Chapter III

A Philosophy of Action

Movement and Action

While the divine 'I am' is 'independent, elemental, absolute',[79] since nothing stands opposed to Him, no 'non-self' confronts Him in its alterity, our 'I am', which makes us be and gauges our level of reality, is held in the relationship, which is constitutive for it, of the self to the non-self. It is for this reason that while its *creative activity*, properly speaking, is nothing other than the very *manifestation* of the Ego as free energy, what properly belongs to the finite ego is *transformative action*. And within this action man will find himself to be free through his participation in the work of God, since this freedom is the very corollary of the cosmology of emergence.

'This necessary relationship between freedom and emergence constitutes the full meaning, for Iqbal, of the story of man's Fall, this fall being itself the translation of the fact that God took a chance on the human ego, which is to say on its freedom. He chose, Iqbal says, to see the emergence of a being endowed with unpredictability, chose 'for finite egos to participate in His life, His power, His freedom'.[80]

In the *Dialogue between God and Man* presented in the poem that bears this title, man becomes aware of the full importance of his transformative action and addresses God with these words:

> You made the night; I made the lamp that lights it up.
> You fashioned clay; I made of it a drinking cup.
> You made the wilderness, the mountain and the steppe;
> I fashioned garden, orchard, avenue and scape.
> I change dread poisons into panaceas, and
> I am the one who fashions mirrors out of sand.[81]

If the infinite Ego is the ultimate 'I am' that combines, outside of any temporal succession, thought, goal and life, the finite ego is, by its very nature, necessarily imperfect insofar as it is a living unity. Its 'I am' is an 'I am' of movement of

aspiration towards, more unity, towards more consistency, towards a life that would be beyond death's reach, that of a 'conscious, proud and free creature ('Of himself maker, breaker, seer').[82] Self-conscious, proud and free in his transformative action, or rather *through* his transformative action, as it is because he draws glass from stone and turns the poison into an antidote that he says: 'this is me'.

We could then think that the Promethean truth of man is primordially inscribed, in the revolt implied in this posture that expresses the very essence of the ego. And as a matter of fact, in his own revolt the Fallen Angel exalts the greatness he believes he has imparted to the human condition in these terms:

> That low-born creature of earth, man,
> Of mean intelligence,
> Though born in Your lap, will grow old
> Under my vigilance.[83]

It is however a matter of understanding that, whatever lesson man may learn from God's Rebel, this will only go in the same direction as his destiny, such as it is inscribed within his primary capacity to receive the gift and responsibility of being a *personality*, within the eminence of his nature that places him at the summit of creation and entrusts him with the role of being vice-gerent: 'For he is the last-born of creation, and before him open up the ages'.[84]

'This is me' thus shows man in the movement of *becoming-individual* and of the self-consciousness of freedom, a movement that sustains all beings and which, in his case alone, gives rise to *personality*. This movement is evolution, whose impetus is the love of the freest and most unique personality: God; and this is why self-consciousness, which constitutes the ego, is also consciousness of the movement that, in humanity alone, reaches a total understanding of itself; and this is why, also, this movement becomes in him an action that posits goals and ends for itself. The finite ego thus is for and through action, according to the force of love that governs the continuous creation of desires and ideals and which has given itself, to this end, the tools of sensibility and reason.

In a letter quoted by his translator, R.A. Nicholson, in the *Introduction* he gives to the English text of the *Secrets of the Self*, Muhammad Iqbal describes this continuous movement of evolution in this way:

> Physically as well as spiritually man is a self-contained centre, but he is not yet a complete individual. The greater his distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the completest person. Nor that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary, he absorbs God into himself. The true person not only absorbs the world of matter; by mastering it he absorbs God Himself into his Ego. Life is a forward assimilative movement. It removes all obstructions in its march by assimilating them. Its essence is the continual creation of desires and ideals, and for the purpose of its preservation and expansion it has invented or developed out of itself certain instruments, e.g., senses, intellect, etc., which help in to assimilate obstructions.[85]

To become more and more of an individual: this assumes that the movement, or what we can call in the language of Schopenhauer, the universal 'will-to-live', becomes directed action. The ultimate end for the finite ego is thus to conquer a personality through its action that has the consistency of a diamond in order to preserve it afterwards, in an immortality which in this way would be snatched from dissolution.

Fatum, Time and Prayer

The Iqbalian philosophy, because it is a thought of emergence and freedom, is opposed to the thesis of a fatalism that is supposed to be inscribed within the very essence of Islam, as well as the metaphysics of a certain Sufism for which life is meditation on death. Thus, only ignorance of the true significance this religion gives to fate has made Islam, for some people, into a fatalism, leading Leibniz for example to refer to *fatum mahometanum* or the '*fatum* of the Turks'.

It is a matter however of thinking in terms of life and movement – 'the thought of death', said Spinoza, 'is not the thought of a living thing' – and of grasping the true sense of fate (*taqdîr*), not in attitudes of passivity and resignation but, for example, in these words spoken by very different men of action: thus Muawiya, the founder of the Omayyad dynasty, proclaimed, 'I am destiny'; 'I am the speaking Quran', declared Ali, the last of the four 'rightly guided caliphs' who succeeded the Prophet at the head of the Islamic community; 'I am a thing, not a person', said Napoleon.

The question of knowing whether human beings are endowed with a free will that would give them control of and responsability for their choices and actions or whether, on the contrary, they are determined to go in one direction or another, is one of the 'philosophical' questions around which the different theological schools in the history of Islamic thought have formed.

Supporters of free will and defenders of determinism have thus opposed each other, each camp being able to cite verses that bolster their position, one presenting itself, ultimately, as the advocate of the Omnipotence of God, the other of His Justice. That determinism and the decrees sealed for all eternity deprive humans of all possibility of being ultimately responsible for their acts, with the result that the reward and punishment of divine Justice become incomprehensible. Or that human beings have, by themselves, the power to choose and to act, with the result that God's Power is hampered, ending where His creatures' powers begin.

Muhammad Iqbal's thoughts on this discussion are expressed, it has been said, in the notion of a risk taken by God on the freedom of the ego. It also takes up, on another level, the position encountered in what can be called 'a Sufism of self-realisation through man's acquisition of divine attributes'.

Thus when the hand that grasps is the hand of God himself, the eye that sees, the eye of God himself, we are led beyond the face-to-face confrontation

between determinism and free will by the 'unitive experience' that sees 'the Infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite'. It is a case of a faith (*imân*) that is not the belief in a set of 'propositions of a certain kind', but an attitude born of a 'living assurance begotten of a rare experience' and which is the state of 'strong personalities'.[86] The 'higher fatalism' implied by this attitude is thus that of people of action, as it is the very feeling of 'life and boundless power which recognizes no obstruction, and can make a man calmly offer his prayers when bullets are showering around him'.[87]

This fatalism of *amor fati*, which belongs to the personality that is truly realised as such, will thus be defined as the feeling that the action involves a living creative force beyond temporal duration. From this point of view, the reversal that can be read in the words of Napoleon cited by Iqbal are particularly instructive: in the awareness of the self as life and power, it is the personality itself that appears as a thing in the hands of its own force.

It is once again Hussein ibn Mansur al- Hallaj, a representative of this Sufism of self-affirmation, who, in the *Book of Eternity*, is given the task of speaking the true meaning of fate and that of the notion of submission which, along with that of peace, is constitutive of the meaning of the term Islam itself. 'Submission' he explains to the poet, 'is not passivity, on the contrary it is a force; not every man, however, he says, 'has the zeal to surrender'.[88] This force must be won, and it is so in the very movement of constitution of a personality that, no longer being dissolved in the back-and-forth between fear and hope, recognizes that the ego is, with itself, in a *peace* that Iqbal also considers to be a 'living assurance' in which its own will bends that of God: 'The true believer', he has Hallaj say, has a sort of understanding with God, and says to him '"We accord with you, so accord with us.' His resolution is the creator of God's determination, and on the day of battle his arrow is God's arrow'.[89]

The arrow here is a reference to the following passage from the Quran (8:17): 'And yet, it was not you who slew the enemy, but it was God who slew them; and it was not thou who cast arrows, when thou didst cast them, but it was God who cast them.' We could also, in the very spirit of Iqbal's 'policy', apply this reading to the following verse: 'God does not change men's condition unless they change their inner selves' (Quran 13:11).

Furthermore, in *Gabriel's Wing*,[90] the poet-philosopher writes: 'Raise your ego to the point where before making your destiny', each time God first asks you, his creature: 'What do you think?'

Not only then has God taken a chance on the freedom of humanity, but He has made the realisation of personality the condition that grants His will to that of the human ego. This is the meaning to give to an active fatalism such as is embodied in the figure of Khâlid ibn al Wâlid. He is known in history by the nickname the 'sword of God' for his military genius both when he was in the

armies that, thanks to him, fought victoriously against the first Islamic troops, and when his conversion then put his legendary invincibility at the service of this religion. Hallaj tells the poet that this fatalism of Khâlid's:

> turns a world upside down;
> for us, constraint tears us up by the roots.
> The business of true men is resignation and submission;
> this garment does not suit the weaklings.[91]

Fatalism conceived in this way cannot be perverted so that it takes on an aspect of passive resignation to an external will. If such a perversion has happened it is, on the one hand, within a theology that has above all sought to legitimize political states of affairs and, in particular, the dynastic devolution of Omayyad power which was ratified as the expression of the 'will of God'. It is, on the other hand and above all, because the idea of fate has been solely connected to the concept of serial, dividable time, the succession of causes and effects, and not to the one that regards life 'as a whole which in evolving its inner richness creates serial time'.[92]

The fatalism that is perverted in this way is dispossession of self, which is thus based on a conception of time, on a cosmology that presents a universe of closure, where the future, already fixed, is simply held in reserve, so to speak, according to an order of events that is predetermined, inexorable, and which, in the end, fetters even the creative activity of God. This is a case then, in the end, of an astrological cosmology, in which only *foresight* has a meaning, which spreads out a world where time is nothing, deserted as it is by the *élan*, empty of this life translated by the themes that run through Iqbal's poetry: desire, sigh, murmur, drunkenness, thirst, quest, melody, adventure, danger, journey, burning, embraces, love. The poet denounces this imposture: 'Your station, how can the astrologer know it? You are living sediment, you do not depend on the stars'.[93]

When it acts in the world then, positing ends and goals for itself, presenting its surroundings as a system of causes and effects within which it will inscribe its freedom and exercise its initiative, the ego needs to renew its contact with the very source of time, the one that makes it into a factor that participates in the life of the universe. It is through this 'self-possession' that it is able to oppose its dissolution in 'the mechanizing effects of sleep and business': the meaning of prayer is in effect in this 'ego's escape from mechanism to freedom'.[94]

At selected moments then, the ritual will regularly be performed, whose cosmic significance is that of the ego's re-centering itself at the same time as its awareness of being united with a 'larger whole of life'. This awareness is more clearly affirmed in what the tradition considers to be the best form of prayer, that done with others, in which one grasps, or at the very least comes up against, both 'the unity of the all-inclusive Ego who creates and sustains all egos' and 'the essential unity of all mankind', which is felt when, on the same level, shoulder to shoulder, the Brahmin and the untouchable turn towards the same center.[95]

When, in prayer, the ego thus encounters the promise of a larger, fuller, immense life, it understands that the words and gestures that constitute it take on the significance of action. Through prayer as through action then, it participates in the creative activity of God, and each of these fundamental postures of the ego thus illuminates the meaning of the other.

In his novel *Ambiguous Adventure*,[96] Cheikh Hamidou Kane states, 'If a man believes in God, the time he takes from prayer for work is still prayer. It is even a very beautiful prayer.' In this we can see a fundamental idea that goes in the same direction as Iqbalian thought: for this time to be prayer, it must be taken from that given to prayer, not *substituted* for it. This prayer having been deferred, its meaning remains present in the work that defers it. The fact that the transformative action of the person and prayer are two faces of the ego's participation in divine creative activity prevents us from thinking that prayer could be opposed to work (dreamy mysticism) or that work could replace prayer (dissolution in the mechanical and, ultimately, idolatry).

An Ethics of Consumption

In the same way that the mountain without the self is no more than a pile of sand, so, without the cohesive force of the becoming-individual, a human life dissolves in the succession of days that make it up. Thus Ali ibn Abi Tâlib pronounced this 'existentialist' sentence: 'O son of Adam. You are nothing but a collection of days; each day that passes takes away a fraction of your being.'

To make life something other than the sum of its days would be the ultimate significance of human action. In this sense, Iqbal's philosophy of the power of individuation translates into an ethics that rests on the distinction between, on the one hand, what strengthens the ego, which is to say increases its power, and what, on the other hand, diminishes it and thus destroys the ego. This power is once again love. Referring then to an *ergo sum* of love that deserves to be held as a first truth much more than the *ergo sum* of pure thought, the poet thus writes:

> On my existence or my non-existence,
> my thought had its doubts
> It is Love who revealed my secret: I am.[97]

To be is to love; to become an individual is to be consumed, as they say, by love, to know this burning of which Rûmî, in his *Mathnavî*, wrote that it 'is everything, more precious than the world's empire, as it calls God secretly in the night.' It is the poet Georges Bataille who gave 'consumption' *(consumation)* a meaning that can shed light here on the Muhammad Iqbal's suggestion. Edgar Morin explains its meaning, which is 'the fact of burning with a great inner fire', and which is precisely 'the opposite of consuming'.[98] Whereas consuming effectively concerns the accumulation of things around oneself, and, as a result the dispersion or dissipation of the self in things, consumption is the true wealth of the personality

which makes it attain itself, forges it in its consistency and expresses it as well, which is to say translates it externally in its signs. In its expression consumption is thus, to use again Edgar Morin's terms, poetry, expenditure, waste, madness…

As it was for Rûmî, who he takes as his master, love appears to Muhammad Iqbal as the royal road, not as a fusional power of self-extinction that annihilates separation, but on the contrary as a force of individuation: 'love individualises the lover as much as the beloved. The effort to realise the most unique individuality individualises the one who seeks and implies the one who is sought, as nothing else will be able to satisfy the nature of the seeker.' Thus comments Javid Iqbal, who cites this passage: 'the despair of separation (from God) is transformed into human joy in distinction (from God) in the Iqbalian conception of love'.[99]

And it is poetry that teaches us to understand this Iqbalian philosophy of love, where difference is joy because it is precisely the sign of inner wealth through love, the very possession of the intimate fire which consumes one. So, even if destitute (in the order of having), the one who loves is always rich from loving (in the order of being), and he spends himself joyfully:

> They say Iqbal, though poor, is generous,
> But has nothing to offer but fire and flames.[100]

The Iqbalian theme of consumption by an inner fire is best expressed, no doubt, in the poetic significance of the glow-worm who sings thus in *The Message from the East*:

> I am not an insect that hurts with its sting.
> One can burn in one's own fire. So do not
> Regard me as a moth that has to fling
> Itself into a flame.
> If the night be
> Dark as deer's eyes, I light my path myself.[101]

The glow-worm (firefly) here is the symbol of consumption, of the inner fire that exhales outward in luminosity, in order to light or rather in order to create the path. It represents the *lucifer* self that realises itself in its own ardor. To this richness of the glow-worm expressed by the luminous profusion that overflows from inside is opposed the ontological poverty of the moth, attracted to the external light and who ends up perishing in the fire. It is called *parvânâ*, which the translators of Gabriel's wing tell us comes from an expression that literally means: the butterfly who jumps on fire and light.[102]

We can then say of Muhammad Iqbal's ethics that it is founded on this poetic ontology of luminosity: beings are more or less luminescent according to the degree of consistency of their ego, thus according to the intensity of their consumption or else – which amounts to the same thing in this philosophy of action where reality is incompletion and change – according to their *power to act*.

As is also the case in Spinoza's philosophy, Iqbalian ethics is above all attention to what, on the one hand, increases one's power to act, and which is thus the good of the ego (in the sense that it strengthens it) and, on the other, to what is an evil for it because it corrodes the ego by diminishing its power to act. And the poets cites, drawing on this way of seeing things, the Quranic verse where God swears by the soul: 'By the soul and He who hath balanced it, and hath shown it the ways of wickedness and piety, blessed is he who hath *made it grow* and undone is he who hath *corrupted* it' (91: 7-10).[103]

Evil is thus never anything but the *self-diminishing* inflicted on oneself, which can go so far as destruction, when the good is what inscribes the ego within the significance of the universe of being constant evolution: what makes *the self grow* to the point of immortality. When Adam and Eve are chased out of Eden, the prayer they offer up from the depths of their destitution is not to say 'we have disobeyed your order', which would express remorse at not conforming to an external transcendent law; but rather to state: 'Lord, we have committed a *wrong against our souls*'.

Iqbal suggests then that values are only as they are through the evaluation that creates them and they must be questioned in function of the intensity of life they imply. 'Life offers a scope for ego-activity, and death is the first test of the synthetic activity of the ego. There are no pleasure-giving and pain-giving acts; there are only ego-sustaining and ego-dissolving acts'.[104]

> And what thus strengthens the ego in the first place, is action, is movement.
> The life of those who are walking on the Path, is to walk and nothing more.
> For waves in movement, there is no stopping, nor rest.
> The burning words of the guide Rûmi illuminated my arid soul: 'The goal of our journey, he said, is the Almighty Himself'.[105]

Movement, which is a reality inscribed in cosmic incompletion itself, is also an *ethical imperative* that demands that each human act creates a new situation opening up in turn new opportunities of self-creation in a continuous evolution that is ultimately the conquest of a life beyond death.

Such is the significance according to Iqbal – for whom resurrection must be understood as the fine extremity of this movement of intensification of life – of the Quranic 'demonstration' of a re-emergence of the ego, after the trial that is death, by analogy with its first creation. He invokes in this regard the following verses: 'man says, 'What! Once I am dead, shall I again be brought forth alive?' But does man not bear in mind that We have created him aforetime out of nothing?' (19: 66-68), 'We have decreed that death shall be among you: but there is nothing to prevent Us from changing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being in a manner unknown to you. And you are indeed aware of your coming into being in the first instance - why, then, do you not bethink yourselves?' (56: 60-62).

This Iqbalian version of immortality through movement is again inscribed within the evolutionist perspective of the poet Rûmî whose famous lines are recalled:[106]

First man appeared in the class of inorganic things,
Next he passed therefrom into that of plants.
For years he lived as one of the plants,
Remembering nought of his inorganic state so different;
And when he passed from the vegetative to the animal state,
He had no remembrance of his state as a plant,
Except the inclination he felt to the world of plants,
Especially at the time of spring and sweet flowers;
Like the inclination of infants towards their mothers,
Which know not the cause of their inclination to the breast.
Again the great Creator, as you know,
Drew man out of the animal into the human state.
Thus man passed from one order of nature to another,
Till he became wise and knowing and strong as he is now.
Of his first souls he has now no remembrance,
And he will be again changed from his present soul.

A Philosophy of Living

If there is a life after death, it is because there is a life *beyond* death, an enthusiasm for life that the idea of evolution must carry and that one must not thus conceive otherwise than *sub quadam specie aeternitatis*: it is thus not death that destroys the ego in its individuality, it is the ego itself that can lose itself, dissolve its being, which is to say its power to act, in *stagnation*. After that of Spinoza, the Iqbalian philosophy has declared that death does not exist. The only reality of the death of the ego is inactivity, stopping: it is the disintegration that follows the petrification of desire. And strictly speaking, hell does not follow this death since it is itself hell, which is to say, not a *place*, but a *state* which is the horrifying in person, which has nothing to do with tortures inflicted from outside, but with something worse: the feeling itself of failure and the irremediable devastation of meaning when one realises that what one was to be has been emptied of its meaning like water absorbed by sand.

In the same way, heaven is not to be considered as a place of rest where an exhausted faculty of desire would come to lay itself down. This is what has always been understood by the Sufism that refuses to abandon the pursued prey, which is the very Face of God, for the mild shadow of a heaven where one finds everything that one can love, but where loving no longer has any meaning. 'You have no desire for wine, nor gaze for my beauty. It is strange that you know nothing of love', says the *houri* to the poet, who retorts that 'rest is … death', as: 'The heart of a lover could not live in eternal paradise: where there is neither sorrowful song, nor grief, nor confidant'.[107]

We must thus see something else behind the sensory images presented by the notions of eternal torment or endless bliss in Edenic rest. It is in the nature of the living sediment that is man to bring himself back again from the deepest failure; the feeling of having committed a wrong against oneself can prove to be 'a corrective experience which may make a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine Grace'.[108] In the same way, 'Heaven is the joy of triumph over the forces of disintegration', and this joy is itself the power to act for the ego who always 'marches onward' and creates itself continuously in actions that, in turn, then open 'further opportunities of creative unfolding'.[109]

We cannot fail to see the presence of Kant in this Iqbalian thought of immortality. No doubt the poet has in mind the passage from the third section of the *Critique of Practical Reason* concerning 'the dialectic of pure practical reason' where Kant speaks of the 'paradise of Muhammad.' In the Kantian text, this represents a 'monstrous' perversion – since it is constituted of 'dreams' riddled through and through with a material appetite for pleasure – of the practical ideal of the Sovereign Good. Sufism, it has been said, has always recalled that we must know how to understand the description of the state of paradise so that we do not make it, in a contradictory way, into an obstacle to love. Islamic modernist philosophy has also returned to the question to indicate the spiritual interpretation that should be given of it.[110]

Iqbal goes further than this simple spiritualization by bringing the question to bear on immortality itself. He thus discusses different conceptions of personal immortality and different arguments in its favor. And, first of all, the Kantian ethical argument that posits as a practical postulate, on the one hand the reality of this immortality of the soul that alone permits an indefinite progress toward the ideal of holiness; and on the other the reality of Being that alone is in a position to grant, in order to thus accomplish the sovereign good, happiness to morality, which is to say God. Iqbal wonders then why the indefiniteness of the time required for the achievement of the supreme good would be the infinity of immortality, or again what could be the content of this divine synthesis of virtue and happiness, that are heterogeneous to each other, in this philosophical appropriation – within the limits of reason alone – of religious representations.[111]

Following this brief discussion of the Kantian conception of immortality as postulate of practical reason in the *Lecture* devoted to the human ego, comes that of the Nietzchean eternal return. It is a case of poetic inspiration but also of a despairing idea, according to Iqbal, of immortality, which doesn't succeed in shedding any light on the perspective of the arrival of the overman: this ideal combination, like all the others, has already taken place an infinity of times, it does not bring about any radical novelty, and the eternal return hardly has the vital value it is supposed to carry: the overman who only returns to the same does not accomplish the work that justifies him being the promise borne by man: the achievement of the world, to use a concept of Teilhard de Chardin's.

These lines in fact by the author of *Milieu divin*, are entirely appropriate to Muhammad Iqbal's thought:[112] 'we must all, in the course of our lives, not only show ourselves obedient and docile. But by our fidelity we must build – starting with the most natural territory of our own selves – a work, an *opus*, into which something enters of all the elements of the earth. We make our own soul throughout our earthly lives; and at the same time we collaborate in another work, another *opus*, which infinitely transcends, while at the same time it narrowly determines, the perspectives of our individual achievement: the completion of the world'.

To collaborate in the achievement of the world, such is the mission of the overman, which must be understood not as aiming for the closure of this world, but rather its opening; which must thus be understood as the invention of new possibilities of life, to precisely speak like Nietzsche.[113]

The figure of Nietzsche is very present in Iqbal's work. However, it represents more of a poetic theme than a philosophy that would be referred to and eventually discussed for itself. Thus, for example, in the *Book of Eternity,* the German philosopher has his home 'beyond the spheres' and is introduced to the poet by his guide Rûmî as 'a Hallaj who was a stranger in his own city; he saved his life from the mullahs, and the physicians slew him', he whose 'eyes desired no other vision but man' and who 'fearlessly … shouted: 'Where is Man?'"[114]

The overman is not the representative of a higher humanity. He is humanity, in achieved form. What Muhammad Iqbal says, sometimes in the language of the author of *Zarathustra*, regarding this collaborator in God's *opus* who tirelessly works to be equal to his infinite responsibility and task of achieving the world has, in fact, less to do with Nietzsche's overman than with 'the perfect man' – *perfectus* – of the Sufi tradition: the *insân al-kâmil*, the idea of which is associated with Abd al-Karîm al Jîlî, the author whose major work bears this title.

It must moreover be specified that the idea of the overman such as it appears in Iqbal is above all Quranic and that its significance is simply that of being the goal of this tendency in the human being, that is its life itself and its greatness, toward the creation within him of divine attributes. Thus the Earth he inhabits, whose achievement is his task, will respond thanks to him to the contempt shown to it by Heaven from the first day of creation, and the angels' prophecy will thus be realised:

> The lustre of a handful of earth one day shall outshine the creatures of light;
> earth through the star of his destiny one day shall be transformed into heaven.
> His imagination, which is nourished by the torrent of vicissitudes,
> one day shall soar out of the whirlpool of the azure sky.
> Consider one moment the meaning of Man; what thing do you ask of us?
> Now he is pricking into nature, one day he will be modulated perfectly,
> so perfectly modulated will this precious subject be that even the heart of
> God will bleed one day at the impact of it![115]

This idea of the overman inscribed within man as his destiny gives man all of his dignity and installs the respect of man at the outset of any morality. Because he represents the universal Man in his own person, the Prophet is the one who makes humanity an *oeuvre*: his retreat, Iqbal, has given rise to a people.[116] And when the poet proclaims: 'Say I, you can deny God, but you cannot deny the dignity of the Prophet!', we may understand by this that if we think we can doubt God in His transcendence, we cannot fail to encounter Him in the greatness of Man; and this is also perhaps why it is said of this Prophet – and the Quran insists on his simple humanity – that God Himself and His angels pray upon him.

The ethical undertaking to bring Man about means to strengthen the ego against dissolving influences. In his presentation of the Iqbalian conception of the ego, Javid Iqbal lists the factors that increase its power to act and which, for this reason, represent ethical values: it is a matter, he says, of love, freedom, courage and disinterestedness, and he insists on this point, which is effectively essential, that it is a case here of values of individuality. We find in Anwarul Haq's reflection on the human ego in Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy a more detailed enumeration of the forces that enhance the consistency of the personality. They are, according to the list he presents: (i) love, (ii) *faqr*, (iii) courage, (iv) tolerance, (v) *kash-hilal*, (vi) original and creative activity. Conversely, he writes, the dissolving influences that diminish the power to act are: (i) fear, (ii) beggary or *sawal*, (iii) servitude and (iv) the exaltation of belonging or *nasah parasti*.[117]

In the end, this opposition between strengthening and dissolving factors comes to a great extent down to that between *faqr*, which is freedom and *sawal*, which is servitude, between poverty and neediness. This is a case of an opposition which itself is clarified by everything that the Sufi tradition places under this notion of *faqr*. The poverty in question here is that of *disinterestedness*, which is to say that which precisely *asks for* nothing.

To demand diminishes the self. This could be the fundamental statement of the Iqbalian ethic. The demand has the sense of a mode of being which belongs to a diminished, stunted soul; it is the dispossession of self, the very expression of what Muhammad Iqbal calls, following Nietzsche, a 'slave' morality. To demand is to hold out one's hand, of course, but it is above all and more fundamentally to adopt a posture in the world of which this attitude is the sign: that which consists in expecting time to provide the means and reasons to live. The one who demands thus places themselves before time and life as before a distribution of lots, in a position that gives rise to everything that the self can *poison itself* with: fatalism, fear, jealousy, envy; in a word, once again Nietszchean: *ressentiment*.

To imitate is thus also to demand; to shape life within the mould of indefinitely repeated habits, received ideas that are petrified into certainties, the *taqlîd* (servile imitation of the past) that is denounced by philosophy as well as Sufism, this has the effect of dissolving personality. And this is apparent in the fact that

imitation is precisely the opposite of the original and creative activity that features in the list of values that strengthen the ego. This activity is nothing other, in effect, than the courage to live, the enthusiasm for life and freedom: as such it is opposed to the laziness, the fear of living, which is to say of inventing, of the one who shuts themselves up in the time of repetition, imitation, servitude.

'To live is not to live if one lives without danger', writes Iqbal in *The Mysteries of Selflessness*. Muhammad Iqbal's taking up of this idea of *living dangerously*, far from having the meaning of a daredevil formula, is thus the very expression of a philosophy of creation of an 'artist philosophy'. And we can also understand why, in the list of the dissolving influences on the ego, fear comes in first place. It is through fear in fact that the idea of death enters into a world which is life through and through. It is, Iqbal says, 'a spy come from the world of Death' and he makes it the source of all of the dissolving influences which, ultimately, only represent different modalities of fear:

> Whatever evil lurks within thy heart
> Thou cast be certain that its origin Is fear.[118]

It is for this reason that the figure of the predatory animal is often encountered in Iqbal's poetry – the lion, the eagle, the falcon, the sparrowhawk – representing the refusal of all imprisonment and thus presenting the very figure of freedom and disinterestedness.[119]

A Philosophy of Tolerance

We must also understand 'the exaltation of belonging' as an imprisonment of the self, a true servitude that diminishes the power to act. For it is still servitude to substitute, for the movement of *self-invention*, the process of 'becoming-someone', which is human identity itself, the *belonging* to a tribe, to a caste, from which one demands guidelines for pre-established ways of living and thinking.

In his own country, with the hierarchical system of castes that characterizes it, the message of the 'Brahmin' Iqbal is undoubtedly important on the social and political level. It is a matter of renouncing the pride of birth, he clearly indicates, as:

> There are neither Afghans, nor Turks, nor sons of Tartar,
> We are all the fruits of a single garden,
> a single trunk,
> We are the flowering of a same spring.[120]

This social message itself follows from the Iqbalian philosophy and ethics of the 'becoming-someone' in which the confusion between the movement of identity and the imprisonment within belonging is, quite simply, the supreme sin of idolatry: – 'Break all the idols of tribe and caste Break the ancient customs which enchain men!'[121] – which risks shielding from your own eyes the mission you must respond to, one aspect of which is the achievement of the world and the other the invention of the self.

Also as a result we may consider as idolatry everything that goes against a principle of tolerance that can be said to be *active*, which is to say is based on the idea that identity is not being closed in on oneself but the ability to welcome difference. And this cannot be fully understood in effect except within a philosophy of impermanence, in a philosophy that is thus able to be *restless* with God and truth.

It is thus not surprising to read from the pen of this disciple of Rûmî's that:

> The one who loves finds no difference between the Ka'aba
> and the Temple of idols:
> The first is the apparition of the Friend, the second is his sanctuary.[122]

But perhaps the best illustration of what a tolerance that can welcome difference can mean is in a way, that we can call Iqbalian in spirit, of understanding the tradition according to which there are seventy-two Islamic sects, only one of which is destined to be saved. Taking up this prophetic saying in his poetry, Iqbal writes:

> The true doctrine is lost in the quarrels
> of the seventy-two sects:
> Impossible to understand it if your perception
> is not impartial![123]

Ghazâlî, in his treaty entitled *Deliverance from Error*, begins the presentation of his search for the truth, beyond the schools, doctrines and controversies which, at the time he was writing, divided minds and hearts, by recalling this tradition of the seventy-two sects (there is a variation that refers to seventy-three sects and this is the one used in Ghazâlî's text); and to emphasize the dramatic nature of his path, at the end of which salvation is at stake, he immediately adds afterwards: 'this saying is about to be realised'.

There is a primary *sectarian*, way of understanding this saying: the one that would look for the group, among the seventy-two or seventy-three, that would hold the correct point of view. If this approach, in the best of cases, could lead to the sect that is considered to be the right one to *tolerate* the others, this would be in a condescending way, accepting to suffer them. A second way, which corresponds to what has been called an active tolerance, consists of understanding this tradition as a parable designed to test 'the impartial perception' of the truth by the testing of the self. It will then precisely be a matter, by means of the alterity and the questioning it bears, of knowing how to go beyond oneself to question belonging and test certainties.

Following this second approach, we can then understand that difference is an invitation to a dialogue with oneself as well, with oneself above all, and that it is the shortest route in the knowledge and strengthening of the self. This approach would not be relativistic or sceptical, considering for example that the truth is nothing but error seen from another angle: on the contrary, it will be

assured in itself because of its attentiveness to the different faces under which the same truth is able to draw its adherents. In a word, it will be understood that the sect that will be saved is the one that would have attained, through the deepening of the self as well as the *restlessness* of difference, the *impartial perception* of the truth and which would be virtually *inscribed within each* of the seventy-two or seventy-three. And we will also understand, with the poet, that this *non-sectarian approach* must be followed not only in the world of Islamic sects but in the world in general.

A Politics of Autonomy

To speak of Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy of action is also to ask what light it can shed on his effective political action in the years of torment that led to the separate independences of India and Pakistan.

Let us dwell for a moment on the Iqbal who appears as a character in Hélène Cixous' play, *L'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*.[124] There he is the one who stubbornly insinuates his idea of an Islamic state separate from Hindu India in the spirit of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), who will later become the *Quaid i-Azam* or Grand Leader, the founder of Pakistan. And since he ends up convincing Jinnah of the necessity of the partition despite the prayers and infinite love of the Mahatma Gandhi himself, his character in the play is quite that of a 'evil influence'.

As a matter of fact, in his Introduction to the *Letters*[125] that Iqbal wrote to him during the years of struggle for independence, Muhammad Ali Jinnah makes the ideas of the poet-philosopher the very foundation of the will to create an Islamic state separate from the mostly Hindu India, and which was expressed in detail in the Lahore Resolution of the Pan-Indian Muslim League of 1940, also known as the 'Pakistan Resolution'. And, in a message on the occasion of the Iqbal Day celebrated in Lahore in 1944, he presented the ideas and political actions of Muhammad Iqbal in the following terms:

> Iqbal was not only a preacher and a philosopher … He combined within himself the idealism of the poet and the realism of the man who takes a practical approach to things … Even though he was a great poet and a great philosopher, he was no less a practical politician … he was one of those very small number of men who were the first to consider the possibility of carving out, in the north-west and north-east of India, an Islamic state, these regions which are historically Islamic lands.[126]

This appreciation can be usefully contrasted with that of those who criticized the poet's action in the early thirties, precisely considering that this betrayed his poetry and his philosophy. A journalist from the *Bombay Chronicle* thus set himself up, in an interview with him on the eve of his departure to attend then round table of 1931, as the spokesperson for these critics. What would he say, he thus asked, to those who found his former attitude (judged to be separatist and

finally compliant to the interests of the British colonial powers) difficult to understand and in contradiction with the teachings of his poetry? Who considered that Iqbal the politician had taken over Iqbal the poet, whom he hardly resembled anymore?[127] It can also be recalled in this regard that he himself declared – in 1910 it is true, which is to say before the end, in 1926, of what has been called the (certainly turbulent) 'honeymoon'[128] between Hindus and Muslims: 'nations are born in the hearts of poets; they prosper then die in the hands of politicians.'[129]

It is finally useful, when we thus consider the different evaluations made of Iqbal's political action, to recall what the judgement of Jawaharlal Nehru was as we can read in his work *The Discovery of India*.[130] 'If Iqbal', he writes in this book, 'was one of the first advocates of Pakistan, it appears he had different ideas at the end of his life'. He recounts that, having made the journey to Iqbal's sickbed – it is Iqbal who summoned him – he had a talk with him that reminded them of how much they had in common and at the end of which the poet declared to him: 'what do you and Jinnah have in common? He is a politician, you are a patriot'.[131]

But if we attend to the facts themselves, the chapter that Lini S. May entitled 'the march towards independence' in the work that she devoted to Iqbal shows perfectly well his insistence – he begs pardon from Jinnah at one point for writing so often to a man that he knows, he says, to be so busy – but that he is the only one 'India's Islamic community has the right to ask for safe guidance in the storm that will strike the north-west region and perhaps the whole of India'.[132] Muhammad Ali Jinnah, his biographers indicate, began his political career showing the most ferocious will to forge unity between Hindu and Muslim Indians. At the end of the first ten years of this career, from 1906 to 1916, this attitude had earned him the nickname 'the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity' and Sarojini Naidu, who in 1918 published a text precisely called *Mohomed Ali Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity*, said of him that he was 'not only an ambassador but the living symbol Hindu-Muslim unity'.[133] Still in 1937, in a speech he made during March in Delhi, if he speaks of the separate organization of Hindus and Muslims, it is in order, he says, 'to better favor their mutual understanding in the "national fight"'.[134] It is to this man that Iqbal will insist, to convince him of the idea that he will express forcefully in 1940 as president of the Muslim League: 'No force on earth can prevent Pakistan.'

How are we to understand in the end the trajectory that led Iqbal to the imperative of autonomy? Shall we say that alongside the essential aim of the poet and the philosopher, and thus externally in relation to this aim, circumstances ended up imposing on him the realism and practical outlook of the politician, thus leading him to conceive and even to sketch out the Pakistan that was realised after his death? Shall we thus evoke the *force of circumstance*? Shall we not rather look for an internal, necessary relationship between the Iqbalian philosophy of the 'reconstruction of religious thought in Islam' around the notion of self-

affirmation, whether as individual or collective ego, and the political demand for autonomy? He himself provided an answer to these questions, forming the subject of the important historical text that is the speech he made as session President to the Muslim League at its 29 December 1930 meeting in Allahabad. And this speech intimately blends the force of circumstance and the necessity of the idea.

In his presentation,[135] Iqbal begins by stressing the fact that he himself is in no way a political man but a scholar who, as a result of having spent most of his life studying Islam in its laws, institutions, history and culture, considers himself to be in a position and under an obligation to shed light on the decisions that are for the members of the League to make. The question he then raises is that of the very nature of religion: 'can we consider', he asks, 'that it is simply a private matter, the lived experience of the individual alone who has decided to split himself between his spiritual and his temporal life?' In Islamic thought, he declares in response to this question, the dualism between spirit and matter that grounds such a separation hardly corresponds to the reality of a religious ideal that created a social order to which it remains organically attached.

Then comes, in his ideas, the question of the nation, in relation to which he recalls the concept used by Renan to define it: that of the 'moral consciousness' that is constitutive of it, beyond any particular cultural attachments. Ultimately this question is that of knowing what nation to conceive. Is there thus a genuine 'moral consciousness' behind the idea, that we could call 'pan-Indian', of the nation? Conversely, can pan-Islamic nationalism truly have a content in the present circumstances? In a certain way, the future Pakistan will be built against these two nationalisms.

On the one side, against the Indian nationalist movement, for which the essential thing was the struggle against imperialism, which assumed the divisions of religious communitarianism to be genuinely overcome in the spirit of the Lucknow Pact of 1916, by which Hindus and Muslims were to demand India's autonomy together. On the other side, against a pan-Islamic nationalism manifesting itself, for example, in the 'Khilafat Conference' party founded by Muhammad Ali (1879-1930) in 1919, whose action would be directed by the principle of 'non-cooperation' undertaken by Gandhi. The explicit objective of the Khilafat Conference was to obtain the full restoration of the Ottoman Empire by pressuring colonial powers: how could one fight for the independence of a given territory, of only a portion of the Community of Believers (*Ummah*), forgetting Muslim lands in general – especially those where the holy places of Islam are located – as well as the caliphal power of the Ottomans that could be considered to be the very symbol and rallying point of this community? Historians often cite this image used by Muhammad Ali to convey his emotion and his confusion: his belonging to two non-concentric circles, one of which is India, the other the Islamic world.

What were the circumstances? In Turkey, it was the secularist movement of Mustapha Kemal who in 1924 abolished the caliphate, returning in a certain way the pan-Islamic movements to the inevitable reality of nations. In India itself, despite the sadness and hunger strikes of Mahatma Gandhi, inter-communal tensions seemed more and more to confirm the conclusion of the report prepared in 1934 on Indian constitutional reforms: considering in effect that, behind the anti-colonial struggle for independence, one was also confronted with the antagonism not only between two religions, but between two veritable 'civilizations'.

In his work entitled *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*,[136] Jean-François Bayart describes perfectly the mechanism by which primordial identities are manufactured, which very often harden into veritable 'civilizations' in conflict. And in order to account for this mechanism, he very rightly uses a chemical concept, speaking of the '*precipitation* of communalism'.[137] Referring more specifically to the clash between Hindu and Muslim nationalisms which finally led to what Hindus considered to be the 'sacrilege of Mother India's vivisection',[138] Jean-François Bayart writes:

> the fabrication of Vedic authenticity, by 'assimilating the Other's values' has provided a vehicle for a radical mutation of Hindu cultural identity and its politicization in a nationalist manner. For its part, Islam in the Indian subcontinent has not proven to be either more united or more stable than Hinduism, no matter how Hindu nationalists have perceived it. In India, communalism is fed not by the internal coherence of the two religious communities, but precisely by their relationship, which has been an antagonistic one in certain situations and historical periods. However, it should be stressed that this antagonism is not immanent to their respective dogmas, or to their encounter in an enlarged polity constructed by the colonizing power.[139]

The 'force of circumstance' is thus legible no doubt in this permanent clash of nationalisms which were hardened in their mirroring of each other, so to speak. This is what led Iqbal to write in a letter, and this was already in 1909, that 'the vision of a common Indian nation is a *beautiful ideal with poetic appeal*, but which, when one considers the present conditions as well as the unconscious tendencies at the heart of both communities, appears impossible to realise.'[140]

To return to Iqbal's speech to the Muslim League, we can note that he persistently returns to this feeling of a sort of inevitability of communalism, formed, he says, from the suspicion and distrust of each of the communities, Hindu and Muslim, toward the other. This mirroring relationship, he says, leads to the adoption of the narrow-minded attitude of the caste or the tribe.[141] But he raises this to immediately add that there is a higher aspect of communalism, he says, that makes him 'love' the group thus formed: this aspect corresponds to the necessary cultural autonomy that alone can allow, he declares, a given community to 'work out the possibilities that may be latent in it.'[142] It is thus

because Islamic religious thought must engage in its own reconstruction, which is above all that of its law, that the *federalist* demand he advocated at that point in time does not constitute in his eyes the sign of an identitarian rigidity but, on the contrary, the condition of the self-creating movement that precisely needs *autonomy*. And in the same presentation, Iqbal indicates all of the importance that this movement of reconstruction that would take place in the most populous territory in the Muslim world would have for the whole of Islam. Thus, fully aware of the emergence of a force of renewal in the Indian sub-continent, Iqbal declares that this would be 'for Islam, an opportunity to rid itself of the stamp that Arabian Imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilise its law, its education, its culture, and to bring them into closer contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of modern times.'[143]

Overall, *autonomy* is conceived above all for and by *ijtihâd*, which is to say the effort of innovation: autonomy is thus both the condition and the meaning of the movement of continuous self-creation. And we can say that this was the principal lesson, for the poet, of the two revolutions that had a great resonance in his work, that of October and that of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

From the October revolution and the socialist ideal it sought to express what Iqbal essentially retained as the goal of *self-repossession*. Thus, 'The Song of the Worker', a poem contained in *Message from the East*, expresses a rather poetic vision of the imperative carried in the conditions of the proletariat: it is a matter, against the alienation brought by capitalism, of no longer 'living unconscious of oneself' like – according to a frequent image in his poetry – the 'butterfly' who lives 'fluttering around the flame'.[144] And it is the same poetic theme that we find when it is a matter for the philosopher of evoking the condition of the Muslim who has 'become a stranger to himself', according to the three possible meanings of this state of alienation: that connected to the colonial situation to which Muslim countries are subject, that – an effect of the first – consisting in the pure and simple imitation of the West and that, finally, expresses the fact of being cut off from the very principle of one's movement. The figure of this last meaning of self-forgetting, to which all are ultimately related, is *petrification*, *immobilism*.

This is why Muhammad Iqbal, citing large extracts from the texts of the Turkish nationalist poet Zia, 'whose songs', he writes, 'inspired by the philosophy of Auguste Comte, have done a great deal in shaping the present thought of Turkey', shares this poet's observation that 'among the Muslim nations of today, Turkey alone has shaken off its dogmatic slumber and attained to self-consciousness'.[145]

To attain to self-consciousness is the primary philosophical imperative and also constitutes the aim of politics: this must aim at autonomy understood as the implementation of power, or rather of the *duty of ijtihâd*, in order to give

society back its ability to pursue its own principle within the indefinitely open process of its continuous auto-creation. This is why, at the end of his life, at the same time that he emphatically demands that Jinnah become the spokesperson of the autonomist imperative, he undertakes preparations for new work that was to be a sequel to his *Lectures* and that he would not have time to write: a work he wanted to be 'an introduction to the study of Islam with particular emphasis on its jurisprudence'[146] and which was described by his secretary at the time who wrote down the outlined plan for the book as a work 'destined to be definitive, a reference work in the area of Islamic institutions and jurisprudence'.[147]

In the principle of this politics of autonomy we find the cosmology of emergence on which Iqbalian thought is founded. And it is this cosmology which demands that each generation is able, of course, to draw on what preceding generations have thought and done, but in understanding the necessity it finds itself in of inventing, in *fidelity* but also in *movement*, the solutions to bring to its own problems. In practice, Iqbal indicates, this means the establishment of legislative assemblies that organise the *ijtihâd*, the 'republican form of government' having become a necessity in virtue of the new forces that are liberated, he says, in the Islamic world. In this way, finally, the world of Islam in its diversity and in its unity will henceforth present itself no longer as a group governed by a caliph, but as a 'living family of republics'.[148]