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The Challenge of Muhammad Iqbal's Philosophy of *Khudi* to Ibn 'Arabi's Metaphysical Anthropology

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Abstract: The period between the publication of *Asrār-i Khūdī* (Secrets of the Self) in 1915 and *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* in 1930 marked the consolidation of the philosophy of *khūdī* (self) from the perspective of the Indian philosopher Muhammad Iqbal. A philosophical project for the contemporary Islamic world that sought to overcome, from the acceptance of science and few elements of Western philosophy, the limitations of the Islamic tradition and, above all, of Sufism, which the author labels as pantheism. Among the deep dialogues he maintains with Islamic tradition, Iqbal carried out a very special one with Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240), who was one of the most notorious mystics and philosophers of Islam. A metahistorical dialogue, in the form of a critique, that invites us to see the convergences and divergences in metaphysical and anthropological aspects of both authors.

Keywords: philosophy of religion; Islamic philosophy; Indian philosophy; history of Sufism

1. Introduction: Why Did Iqbāl Confront Ibn 'Arabī Intellectually?

There is a common misinterpretation in the reception of the figure of the Sufi Master Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240) by the epistemological model constructed by western Islamic studies. This topic was covered in a previous paper on the influence of *Shaykh al-Akbar* on the *ṭarīqa* Tijāniyya (De Diego González 2022b). While the Islamic tradition placed him as the mainstay of the doctrine of his general ideas, some western scholars have denied his influence on this *ṭarīqa*, as he was not the Ibn 'Arabī that they saw in their studies. This is something that I tried to resolve with the idea of the “reimagination” of Ibn 'Arabī in the contemporary imaginaries. There is no univocal and dogmatic Ibn 'Arabī, but one that depends on the episteme that treats him and approaches his work. This is, in fact, a symbol given to the hermeneutics of the subject (Corbin 1986, p. 407). A situation that generated historical misunderstandings and subsequently led to meta-historical dialogues with Ibn 'Arabī and his critics. Dialogues that make up an exciting chapter in the contemporary intellectual history of the Islamic world. This inaccurate criticism of Ibn 'Arabī is made, in many cases, without having read him and without having understood the ambiguous and symbolic nature of his writings.

In other cases, the criticism is directed at him when it should be directed at the commentaries that have survived, alongside the Akbari text, in the Islamic world. The Islamic episteme, in Islamicate areas such as Persia or the Indian subcontinent (Corbin 1986, pp. 407–8), gave priority to the commentary as the original text, and concepts such as authorship or originality were diluted, while other ideas permeated the intellectual imaginary. Another landscape occurs in the colonial context in which, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the traditional Islamic episteme clashed with orientalist academicism, provoking situations such as the one I intend to show in this article.

In my opinion, one of the most interesting critics of Akbari thought was Muhammad Iqbāl (1873–1938). Considered the most important Muslim philosopher of the 20th century (Schimmel 1963; Singh 1997; Popp 2019; De Diego González 2022a), he developed a vibrant



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dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophies. Iqbāl chose the philosophical poetry—with a strong imprint of the Persianate intellectual tradition—and the use of symbolism as his intellectual way. The main topic of Iqbāl's philosophy is metaphysics, the divine knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and that linked to philosophical anthropology: identity, transcendence, and self-gnosis. Strongly influenced in his beginnings by German idealism and British neo-Hegelians, Iqbāl modulated towards a renewal (*tajdīd*) of the Islamic tradition and its cultural symbols, in which a spiritual revolution is derived that seeks the fullness and freedom of the human being. Freedom that arrives with the total emancipation from the "slave culture" (Mir 1999, pp. 82–83) and the acquisition of a "self-gnosis" that leads, through vital balance, to become a perfect human being (*insān kāmil*).

The foundations of Iqbāl's philosophy are obviously not original. He had several intellectual influences from the Islamic world and the Western Philosophy, and one of the most present in his thought is Ibn 'Arabī. Iqbāl takes from Akbari thought certain hermeneutical models that allow him to transcend literalism, as well as, in his maturity, the ability to move towards the symbolic world without justifying himself in a systematic and rational philosophy. In fact, the beautiful journey of *Jawīd Nāma* (The Book of Eternity) has a curious parallel with the *Kitāb al-isfār 'an natā'ij al-asfār* (The Book of the Secrets of the Fruits of the Journey). *Jawīd Nāma* is a work of maturity that necessarily recalls the initiation experience and his theophanic manifestation, where the symbol takes a concrete form through the creative imagination (*khayāl*). It is also a text in which Iqbāl breaks with the modern world and proposes a look towards tradition. In both works, *Kitāb al-isfār* and *Jawīd Nāma*, we can appreciate the fruits of an initiatory journey and share a proposal of suprarational knowledge.

When the Spanish scholar Miguel Asín Palacios in 1933 invited Iqbāl to give a lecture at the College of Philosophy of the Central University of Madrid, he introduced Iqbāl as the "Ibn 'Arabī of the 20th century" (Umar 1993, p. 27). It was a compliment in a double sense from a scholar who had dedicated his life to recovering *Shaykh al-Akbar*, but one which should also be perceived with some suspicion, because he did not hesitate to accuse Ibn 'Arabī of having psychotic fantasies in his visionary experience, as Claude Addas explains in her book *Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Addas 1993, p. 10). What Asín probably did not know is that Iqbāl had already confronted Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy fifteen years earlier to construct his own metaphysical anthropology. However, the reading of the translation of Asín's classic book *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (Asín Palacios 1926) may have reconciled a certain Akbarian symbolism with Iqbāl, for he produced shortly afterwards a work as fascinating as *Jawīd Nāma* (Iqbāl 1932), so close to the Akbarian experience of the imaginal journey.

There was a time when our philosopher, from his neo-Hegelian studies, considered both Akbarian and other spiritual approaches, such as Vedanta, to be of interest. Already in his seminal work *The doctrine of Absolute Unity as expounded by Abdul Karim al-Khilani* (Iqbāl 1995, pp. 77–96), Iqbāl sympathized with Akbarian anthropology and metaphysics. In the introduction to his doctoral thesis, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, he pointed out about Ibn 'Arabī:

"The student of Islamic Mysticism who is anxious to see an all-embracing exposition of the principle of Unity, must look up the heavy volumes of the Andalusian Ibn al-'Arabī, whose profound teaching stands in strange contrast with the dry-as-dust Islam of his countrymen. The results, however, of the intellectual activity of the different branches of the great Aryan family are strikingly similar. The outcome of all Idealistic speculation in India is Buddha, in Persia Bahāullah, and in the west Schopenhauer whose system, in Hegelian language, is the marriage of free oriental universality with occidental determinateness". (Iqbāl 1908, pp. viii–ix).

Only eight years later, in 1916, following the polemic against "pantheistic" and "syncretic" Sufism (Khan 2010, pp. 339–40), Iqbāl stated his philosophical change in a letter to the Sufi master Shāh Sulaymān Phulwarwi. He explained that even though he grew up

intellectually with the Ibn ‘Arabī, he was no longer able to see him philosophically in the same way:

“I have no misgivings about *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, may Allāh be pleased with him, rather, I feel love for him. My father had a deep attachment to *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikām* and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. From the age of four my ears were familiar with the name and teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī. For years, the two books mentioned above were studied in my house. In my childhood I did not understand much of these doctrines, but, nevertheless, I often attended these study circles. Later, when I studied Arabic, I tried to read it on my own. As I grew in experience and knowledge, my understanding and interest also increased. It is now my opinion that the Shaykh’s teachings do not follow the Qur’an, and neither can they be related to the interpretation (*ta’wīl*) and commentaries, but it may be true that I have misinterpreted the Shaykh’s words. For many years my thinking has been wrong, and I believe that I have come to an accurate view, but still, to this day, I am totally opposed to this thinking”. (Dar 1967, pp. 177–80).

The statement in this letter gives us an important clue to the polemic. His criticisms against Akbarian metaphysics and anthropology are directed at specific aspects biased by the strong polemics in the Indian subcontinent (Chittick 1992). For Iqbāl, the object of his criticism is not the historical Ibn ‘Arabī but the one who shaped the Islamic tradition in the subcontinent. Iqbāl was conditioned by the interpretation of Ibn ‘Arabī that, on one hand, he had heard in the subcontinent and, on the other hand, partly by what the historiography of his time and the *Akbarian renaissance* (Nicholson, Nyeberg, or Asín Palacios among others) in Europe was beginning to draw (Hussain 2012, p. 94). In addition to this, in his criticism Iqbāl was influenced by two important factors. First, by the popular Sufism of the subcontinent, which had come into interchange with Hindu *bhakti*, because in his opinion had moved away from a correct balance of Islamic doctrine. Here, the main argument is the validity of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence). Although it is not mentioned by Ibn ‘Arabī himself, it is automatically related to Akbarian thought. Bakri Aladdin (2012) has studied the impact and development of this controversial topic.

For example, Iqbāl associates the *waḥdat al-wujūd* with pantheism—as does, for example, René Guénon (2004a, pp. 130–34)—situating himself in the critique made by neo-Sufism and the debate with the reformism in the subcontinent (Chittick 2012). At the same time, Iqbāl perceived pantheism as a dangerous cession to Hinduism and a way to accept the predestination that would clash with his dynamic conception of the human being. Second, and not less important, is the association of this pantheism with a path that would stop the progress of human destiny because there would be no point in action if everything were due to Allah. For both the divine and the human being are individual, and it is in the recognition of their individuality that the human being is complete.

On the other hand, a problematic situation was that for him the reform that Islam needed, both socially and politically, could not come with a pantheistic metaphysics. Iqbāl suggested a spiritual revolution in which a pantheism would not fit, as he believes that it could experience the fate of al-Ḥallāj: social heresy leading to execution as a punitive measure. Even this would occur through a misunderstanding, as he shows in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, preferring himself the Sufi experience of Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi founded on the integration of the spiritual with the rational (Iqbāl 2012, pp. 77–78). A spiritual experience founded more on action, on the everyday and on the achievement of balance, an experience that prioritises the anthropological.

What Iqbāl did not know, however, was that later authors such as Robert Whitemore (1956), Henry Corbin (1986) or Muhammad Rustom (2006, 2016) would strongly reject the idea that Ibn ‘Arabī was a pantheist or monist. In any case, Henry Corbin proposed that *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* may have been a panentheist or theomonist but not a pantheist, which he was accused of being by several scholars of the Middle Ages (Corbin 1986, p. 406). There is even a defence of Akbarian thought by Sirhindi—translated into English by Alberto Ventura (2012)—where the resolution of this polemic of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence)

is to be found, and which, surely, Iqbāl did not have the opportunity to read. Iqbāl opposed Ibn ‘Arabī as he opposed also his former neo-Hegelian teachers, Ward and McTaggart, at Cambridge. His philosophy of the *khūdī* (self) needed a trigger, and they, his former teachers, served to enable Iqbāl to produce an intellectual emancipation.

This “meta-historical battle” of Iqbāl against Ibn ‘Arabī is the subject of this article. I tried to research about an example of contemporary reception of Ibn ‘Arabī that has all the elements for a philosophical historiographical analysis: indirect borrowings, epistemic distortions, and the construction of a philosophy in its own in opposition to tradition. Again, as in much of history, Ibn ‘Arabī was reimagined and redrawn, this time by Iqbāl. Thus, years later Iqbāl meets again, in a silent and subtle way, in *Jawīd Nāma* with Ibn ‘Arabī, beyond words, in the imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) where experience occurs in the face of theophany.

2. The *insān al-kāmil*: Divergences in the Understanding of an Anthropological-Metaphysical Project

A large portion of both Ibn ‘Arabī’s and Iqbāl’s thoughts are devoted to explaining the nature of human being and his role in creation (*khalq*). Transcendental anthropology, therefore, occupies many of the pages of these two authors. For both, the human being is the protagonist of a cosmic play to reach the degree of the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*), a human being who could emulate in physical and metaphysical terms the state of existence of the Prophet Muḥammad (Arnel 1997).

The key to understanding this transcendental anthropology is the *insān al-kāmil* (Ibn ‘Arabī 1946, p. 214). It was presented in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikām* (The Bezels of Wisdom) and which later was thematised in a much more precise way by one of the most brilliant members of the Akbarian school, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (1365–1424). For the Islamic tradition to become the axis of Sufi anthropology, all spiritual experience seeks an *imitatio nabi* (imitation of the Prophet). For them, this was the way to attain the higher states of existence. At the same time, however, it is a quest that cannot ignore the levels and responsibilities it has in the earthly world (*dunya*), such as politics or social justice. The Islamic tradition, and this is not alien to Iqbāl, invites one to take, along with the spiritual experience, the experience as a *khalifa* (vicegerent) of Allāh on earth, like the position of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Iqbāl and Ibn ‘Arabī agree on the idea that the Prophet Muḥammad represents the centre of any Islamic anthropology. However, both differ when it comes to achieving the state (*maqām*) of *insān al-kāmil*. For example, in the twelfth chapter of Annemarie Schimmel’s *And Muḥammad is his Messenger* (Schimmel 1985, pp. 238–56), the impact of the Prophet on the spiritual imaginary of Iqbāl is shown. Muḥammad figures prominently in his work, inheriting the symbolic and devotional aspects of the classical Islamic tradition. It is very interesting that most of his vision coincides with Sufi readings and ends up leading to the profound anthropological spirituality that Iqbāl exhibits in his thought. The Prophet, for Iqbāl, is a human character who depends on his own life trajectory to achieve fulfilment.

Iqbāl, with the writing of *Asrār-i Khūdī* (The Secrets of the Self), therefore, broke with the possibility of following a Sufi model influenced by Akbarian thought and probably influenced by the debate about the figure of Muḥammad in the subcontinent (Tareen 2020). Thus, he proposed something different, closer to vitalism, to human creativity, and to a knowledge of the self (*khūdī*). The idea could remind us of Jungian *selbst* (self). The philosophical echoes of the West were present, as opposed to a Sufism that was more embedded in predestination and exceptionality, the saints (*awliyā’*) and divine knowledge. In short, the key to Iqbāl’s opposition to Ibn ‘Arabī is not to accept the fatalism that Allāh dictates in the face of the possibility of initiating a *jihād akbar* (great struggle) to create one’s own destiny, so that Allāh will reward him by granting him an opening (*fath*).

What we see in Iqbāl is a rejection of an anthropology that could propose a loss of human freedom. At this time, he was searching for a political–spiritual project for the subcontinent, at the same time as he was complaining in *Shikwa* (Lament), in 1909, and *Jawab Shikwa* (Reply to Lament), in 1913, about the future of the Muslim community, which

was neglecting the prophetic model in danger of being replaced by Western modernity and ideologies far removed from the balanced project of the Prophet Muhammad, the *insān al-kāmil*. Indeed, in *Asrār-o Ramūz*'s foreword to *Collected Poetry* (Iqbāl 2002), published by the Iqbal Academy in Lahore, Iqbāl pointed out:

“Obviously this view of man and the universe is opposed to that of the English Neo-Hegelians as well as to all forms of pantheistic Sufism which regard absorption in a universal life or soul as the final aim and salvation of man. The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation, and he attains this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique. The Prophet said, ‘*Takhallaqū bi-akhlāq Allāh*,’ ‘Create in yourselves the attributes of God.’ Thus, man becomes unique by becoming more and more like the most unique Individual. What then is life? It is individual: its highest form, so far, is the ego (*khūdī*) in which the individual becomes a self-contained exclusive centre. 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. Not that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary, he absorbs God into himself” (Iqbāl 2002, p. 4).

Asrār-i Khūdī represents an interesting turning point in his thought and, above all, a rejection of the *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence). At the same time, it is a forceful text that makes clear to us Iqbāl's project of philosophical anthropology, as his prologue invites us to do. At the core is the rejection of the denial of the individuality of the human being for a union of a mystical kind. For Iqbāl, the loss of the self would be dangerous for human beings in that it would prevent him from coming in fullness before Allāh, from becoming the *khūdī* as he transcends self-containment and unfolds himself by allowing the divine attributes to apply to him. Indeed, he blames the quietism derived from these practices as responsible for the debacle of Islamic civilisation (Iqbāl 1923a, pp. 93–96). Mysticism can produce an oblivion of the near world to focus on a symbolic and imaginal world, without a large part of the mystics understanding that this world is open to profound hermeneutical approaches.

Unlike more conventional mysticism, Iqbāl proposes to break with the idea of *fanā'* (annihilation) and the destruction of individuality to integrate into Allāh. He thus begins a critique of Plato and his intellectual followers, among whom Ibn ‘Arabī is implicitly included, in which Iqbāl exclaims: “to die,”—he wrote—“is the secret of Life: glorified be the flame when it is extinguished” (Iqbāl 1923a, pp. 32–36).

For Iqbāl, Plato has exerted a disastrous influence on the West and on Sufism, insofar as he has intellectualised theophany and determined everyday creation as myth. What concerns him is the loss of the Adamic nature of the human being and a cult of the intangible. The vitalism of the philosopher from Sialkot invites us to think that a philosophical quietism is dangerous for the human being, as it could withdraw the capacity to reach vital equilibrium. This could lead to forgetting that the human being must return to the community with the profound knowledge acquired, with the full *khūdī* (self). The absence of return from the theophanic experience is, in a sense, a loveless act (*‘ishq*) that strengthens the ego (*nafs*). Again, balance in the human being is central and key to a world in crisis.

The problem, in my opinion, is that Iqbāl, again, takes a distorted picture of Akbarian thought and he just sees his Platonism while ignoring the fullness of Ibn ‘Arabī's thought. For example, he ignored the chapters of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (Ibn ‘Arabī 2013, vol. 8, pp. 160–71) which deal with *‘ibāda* (rituality) and invite us to think of a balance between *sharī‘a* (exoteric law) and *ḥaqīqa* (divine reality). In fact, this is where an Akbarian vitalism is forged that invites us to live and build in the social and in this rituality. Ibn ‘Arabī is not a Platonist, but he is touched by a transformative spiritual experience conceptualised in a certain neo-Platonic language. This is something that Iqbāl does not understand, falling into a mistake and reducing Ibn ‘Arabī to a weak mysticism.

The main point of divergence between both is established in the purpose of the human being, in “becoming *insān kāmil*”. In fact, the Akbarian *insān kāmil* differs from that of Iqbāl in that the one proposed by Ibn ‘Arabī is the one who knows Allāh (*ta’rif*) deeply and takes His attributes to be extinguished in Him. It is a vital experience linked to the cosmological and the metaphysical; the human being lacks control over it, and existence becomes imagination (*khayāl*). The Prophets, the intimates (*awliyā’*) of Allah and the divine knowers (*‘ārifūn*) are examples of this anthropological development. In these categories, human beings are stripped of otherness and become intimately acquainted with the divine, so much so that they are integrated into unity by stripping themselves of their individuality. The human being, by his Adamic nature, is an isthmus (*barzakh*) between the divine and the created; therefore, the human being aspires to rise and reintegrate into Allāh, first by annihilating (*fanā’*) to subsequently subsist (*baqā’*) in Him without identity or name (Izutsu 2019, pp. 186–87). A perpetual creation (*khalq jadīd*) referring to everything in the Divine Reality. The human being needs neither reason, nor history, nor identity, but divine providence to grant him *kashf* (unveiling).

The model proposed by Iqbāl is a human being in fullness as a person, as a self (*khūdī*). He is required to use reason, intuition, and vital balance together with his own life history to be able to reach Allāh and absorb the attributes of Allāh in his self (*khūdī*), achieving an individual completeness capable of welcoming the absolute in himself. Transformation is individual, but the fruits are collective. Iqbāl proposes, following Syed Ahmad Khan, Bergson, and Nietzsche, an individual who evolves, who grows, and transits by empowering his self (*khūdī*) until he reaches the Absolute within himself. Only in this way can human beings attain freedom without having to renounce their existence and their consciousness to transform the world in which they live. In this regard, with its connection with the Islamic experience, Iqbāl says in *The Reconstruction*:

“The spirit of man in its forward movement is restrained by forces which seem to be working in the opposite direction. This is only another way of saying that life moves with the weight of its own past on its back and that in any view of social change the value and function of the forces of conservatism cannot be lost sight of. It is with this organic insight into the essential teachings of the Qur’an that modern Rationalism ought to approach our existing institutions. No one can afford to completely reject their past entirely, for it is their past that has made their personal identity. In a society like Islam the problem of a revision of old institutions becomes still more delicate, and the responsibility of the reformer assumes a far more serious aspect. Islam is non territorial in its character, and its aim is to furnish a model for the final combination of humanity by drawing its adherents from a variety of mutually repellent races, and then transforming this atomic aggregate into a people possessing a self-consciousness of their own”. (Iqbāl 2012, pp. 132–33).

For Iqbāl, a human being cannot be exclusively spiritual to the point that he becomes detached from reality, from history, from his past and his identity. For this reason, he said: “no people can afford to completely reject its past, for it is the past that has shaped its personal identity”. Therefore, it renounces its identity, its history, or its life. Human beings are responsible for transforming their world from their spirituality, from their life, from their reality. This anthropological experience is what Guénon would call a “descending spiritual realization” and implies a return to reality, after reaching a theophanic experience, without being understood as a return (Guénon 2004a, pp. 167–78). Descending realisation implies a sacrifice (*sacrum-facere*) of the subject to reoccupy his place in the world. Iqbāl’s *insān kāmil* follows this logic: the human being who has empowered his *khūdī* with love (*‘ishq*), who is the complete individual and who can, in the Muhammadian way, transform his world. Therefore, the *fanā’* (annihilation) in the divine is something that he cannot contemplate from the same Muhammadian example. This is how Iqbāl explains it, again, in *The Reconstruction*:

“Muhammad of Arabia ascended the highest Heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point, I should never have returned.” These are the words of a great Muslim saint, ‘Abd al-Quddūs of Gangoh. In the whole range of Sufi literature, it was probably difficult to find words which, in a single sentence, disclose such an acute perception of the psychological difference between the prophetic and the mystic types of consciousness. The mystic does not wish to return from the repose of “unitary experience”; and even when he does return, as he must, his return does not mean much for mankind at large. The Prophet’s return is creative. He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals. For the mystic the repose of “unitary experience” is something final; for the Prophet it is the awakening, within him, of world-shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world. The desire to see his religious experience transformed into a living world-force is supreme in the Prophet. Thus his return amounts to a kind of pragmatic test of the value of his religious experience”. (Iqbāl 2012, p. 99).

It is the *mi’rāj*, Muḥammad’s journey to the heavens, that is the clearest example of what it means to become *insān kāmil*. The Prophet could have stayed in the heavens, but he chose to transform his world by indulging in a historicised and lived life. Iqbāl considers that this act of taking on the “descending realisation”—paraphrasing Guénon’s argument—is what gives him the creativity and complete freedom to transform the world. His experience of the theophanic has value insofar as it allows him to apply it in the world after having received, or re-knowing (*ta’rīf*), the Divine into his *khūdī* (self), in an almost alchemical process involving a transmutation of his *nafs* (ego) into the *khūdī* (self), thus, to exist as a perfect human being, assuming in fullness the Adamic caliphate.

Therefore, the greatest real divergence, in this sense, between the *Shaykh al-Akbar* and Iqbāl is in the understanding of the theory of action that is intimately linked to the theory of knowledge and anthropological development in the concept or symbol of openness (*fathī*). Should the human being trust in being destined to reach the divine in this existence, or should he strive for it throughout a historicised life?

3. The Lived World between the Akbarian *kashf* and the *tarbiyat* of Iqbāl

While Ibn ‘Arabī invites us to think of this openness in terms of ontological destiny, Iqbāl—embedded into contemporary Sufism—proposes that self *must fight for* it. As I have already mentioned, the key concept is the openness (*fathī*). A genuine call to the *jihād al-akbar*, a striving against the ego, in the face of a world in a deep spiritual crisis, mired in ideologies. This is how Iqbāl explains it in *The Reconstruction*:

“Neither the technique of medieval mysticism, nor nationalism, nor atheistic socialism can cure the ills of a despairing humanity. Surely the present moment is one of great crisis in the history of modern culture. The modern world stands in need of biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of western science necessarily involves, and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter. It is only by rising to a fresh vision of his origin and future, his whence and whither, that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by an inhuman competition, and a civilization which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values”. (Iqbāl 2012, p. 149).

Iqbāl’s warning seems almost prophetic, in this inspired paragraph that makes clear what so many other authors were warning about in the interwar period. The modern world was not prepared to show the way to the human being; in fact, the alternatives were even more dangerous. Hence Iqbāl’s final critique of Akbari philosophy: There is no

ontological destiny, but human beings will have to face their own history and transform it from their self. This is the reason for his critique of medieval mysticism, of the dynamics of the mystical conception that he exposed earlier. For Iqbāl, the present was in need of an attitude of creative and active transformation and no ontological destiny is expected. In the Akbarian schema, this concept is represented by the *fath* (the opening) that initiates the beginning of divine knowledge.

Ibn ‘Arabī tell us in a verse from chapter 216 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* that: “Truly the *fath* is the cessation of all troubles/But it is a storm, do not be happy when it comes” (Ibn ‘Arabī 2013, vol. 6, p. 468). This idea is central to Sufism and defines the Akbarian metaphysical experience. It demands, according to him, a high degree of humility and servitude (*‘ubūdiyya*) because “one does not know what comes next”, since the *fath* hides the end of a spiritual state (*ḥāl*). *Fath* is intimately linked to the idea of freedom, of which Ibn ‘Arabī wrote that it is a style of servitude, for the subject becomes free from everything except Allāh (Ibn ‘Arabī 2013, vol. 6, p. 459). It is an experience that is given following an ontological destiny of the person. In the third category, Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of the *mukāshafa* (Ibn ‘Arabī 2013, vol. 6, p. 475), the falling of the veil, that we are most interested in contrasting it with the experience of Iqbāl.

This is an instant in which the Sufi, already versed in the initiatory path, unveils reality (*ḥaqīqa*) through the acquisition of divine knowledge (*ma‘rifa*); as Ibn ‘Arabī himself says, the veil is dropped, and the existent is differentiated from the lie. A knowledge that depends on Allāh and for which some beings have been predestined. Izutsu in *Sufism and Taoism* gives us an interesting clue: “The manner in which each thing receives existence from the Absolute is strictly determined by its own ‘preparation’” (Izutsu 2019, p. 180). A preparation that involves *qadā’*, predestination, which in turn is the judgement of Allāh according to what the subject needs and which, finally, ends in a determined allocation or *qadr*. The *kashf* makes it possible for a human being to understand it, but at the same time it would only be restricted to an elite whose *qadā’* is to discover the divine reality (*ḥaqīqa*).

What Ibn ‘Arabī proposes, from the point of view of Iqbāl, is that there is no spiritual evolution, for the transits of state are already given in the *qadā’* and *qadr* without—as Izutsu points out—the ignorant, those who have not yet received the *fath*, being able to change, despite their prayers, the course of events (Izutsu 2019, p. 83). Whereas the divine knowers (*‘arifūn*) by knowing reality (*ḥaqīqa*) recognise it and therefore do not attempt to change it or ask for change. Thus, the action is empty if it is not in the *qadā’* and *qadr*; it is pure illusion. Here the freedom that you mentioned earlier is manifested; it involves a breaking away from all attributes, adjectives, and only the essence (*dhāt*) remains. Ibn Arabī explained to us in *al-Futūḥāt* that freedom is always stated in the negative form: “It is said not that you are free, but that you are no longer a slave of other than Allāh”, for there is no absolute freedom of the individual since everything is determined; there is no independence of the essence (Ibn ‘Arabī 2013, vol. 6, p. 459).

He who has achieved divine knowledge (*‘arif*), thus, can aspire to be annihilated (*fanā’*) in the divine and to remain there (*baqā’*). The most interesting point of the Akbarian *fanā’* is that it is rooted in the mystery of predestination (*qadr*) and disobedience—one of the meanings of *fanā’*—to the laws of the material which, in fact, implies an obedience to the essence that occurs by contemplating the pure light of the divine. This is a performance exclusive to Allāh; the true *fanā’* is lived from the role of witness. In fact, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions that in the *fanā’*, alluding to the fifth of its meanings, the individual as such vanishes from the world by witnessing Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) and essence (*dhāt*) assuming oneness (*tawḥīd*): “there is nothing but Allāh”. Thus, there is an indistinction between the individual as subject and the divine, for nothing other than Allāh is seen in reality (*ḥaqīqa*). The individual, therefore, receives the *baqā’* (permanence) which *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* relates to supreme obedience. A stability in Allāh after the *fanā’* in which there is no possibility of naming or attributing anything to the subject having reached the core, a state of fullness with Allāh. Nothing remains to be done; only the divine presence envelopes him (Ibn ‘Arabī 2013, vol. 6, pp. 492–97).

The Akbarian experience invites the dissolution of the individual and the re-knowledge of Allāh in the whole of Reality to integrate into it. Therefore, why try to change the world if it is predetermined this way for certain beings? What is the point of action if a human being lacks power? An interesting mystical relativism that does not fit with what Iqbāl perceived in the contemporary era.

The ontological reality of Akbarian action, and its apparent disinterest in the political in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikām*, lead Iqbāl to think that Ibn ‘Arabī prefers to subjugate the course of history to ontological destiny. A renunciation of the struggle to transform by virtue of accepting a metaphysical reality that, placed above morality, ruins the world. Iqbāl’s defiance of this attitude succeeds in challenging Ibn ‘Arabī, for Iqbāl cannot comprehend the decadence of the world.

This is the subject matter of his poems *Shikwa* and *Jawab Shikwa*. Iqbāl’s anthropology invites the human being to become independent of dogmas and spiritual mediators to become creative, for Iqbāl wants the human being to recover control over their destiny in imitation of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is the *burning sincerity* mentioned by Nicholson in the foreword to his translation of *Asrār-i khūdī* (Iqbāl 2013, p. x) that then becomes manifest when, in this same work, Iqbāl invites us to stop feeling alien and to confront those who “stole paradise from us”. A very romantic reading, with an eye to the past and especially to those who he considers destroyed the possibility of acting from realism: the pantheistic metaphysics of the Hindus (Vedanta), that of the Sufis and that of the Europeans. That confrontation is through action; there is no point in contemplation if the world is in injustice and imbalance; there is no point in being an *insān kāmil* if there is no possibility of the divine knowledge (*ma’rifā*) that he possesses being transformed into spiritual evolution for himself and for others.

The human being needs to educate himself spiritually (*tarbiyat*) and advance in existence to reach the divine. It is the measured and directed action through historicity that makes the human being grow because he models himself, strengthens his self (*khūdī*) and fights against his ego (*nafs*). Iqbāl’s difference with the Sufism of his time lies mainly in the fact that Iqbāl sees reason and intellect as tools to influence actions, without totalising them. This is because life is in movement, it is dynamic, and this is what the human being must assimilate; it is the “biological revolution” that Iqbāl quoted in *The Reconstruction* that integrated the anthropological limits and those of nature which do not have a perverse aspect, as in the systems derived from Platonic philosophy. The subject must be constructed to embrace the divine within itself. Thus, in *Asrār-i khūdī* Iqbāl (1923a, pp. 44–52) explains that there are three categories in the education of the self (*tarbiyat-i khūdī*): obedience (*tā’at*), self-control of the ego (*dabt-i nafs*) and divine viceregency (*niyābat-i ilāhī*).

Iqbāl’s *tarbiyat* begins with normative systems that strengthen, at a first level, the *khūdī* (self). At this point, as Iqbāl says, it can be weakened if the subject asks questions too much, which is why obedience (*tā’at*) is a fundamental experience. Obedience to the law (*sharī’a*), to the prophetic tradition (Sunna) or nature itself. The *khūdī* assimilates that, to achieve creativity, freedom, and fulfilment, he must cling to a safe space as “the grass obeys the law of growth/if it leaves it, it is crushed by the footprints” (Iqbāl 1923a, p. 45). The *sharī’a*, understood holistically as the path of transit of the human being, provides this experience of control of the ego and desires. Thus, the *khūdī* can bend it and focus on creating, imagining, and understanding. It enters, in fact, into its natural law: “To burn unceasingly from the candle is the law” (Iqbāl 1923a, p. 46). Science and reason can help to adapt to the normative and to construct judgements that improve the person. For whatever strengthens the self (*khūdī*) is good, and whatever weakens it is harmful. It is a Platonic move beyond the fact that what is visible and natural is harmful, to understand that reality is not to be moralised.

The experience towards the fullness of the human being continues in the self-control of the ego (*dabt-i nafs*). Once it has been subdued and the ego is no longer the centre, the self (*khūdī*) emerges and begins a process of self-gnosis, so important in contemporary Sufism. The ego gradually dissolves to give way to an empowered self that is conscious

of the divine reality (*ḥaqīqa*). It is in this process that *ʾishq* (love) is basic because it helps the *khūdī* to emerge between sensible knowledge (*ʾilm*) and divine knowledge (*maʾrifa*). This knowledge comes from the divine, but is fabricated and strengthened by the human being. It is love that builds a diaphaneity of its own in the heart of the human being for theophany to take place. In *Payām-i Mashriq*, Iqbāl (1923b, p. 99) states: “Knowledge deals with attributes, while love is the vision of the essence (*dhāt*)”. Now the entire *sharīʿa* is assimilated into the spiritual realm, the self (*khūdī*) makes its own the obligations it no longer perceives as such (Iqbāl 1923a, pp. 46–47). Each of these old obligations transforms the subject, kills his ego, and now gives him freedom. Moreover, it is the pilgrimage, the *ḥajj*, where the self is elevated, enlightened, and as Iqbāl says: “It teaches separation from one’s home // and the rootedness of the homeland is destroyed”. Metaphorically, the ego (*nafs*) experiences remoteness from one’s own and nostalgia fades; without nostalgia there is no attachment, and the self (*khūdī*) becomes “permeable”. It becomes imbued with that theophany, with the divine, and recognises the why of the previous phase. It is not, but that it recognises itself (*khūdī*). Islam is reborn, as a balanced experience, becoming the way for the self that no longer obeys, but rises in the fullness of life. As Iqbāl (1936, p. 7) says: “The secret of the *khūdī* is hidden in that *There is no god but He*/The *khūdī* is only a blunt sword, *there is no god, but He* is the stone that sharpens it”.

The last step of Iqbāl’s *tarbiyat* is the divine viceregency (*niyābat-i ilāhī*). Having taken the previous step, the self (*khūdī*) becomes aware of its preeminent role and its advancement in existence by manifesting over its self (*khūdī*). Consequently, the human being begins to act by harmonising rational knowledge (*ʾilm*), actions, and divine knowledge (*maʾrifa*), while absorbing the attributes of the names of Allāh. Those attributes he makes his own and incorporates them into his life. Then, the human being’s existence is no longer illusion but reality. That assumption of reality causes him to become the vicegerent of Allāh, to exist in the shadow of the great divine name, and to know the whole and the part. The human being becomes full and embraces the divine in his self (*khūdī*), enabling him to realise it downwards and implement it in society. His life is an eternal youth, because he takes on the Adamic role of knowing the name of each thing. Fullness is not finitude; fullness is taking on the manifestations, the Prophet’s nature, in the self. Says Iqbāl:

“It is the final cause of “God taught Adam the names of all things”,
Intimate meaning of “Praise be to Him who made him travel in the night”.
His white hand with the staff strengthened,
His knowledge with the power of a perfect man is laced.
When that bold knight the reins takes
time’s gallops steed faster.
Terrible appearance dry up the Red Sea,
and from Egypt Israel he delivers,
at his cry: Arise! The dead spirits stand
in their worldly graves, like trees in the meadow.
His being is an atonement for the whole world,
That by His greatness the world is saved”. (Iqbāl 1923a, p. 50)

The perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*), like the imitation of Muhammad, occupies the whole of the prophetic history, incorporating it into himself. This *insān kāmil* updates his action with this divine manifestation and takes care of its impact on the world because ethics (*akhlāq*) itself is a creation (*khalq*) of the reality in which one lives. He is a free being who acts under the dictates of Allāh, guarantor of a freedom that relates to immortality. The self (*khūdī*) is free, and immortal, because it is not subjugated to a linear and progressive space-time—note the philosophical influence of Bergson—but is immersed in the “present space-time” of God. It is here that the *fath* (opening) occurs: his destiny has created him during the *tarbiyat*, and the spiritual opening is only a reward as his self breaks through

time, history, and space by unifying diversity without renouncing it. The self will continue to exist forever as a symbol, as a receptacle of Allāh for those who have not yet been fortunate enough to reach it. Iqbāl, unlike Ibn ‘Arabī, does not propose an annihilation and after permanence, but to be receivers and to live containing the Absolute, for existence is the most real thing there is.

Although Iqbāl misread Ibn ‘Arabī, his metaphysical anthropology serves Iqbāl in constructing a model of his own in defiance of much of the Islamic tradition. Ibn ‘Arabī reimagination serves as an ignition to offer a brilliant system of metaphysical anthropology. By counterposing a vitalist model to a mystical-quietist model such as the Akbarian, without dispensing with a deep spirituality such as he exhibits in *‘aql-u dil* (reason and heart), he can draw an independent and creative alternative to the traditional Islamic model of the servant (*‘abd*) as I tried to show previously (De Diego González 2022c). The idea that a realised human being can reach the Divine is suggestive and responsive, moreover, to the political project proposed by Iqbāl. It is not a matter of ideology, but of bringing about a spiritual and anthropological revolution, a universal evolution, from the depths of the human person. A human being emptied, free of idols.

4. Conclusions: A Symbolic Reconciliation on the Spiritual Journey: The *Javīd Nāma*

Leaving aside the intellectual polemic, if we could say that there was a possible meta-historical reconciliation between Iqbāl and Ibn ‘Arabī, this had to take place, necessarily in the *Javīd Nāma* (The Book of Eternity). Considered by Syed Abdul Wahid (1944, p. 19) as the *opus magnum* of Iqbāl, this is a text where he displays even more creative freedom and a very intensive use of the creative imagination by applying it to the development of his metaphysical anthropology. Although this book deserves an essay of its own, I will try to summarise some ideas in dialogue with Akbarian thought.

The text, an overwhelming epic poem of 3646 verses, invites us to think about the human being through the initiatory journey. A theme that refers to the very experience of the Prophet Muhammad, specifically to *al-isrā’ wa-l-mi’rāj* (the night journey), and which has been the subject of multiple references and interpretations in the Islamic tradition. Beyond the Islamic interpretation itself, however, it is also a universal theme with which Iqbāl offers us a symbolic reflection. All cultures refer in their imaginary to initiatory journeys to imaginary worlds, as Mircea Eliade (1999, pp. 111–26) rightly pointed out in his essential article *The Magic Flight*. This experience, which is practised from shamans to writers, represents a rite of immemorial character that involves a journey through the heavens and the hells through the metaphors of flight and ascension. A journey that the modern world insists on seeing as fictitious, but which within the point of view of Ibn ‘Arabī, Jung or Iqbāl is a symbolic experience that touches the deepest part of the self.

The Islamic world attaches great value to this experience because the Prophet lived this situation, which is considered “authentic” by the traditional Muslim scholars. Narrated in the Qur’an (17:1) and augmented in the Hadith (prophetic sayings), Muhammad takes a journey through the heavens and reaches the limits of paradise, the *Sidra* tree. There he is invested with the seal of prophecy and the deepest secrets of existence are revealed to him. The Islamic tradition has reinterpreted this tradition again and again through *imitatio nabi*, through literature and the arts, and even through active imagination and spiritual practice as in the case of Sufism. For example, regarding the Akbarian visionary experience through imaginal experience, it is in this dimension and with symbolic mechanisms that Ibn ‘Arabī receives all the divine knowledge (*ma’rifā*) to justify his doctrine. It is in the initiatory journey, at the hand of the mysterious young man in the first chapter of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, that he is legitimised and begins to know the symbols that would transform his world.

Iqbāl (1966), likewise, in *Javīd Nāma* embodied in a magnificent exercise of active imagination a “dialogue with his inner figures”—using Jungian terms—by starting from the prophetic experience and directing it towards the universal. When reading the text, the reader feels that neither the language nor the situations that occur are alien to him. That is

because, following Arthur Arberry, the English translator of this work, the poem speaks of the eternal conflict of human history against its weaknesses and towards a path that ultimately leads to glory and peace.

That Iqbāl chose the lyric genre to depict his initiatory journey gives us a very interesting clue as to where he wants to lead us. As he says in *Ḍarb-i Kalim* (Iqbāl 1936, p. 133): “For poetry conveys songs towards eternity in the song of *Jibrīl* or in the roar of *Isrāfīl*’s trumpet”. For Iqbāl, poetry, using symbolic language, allows us to go much further than prose and logic. This work is the best example of an imaginal initiatory journey into the contemporary world, full of metahistorical and archetypal characters. Moreover, the cosmography chosen by our author, the celestial spheres, refers to classical Islamic science and, at the same time, to the symbol of the overlaid heavens. Finally, each sphere holds an archetype to be discovered: Zoroaster, Tolstoy, Pharaoh, or Nietzsche. So, that at the end of the journey, the individual is completely transformed by each experience to arrive at the Divine. One of the most powerful fragments of the whole work is the conclusion of the journey where Iqbāl, through his alter ego Zinda Rud, encounters the Divine, from which he can only hear two voices within his self (*khūdī*): the beautiful voice (*nada-e jamāl*) and the majestic voice (*nada-e jalāl*). Indeed, it is impressive how he addresses beauty with more questions than answers:

Zinda Rud

Who am I? Who are you? Where is the world?

Why is there such a distance between me and You?

Say, why am I bound by fate?

Why don’t You die, while I die?

The beautiful voice

You have been to the dimensional world,
and all that it contains must die.

If you long for life, advance in yourself,
drown the dimensions of the world in yourself.

Then you will contemplate who I am and who you are
and as you have lived, so shall you die. (Iqbāl 1932, p. 228).

The beautiful voice (*nada-e jamāl*) invites him to advance in his self-self (*khūdī*) and break away from worldly dimensions, such as quantity and space-time, to contemplate the divine. After an exhortation against ideologies, in a subsequent theophany (*iftadan tajally-i jalāl*) he reveals a vision that he perceives from his selfhood:

Suddenly I contemplated my whole World,
I saw that the earth and the sky were mine,
drowned by the light of the Dawn, I contemplated it.

I beheld it, like a *Sidr* tree, in crimson.

For the theophanies that into my soul burst
of ecstasy drunk, like Moses, I fell.

That light revealed all the veiled secrets.
and took away my power of speech.

From the deep heart of the inscrutable world,
then, a fiery, flaming melody burst forth (...). (Iqbāl 1932, p. 229).

A fragment that narrates the attainment of the philosophy of *khūdī* in a human being, full of symbols common to other moments of experience of fullness and unity. If we look closely, we can perceive his difference from other visionaries: he is welcoming the experience of the fullness of the Divine in his self after the final dialogue. He is the perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) who, invested with this divine knowledge (*ma’rifā*), can transform

the world. After this, however, the following question could arise: why do it at this moment in history? Why propose something “mythical” at a time when no one believes in it?

In my opinion, *Javīd Nāma* appears at a time of global collapse. It is not a simple literary work, but a vital testament to his whole thought. It appears at a time when the “Reign of quantity” and the absence of values had become a constant. At the same time, in my opinion, it represents a symbolic reconciliation with Ibn ‘Arabī resolving the main problem of this paper. Moreover, it is due to the fruit of the imaginal journey, a convergence in the continuous creation (*al-khalq al-jadīd*) and the capacity of the human being to do so. If the two authors differ in the end, Iqbāl recovers in the 20th century—before the psychedelic generation and, in another sense, Joseph Campbell’s research—the possibility of changing the world through the initiatory journey. It is theophany that overflows the human being, and it is the Divine that motivates him. Ibn ‘Arabī prefers to tell us that it breaks us; Iqbāl invites us to embrace it. It is an overcoming of the purely physical, of the quantitative, and of logic. Both realise the danger of reducing the world to a physical and finite reality, and the human being believes that he has unlimited power over his dimensional reality and becomes pure ego. Yet it is in the *self* that both journeys meet inner dialogues, transcendence, and endless journeys (Ibn ‘Arabī 2015, pp. 3–5). Both authors fit the description of the mystical experience given by Anne Marie Schimmel, the translator of the book into German, who gives of the mystical experience: transgression of logic in which the boundaries of space-time are transcended and there is no other homeland than eternity (Iqbāl 1957, p. 2). After the journey, the whole world belongs to the transcended human being, a feeling of uniqueness far removed from the desire for power over reality.

Beyond Iqbāl’s criticism of Ibn ‘Arabī’s anthropological model, in *Javīd Nāma* he ends up in the same place. Iqbāl criticises the Akbari philosophy without having given it a chance and a thorough reading, but fearful that it might damage his emancipatory project. Unfortunately, he did not read the *Kitāb al-isfār*, which would have affirmed his thoughts surrounding the spiritual quest. However, it is not empty ritual, not ideological nostalgia, and not power over the masses, but only his embrace of the Divine in the self (*khūdī*). Akbarian thought invites to stillness; Iqbāl invites to action, to “descending spiritual realization” (Guénon 2004a). Both, however, re-encounter their philosophies in the Eternity of the Divine beyond space and time, in the living, indestructible symbols, and in the experience of the Absolute. There is no longer any space for the power of words, nor for discursive thought. These are the “fruits of the journey” in which they find themselves, a transcending towards a prospective anthropology that allows others to reach this state of being. A self (*khūdī*) who achieves freedom and breaks free from the chains of the *Reign of Quantity* that René Guénon (2004b) suggested.

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