

Freedom, Thought, and the Will: A Philosophical Reconstruction of Muhammad Iqbal's Conception of Human Agency

Authors : Anwar ul Haq

Abstract : Muhammad Iqbal was arguably the most significant South Asian Islamic philosopher of the last two centuries. While he is the most revered philosopher of the region, particularly in Pakistan, he is probably the least studied philosopher outside the region. The paper offers a philosophical reconstruction of Iqbal's view of human agency; it has three sections. Section 1 focuses on Iqbal's starting point of reflection in practical philosophy (inspired by Kant): our consciousness of ourselves as free agents. The paper brings out Iqbal's continuity with Kant but also his divergence, in particular his non-Kantian view that we possess a non-sensory intuition of ourselves as free personal causes. It also offer an argument on Iqbal's behalf for this claim, which is meant as a defense against a Kantian objection to the possibility of intuition of freedom and a skeptic's challenge to the possibility of freedom in general. Remaining part of the paper offers a reconstruction of Iqbal's two preconditions of the possibility of free agency. Section 2 discusses the first precondition, namely, the unity of consciousness involved in thought (this is a precondition of agency whether or not it is free). The unity has two aspects, a quantitative (or numerical) aspect and a qualitative (or rational) one. Section 2 offers a defense of these two aspects of the unity of consciousness presupposed by agency by focusing, with Iqbal, on the case of inference. Section 3 discusses a second precondition of the possibility of free agency, that thought and will must be identical in a free agent. Iqbal offers this condition in relief against Bergson's view. Bergson (on Iqbal's reading of him) argues that freedom of the will is possible only if the will's ends are entirely its own and are wholly undetermined by anything from without, not even by thought. Iqbal observes that Bergson's position ends in an insurmountable dualism of will and thought. Bergson's view, Iqbal argues in particular, rests on an untenable conception of what an end consists in. An end, correctly understood, is framed by a thinking faculty, the intellect, and not by an extra-rational faculty. The present section outlines Iqbal's argument for this claim, which rests on the premise that ends possess a certain unity which is intrinsic to particular ends and holds together different ends, and this unity is none other than the quantitative and qualitative unity of a thinking consciousness but in its practical application. Having secured the rational origin of ends, Iqbal argues that a free will must be identical with thought, or else it will be determined from without and won't be free on that account. Freedom of the self is not a freedom from thought but a freedom in thought: it involves the ability to live a thoughtful life.

Keywords : iqbal, freedom, will, self

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