

# OVERCOMING NIHILISM THROUGH SUFISM: AN ANALYSIS OF IQBAL'S ARTICLE ON 'ABD AL-KARĪM AL-JĪLĪ

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## INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, there has been a growth of interest in the philosophy of non-European/non-Western traditions in general and the Islamic tradition in particular. This interest has led to the emergence of 'comparative philosophy' which attempts a more systematic and comprehensive study of non-Western/European traditions of thought as philosophical traditions.<sup>1</sup> As David Cooper observes, previously only a few Muslim/Arab thinkers were included in standard 'history of philosophy' books, and this too mainly because those thinkers wrote commentaries on Aristotle.<sup>2</sup> Arab/Muslim thinkers were included not because of their contributions to some of the perennial problems of philosophy, but because of their service in the transmission of ancient Greek philosophy to Europe. Some argue that this is generally a result of Islamic philosophy being studied with a 'history of ideas' approach

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, see Gerald James Larson and Eliot Deutsch, *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989); Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *A Comparative History of World Philosophy: From the Upanishads to Kant* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998); David E. Cooper, *World Philosophies: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Cooper, *World Philosophies*, 1.

instead of a philosophical one.<sup>3</sup> The former is not interested in philosophical questions as such, but in historical ones,<sup>4</sup> such as how a certain idea, or a term, moved from one thinker to another, from one context or historical period to another and, sometimes, who influenced whom. What is more troubling in this emphasis on ‘influence’ is that it reflects ‘the orientalist assumption that Muslims could not really create original work all by themselves’.<sup>5</sup> In order to bring out the philosophical point and value of their arguments, the works of Muslim philosophers too should be studied with a philosophical approach<sup>6</sup>—not merely ‘as fossils in a museum of the history of ideas’<sup>7</sup> but rather as part of ‘a dynamic and living tradition which speaks to philosophers today just as it did in the past’.<sup>8</sup>

Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), a leading modern Muslim thinker, is particularly relevant for rethinking this methodological problem—i.e., reading Islamic philosophy through a ‘history of ideas’ approach and with ‘the orientalist assumption’—in the context of modern Islamic philosophy for at least two reasons. The first is that Iqbal himself was aware of, and concerned with, this problem. As early as 1900, he demonstrated his awareness of it in an article on ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī.’<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Ali Khalidi, *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xiii–xiv; Oliver Leaman, ‘Introduction’ in Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ‘Introduction’ in *ibid*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Leaman, ‘Introduction’, in *ibid*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Leaman, ‘The Influence of Influence: How not to Talk about Islamic Culture’, *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook*, 1 (‘Dialogue of Philosophies’, 2010): 35–45. Online: <http://iph.ras.ru/uplfile/smironov/ishraq/1/leaman.pdf>, 04.02.2016. (Accessed 14 March 2017.)

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn., 2002), ix.

<sup>7</sup> Leaman, ‘Orientalism and Islamic Philosophy’ in Nasr and Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 1146.

<sup>8</sup> Leaman, ‘Introduction’ in *ibid*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, ‘The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as Expounded by Abdul Karim al-Jilani’, *Indian Antiquary*, 29 (1900): 237–46. When Iqbal wrote this article in 1900 (referred to hereafter as ‘Doctrine’), he misidentified the thinker whose ideas he was analysing. He realized this mistake later while writing his doctoral dissertation, and then (1908) corrected the name to ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī: Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1908), 116. (The work was first republished by Bazm-i Iqbal in Lahore, 1954.) In this paper, I will use the correct name. The 1900 article is reprinted in Latif Ahmed Sherwani (ed.),

In it, he criticizes European scholars for paying due attention to ‘ancient Hindu philosophy’, but dismissing ‘Muslim philosophy’ as ‘an unprogressive repetition of Aristotle and Plato’ (‘Doctrine’, 237). Iqbal has no problem in granting ‘the superiority’ of Indian philosophy with its great thinkers, such as Kapila (b. ca. 600 BC) and Shankaracharya (788–820 AD), but thinks that this should not lead us to ignore the originality and ‘independence of Muslim thinkers’ (ibid). He takes it upon himself to demonstrate the originality of Islamic philosophy, and attempts to do this by focusing on a part of it that he thinks ‘has generally been condemned under the contemptuous name of mysticism’ (ibid). In essence, he claims that the originality of Islamic philosophy is found in its mystical/Sufi school, and he attempts to demonstrate this in discourse about al-Jīlī’s philosophy (ibid).

The second reason why Iqbal is relevant for rethinking the methodological problem is that his own work has often been subjected to the same ‘history of ideas’ approach combined with ‘the orientalist assumption’, i.e., studied so as to demonstrate that his arguments are an outcome of the influence of various modern European/Western philosophers. Indeed, this attitude to Iqbal dates back to Iqbal’s own times. After the publication of his *Asrār-i khūdī* (The Secrets of the Self) in English in 1920, some critics argued that his concept of ‘the perfect man’ was influenced by Nietzsche’s ‘superman’, that his theory of selfhood (*khūdī*) was an eclectic combination of the ideas of Bergson, Nietzsche and McTaggart.<sup>10</sup> Edward G. Browne went further and described Iqbal’s philosophy as merely ‘an oriental adaptation’ of Nietzsche’s philosophy.<sup>11</sup> In response to these criticisms, Iqbal wrote a letter to Reynold Nicholson—his former professor at Trinity College and the translator of *Asrār-i khūdī*—and said: ‘I wrote on the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man more than twenty years ago,<sup>12</sup> long before I had read or heard anything of Nietzsche.’<sup>13</sup> Iqbal thus points to the source of his knowledge of the concept of the ‘perfect man’ in Sufism to explain how it is not derived from Nietzsche’s ‘superman’. In his response, Iqbal sounds disappointed that some of his English reviewers did not show the necessary care to understand his ideas properly and jumped to quick conclusions after

*Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 5th edn., 2009), 77–97.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *Letters of Iqbal* (compiled and ed. Bashir Ahmad Dar; Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1978), 139–40.

<sup>11</sup> Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia. Vol. 4: Modern Times (1500–1924)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 4 vols., 1959–64), 431.

<sup>12</sup> Here, Iqbal is referring to the ‘Doctrine’ article.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 141.

seeing a ‘superficial resemblance of some of [his] ideas to those of Nietzsche’.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, such evaluations of Iqbal’s ideas are neither a thing of the past nor exclusively a matter of Western/European scholarship, but rather a general tendency in Iqbal scholarship. Accordingly, analyses similar to those mentioned above—i.e., on the who-influenced-whom pattern, to demonstrate the influence of Western/European thinkers—are also found in contemporary analyses of various Western and non-Western (Indian and Muslim) scholars on Iqbal’s philosophy. In these studies, Iqbal’s philosophy in general and different ideas in particular, such as his theory of time,<sup>15</sup> his conception of the self,<sup>16</sup> his idea of ‘the perfect man’,<sup>17</sup> are generally considered as reflecting the influence of European philosophers, such as Bergson, Hegel, McTaggart, Whitehead, Goethe and Nietzsche.<sup>18</sup> Responses to these studies remain problematic to the extent that they too are framed within ‘the orientalist assumption’, differing from it only in the claim that Iqbal was not in fact influenced by the European/Western philosophers mentioned; rather, the primary influences and frames of reference for Iqbal were authentically Islamic—notably, the teachings of the Qur’an and certain Muslim writers, such as Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273).<sup>19</sup>

To understand how Iqbal’s arguments/ideas were part of a dynamic and living philosophical tradition, one needs to complement a history of ideas approach with a philosophical one. In this way, one can both situate Iqbal’s philosophy in its historical and intellectual/philosophical context, and show how it developed in response to particular philosophical problems. In this paper I argue that Iqbal’s philosophy is best understood

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim: An Introduction to the Life and Work of Mohammed Iqbal* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1951), 39.

<sup>16</sup> Rafiq Zakaria, *Iqbal: The Poet and the Politician* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994), 62–3.

<sup>17</sup> Iqbal Singh, *The Ardent Pilgrim*, 39.

<sup>18</sup> John L. Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 176; V. G. Kiernan, *Poem from Iqbal* (London: John Murray, 1955), xv.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, R. Bilquees Dar writes: ‘Nietzsche’s *Superman* (ubermensch) was in no way Iqbal’s *Perfect Man*’, in R. Bilquees Dar, ‘Iqbal and Nietzsche: Perfect Man versus Superman’, *International Journal of English and Literature*, 4/9 (2013): 449–50. Also see: Bilal Ahmad Dar, ‘Iqbal and Nietzsche’s Concept of Eternal Recurrence’, *Intellectual Discourse*, 19/2 (2011): 281–305; Nazir Qaiser, *Iqbal and the Western Philosophers: A Comparative Study* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2001), xiv; Mohammed Maruf, *Iqbal and His Contemporary Western Religious Thought* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1987), viii.

within the context of, and as a response to, the problem of nihilism as it was debated in modern German philosophy during the ‘pantheism controversy’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I work through Iqbal’s article on ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī to show his concern with the problem of nihilism, and the solution he offers, on the basis of al-Jīlī’s Sufism. Although this article has not attracted much attention from Iqbal scholars, I consider it a very important source for understanding Iqbal’s philosophy because it is like a prototype for almost the whole of his thinking.<sup>20</sup> It provides information about various attributes of his way of thinking, such as his Sufism, his cross-cultural approach, the extent of his study in philosophy, as well as the central philosophical problem (nihilism) that interested him at the beginning of his intellectual development. Most of these attributes and interests remained with Iqbal throughout his intellectual development, albeit undergoing certain changes. If one wishes to understand how Iqbal’s thinking changed over time, his article on al-Jīlī has to be the starting point.

I begin with a brief account of the relevant philosophical and historical context, namely, the problem of nihilism as it was debated during the ‘pantheism controversy’. I then discuss al-Jīlī’s Sufi/mystical approach to knowledge, his doctrines of ‘absolute unity’ and the ‘perfect man’, as presented and discussed by Iqbal, to describe the general structure of al-Jīlī’s solution to the problem of nihilism. In this way I explain how Iqbal demonstrates that al-Jīlī’s metaphysical system does not lead to pantheism, atheism, fatalism, and nihilism.

## THE HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT OF IQBAL’S PHILOSOPHY IN 1900

The article on al-Jīlī is useful for understanding the extent of Iqbal’s knowledge of philosophy around 1900 and identifying the philosophical

<sup>20</sup> To my knowledge, there is no study that focuses on this article, although various scholars briefly refer to it. For instance, Mustansir Mir (*Iqbal* [Delhi: I.B. Tauris and Oxford University Press, 2006], 5) mentions the article when he notes that Iqbal was encouraged by Thomas Arnold to write on al-Jīlī’s concept of the ‘perfect man’. Elizabeth Sirriyeh briefly mentions the article while discussing Iqbal’s early Sufism in *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, [repr.] 2003), 124–6. Annemarie Schimmel (*Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* [Leiden: Brill, 1963], 38) also briefly discusses the article and argues that al-Jīlī’s concept of the ‘perfect man’ and his ideas on ‘the ascension of the soul’ influenced Iqbal’s view of man’s spiritual development.

problems he was interested in. To begin with, we can infer from the names of the thinkers and traditions discussed in the article, that Iqbal had an interest and education in diverse philosophical traditions including, with modern European (German) philosophy, Islamic and Hindu philosophy. Iqbal makes reference to various modern German philosophers, such as Kant, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Hegel and Schopenhauer. But the article itself is about a Sufi thinker, al-Jīlī, and Iqbal shows familiarity also with the philosophy of Ibn ‘Arabī, whom he esteems as ‘the greatest of the Muhammadan Sufis’ (‘Doctrine’, 237). Further, he refers also to the Hindu tradition, to thinkers like Kapila and Shankaracharya and concepts/doctrines like Maya and Vedanta.

Beyond giving us a list of the philosophers Iqbal was familiar with, the article also indicates Iqbal’s awareness of an important debate then taking place in German philosophy which came to be known as ‘the pantheism controversy’ (*Pantheismusstreit*). It was in the course of this debate that the problem of nihilism was first discussed as a philosophical problem, and the term ‘nihilism’ was first used by Friedrich H. Jacobi to name it.<sup>21</sup> In what follows, I explain that Iqbal understands the problem of nihilism as the crisis of intellect/reason and the rising distrust for, or disappointment with, the capabilities of reason to provide a solution to our most fundamental metaphysical concerns. I explain also how Iqbal pursues a double track in analysing al-Jīlī’s philosophy as a plausible solution to those concerns. That is, while he shows how al-Jīlī’s conclusions are different from pantheism, he also discusses in parallel with that, how the pantheism issue was debated by modern German philosophers. This makes it clear that Iqbal was aware of ‘the pantheism controversy’ in modern German philosophy, and how different thinkers handled it. According to Iqbal, problems remain in the solutions offered by Kant, Fichte and Schopenhauer, but he considers Hegel’s solution a success in that, like al-Jīlī’s solution, it does not lead to pantheistic conclusions.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (transl. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell, and Frank A. Capuzzi, ed. David Farrell Krell; San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987), iv. (*Nihilism*) 3. Jacobi writes: ‘Truly, my dear Fichte, I would not be vexed if you, or anyone else, were to call *Chimerism* the view I oppose to the Idealism that I chide for *Nihilism*.’ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill* (transl. George di Giovanni; Montreal & Kingston: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1994), 519.

<sup>22</sup> I cannot within the scope of this article address questions as to the validity or accuracy of Iqbal’s interpretation and comparison of these philosophers. However, I have provided references where Iqbal drew parallels between philosophers, ideas or concepts that readers may find useful. I thank Umur Başdaş for help with Hegel references; Ahmet Özer for help with the Arabic

## ‘THE PANTHEISM CONTROVERSY’ AND THE PROBLEM OF NIHILISM

Beiser describes ‘the pantheism controversy’ as ‘the most significant intellectual event in late eighteenth-century Germany’ along with the publication of Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason) in 1781. Although it started as a private debate between Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn in 1783 over the question of whether or not Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was a Spinozist, thus pantheist, in the two years that followed, ‘the controversy’ became public and gradually included almost all the important thinkers of late eighteenth-century Germany and then some of the greatest thinkers of the nineteenth.<sup>23</sup>

Jacobi’s aim was to demonstrate that Lessing’s philosophy was in fact Spinozism.<sup>24</sup> The claim that Lessing was Spinozist was important since at that time Spinozism was equated with pantheism, and pantheism in turn was equated with fatalism and atheism, given Spinoza’s denial of final causes, finitude of the universe, freedom of will, and a supernatural and personal God (ibid, 49).<sup>25</sup> Yet, it was only on the surface that the controversy was about the question of Lessing’s Spinozism. At a deeper level, it was about the question of the authority of reason in providing support and justification for our metaphysical, religious, moral and political beliefs. Enlightenment philosophy was based on the fundamental principle that all beliefs should be subject to trial by reason, and that only after such trial, could reason support belief. This, Beiser says, was considered ‘a more effective sanction’ than that provided by the authority of tradition, revelation and scripture (ibid, 2). This principle is precisely what Jacobi was challenging. He believed that reason is not only unable to deliver on the promise of ‘a more effective sanction for all moral, religious and commonsense beliefs’, it also (more dangerously) undermines all fundamental truths and beliefs as well as the social, moral and political order (ibid, 45–6). In this respect, Lessing was a vehicle for Jacobi to demonstrate that ‘if we were consistent and pushed our reason

version of ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī’s *al-Insān al-kāmil*. For another account of al-Jīlī’s metaphysics, see N. Hanif, ‘Al-Jīlī, Abd al-Karīm b. Ibrahim (1365–1428)’ in *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: Africa & Europe* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2002), 83–109.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 44.

<sup>24</sup> On how Jacobi first learns about Lessing’s Spinozism, see *Main Philosophical Writings*, 187, 199–200.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 187–9 and 233–4, where Jacobi explains in brief what he takes to be the spirit of Spinozism; for his conception of Spinoza’s God, see 199.

to its limits, then we would have to embrace atheism, fatalism, and solipsism. We would have to deny the existence of God, freedom, other minds, the external world, and even the permanent existence of ourselves [...] in short, deny the existence of everything, and [...] become, to use Jacobi's dramatic language, "nihilists" (ibid, 46).

Challenging the claim that philosophy can provide knowledge of things about existence as a whole, Jacobi 'appealed to common sense and faith as means of overcoming the inability of philosophical reflection to reach out to existence.'<sup>26</sup> When, for instance, questioned by Lessing about his alternative approach, Jacobi responded by saying that he saves himself from the problem through a 'salto mortale'<sup>27</sup> which, by the Enlightenment philosophers, was seen as a form of irrationalism. Although George di Giovanni warns that Jacobi's approach should not simply be seen as irrationalism, he also adds that Jacobi could not explain clearly 'the exact nature of the evidence that he hoped to achieve through these instruments [i.e., common sense and faith], nor for that matter the exact place, within the economy of human knowledge, of the evidence thus achieved.'<sup>28</sup>

Rejecting Jacobi's appeal to faith, Mendelssohn situated himself on the side of reason.<sup>29</sup> In his *Morning Hours* (1785), he explains the rule that serves him as 'the right guide', that is, in instances where 'speculation', or 'contemplation', might misguide us, we should seek help from 'common sense' in orienting our thinking.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Mendelssohn argues that

<sup>26</sup> Di Giovanni, 'Introduction', in ibid, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Literally 'salto mortale' means, Di Givoanni tells us, "a mortal jump," i.e. a leap in which a person turns heels over head in the air' ibid, 189n. He warns, however (195), that the term should not be translated as 'leap of faith' since 'the expression "leap of faith" is nowhere to be found in Jacobi'.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>29</sup> In his letter to Jacobi (cited in ibid, 230), Mendelssohn wrote: "I shall pass over too the noble retreat under the banner of faith which you propose for your own part. It is totally in the spirit of your religion, which imposes upon you the duty to suppress doubt through faith. The Christian philosopher can afford the pastime of teasing the student of nature; of confronting him with puzzles which, like will-o'-the-wisps, lure him now to one corner, and now to the other, but always slip away even from his most secure grasp. My religion knows no duty to resolve doubts of this kind otherwise than through reason; it commands no faith in eternal truths. I have one more ground, therefore, to seek *conviction*."

<sup>30</sup> 'Whenever my speculation seems to lead me too far from the main street of common sense, I stand still and seek to orient myself. I look back to the point from which I started out and try to compare my two guides [common sense and contemplation/speculation]. Experience has taught me that in most cases common sense tends to be right and reason must speak very decisively for



‘if we apply this rule to the doubts that have been advanced by idealists, egoists, and skeptics against the actuality of a material world, then we find that their reasons certainly do not suffice to elicit from us complete approbation.’<sup>31</sup>

In the later stages of the controversy, Immanuel Kant entered into the debate with his 1786 essay *What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* He agreed with Mendelssohn that ‘it is necessary to orientate oneself in the speculative use of reason [...] by means of a certain guideline’, but disagreed with him on the means of this guideline.<sup>32</sup> Distinguishing theoretical (pure) reason and practical reason, Kant argued that we should refer to the latter to orient our thinking when faced with failures of theoretical speculation, that ‘the shortcomings of theoretical speculation must be made good through rational faith on moral grounds’.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, his distinction between ‘pure reason’ and ‘practical reason’ created a dualism, a gap between ‘the noumenal realm’ and ‘the phenomenal’, and made it impossible to acquire secure knowledge of the noumenal realm and the things supposed to exist therein, such as ‘God’, ‘immortality’, and ‘freedom’ (ibid, 116). For Jacobi, Kant’s ‘practical faith’ was not able to escape nihilism ‘since Kant denies that faith is a form of knowledge, and since he also forbids the possibility of an intellectual intuition of things-in-themselves’ (ibid, 125).<sup>34</sup> In other

speculation if I am to leave common sense and follow speculation.” Moses Mendelssohn, *Morning Hours: Lectures on God’s Existence* (transl. Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck; Dordecht: Springer, 2011), 59–60.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Thus it is not *cognition* but a felt *need* of reason through which Mendelssohn (without knowing it) oriented himself in speculative thinking. And since this guiding thread is not an objective principle of reason, a principle of insight, but a merely subjective one (i.e. a maxim) of the only use of reason allowed by its limits—a corollary of its need—and since *by itself alone* it constitutes the whole determining ground of our judgment about the existence of the highest being, and its use as a means of orientation in attempts to speculate on this same subject is only contingent, so Mendelssohn erred here in that he nevertheless trusted speculation to the extent of letting it alone settle everything on the path of demonstration’: Kant, ‘What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?’ in *Religion and Rational Theology* (transl. and eds. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1996] 2001), 12–13.

<sup>33</sup> Allen W. Wood (translator’s introduction) in ibid, 5.

<sup>34</sup> For Jacobi’s critical analysis of Kant’s philosophy, *Main Philosophical Writings* 542–56. He concludes (556): ‘So, this is how the matter truly stands: first Critical Philosophy undermines metaphysics theoretically, for the love of

words, according to Kant's philosophy, 'reason knows a priori only what it creates according to its own laws. Since it implies that the self knows only the products of its own activity, it makes self-knowledge into the paradigm of all knowledge' (ibid, 123). This, according to Jacobi, means that Kant's philosophy (perhaps all philosophy) 'leads to the abyss of nihilism, [and that] Kant's philosophy, if it were made consistent, proves to be "a philosophy of nothingness"' (ibid, 122–3).<sup>35</sup>

The implication, according to Michael A. Gillespie, found its ultimate expression in the philosophy of Johann G. Fichte. By taking Kant's conception of reason to its logical ends, Fichte's idealism 'recognizes no truth beyond consciousness or reason and thus falls into an absolute subjectivism that is at heart merely an inverted Spinozism'.<sup>36</sup> In doing this, 'it reduces everything to the activity of the I, and thus reduces God to a mere creation of the human imagination'.<sup>37</sup> Gillespie adds that it was later Hegel who rejected 'Fichte's attempt to construct all of existence on the basis of the absolute subject and sought instead to reconcile subject and object, and thus freedom and nature, through a more profound conception of consciousness'.<sup>38</sup> This reconciliation

science; then, since everything now tends to sink into the wide open, bottomless, abyss of an absolute subjectivity, it undermines science practically, for the love of metaphysics.'

<sup>35</sup> On the theoretical part of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Jacobi writes (*Main Philosophical Writings*, 544–5):

'Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* [...] considers only the first, theoretical, part of his system. It objected that that first part leads to nihilism, and that it does so with such an all-devastating power that no rearguard intervention could recoup what had been lost. It was lost once and for all.

Every philosophy that denies man a *higher* faculty of perception (one that is not in need of *sense* intuition) but undertakes to rise from the senses to the supersensible, from the finite to the infinite, simply through protracted reflection upon what is visible to the senses, and upon *the laws for the imaginative projection of this visible into the understanding—any* such philosophy (and this includes therefore also the *philosophy of the immortal Leibniz*) must ultimately lose itself, above and below, in a clear and bare void of cognition.'

<sup>36</sup> Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 66. For Jacobi's depiction of Fichte's philosophy as 'inverted Spinozism', see his Letter to Fichte (*Main Philosophical Writings*, 502): 'I chose this image because I first found entry into the *Doctrine of Science* [i.e., Fichte's *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge*] through the representation of an *inverted* Spinozism. And I still portray it to myself as a materialism without matter, or a *mathesis pura* in which a pure and empty consciousness counts for mathematical space.'

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 116.

depended ‘upon the dialectical demonstration that the nothingness of contradiction is the highest reason’.<sup>39</sup>

The ‘pantheism controversy’<sup>40</sup> was a debate on the meaning, role and capabilities of reason. On one side, there were Jacobi and his supporters who pointed to the inadequacies of reason in supporting our metaphysical, religious, moral and political beliefs. On the other side, there were the Enlightenment philosophers who defended the capability of reason against Jacobi’s criticisms and sought new ways to demonstrate that it can support our metaphysical, religious, moral and political beliefs. Below, I will discuss how Iqbal attempted to contribute to this debate by introducing Sufism and the mystical faculty of knowledge (*qalb*) which, in his view, enables an approach to knowledge superior to reason/intellect.

### MYSTICISM/SUFISM (*QALB*/HEART) AS A SUPERIOR APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE THAN PHILOSOPHY (INTELLECT/REASON)

Iqbal conceives nihilism as the consequence of reason/intellect (philosophy) failing to provide man with a plausible solution to his most fundamental metaphysical concerns, which Iqbal calls (‘Doctrine’, 237) ‘the human enigma’, borrowing the term from Carl Du Prel. By ‘the human enigma’, Du Prel refers to the mystery of existence and man’s place in it.<sup>41</sup> Iqbal believes that the solution is not found through the family of reason (philosophy), but through heart (*qalb*), i.e., through mysticism/Sufism.<sup>42</sup> He believes that ‘mysticism appeals to a standard higher than intellect [reason] itself. This standard, waiving the question of its objective existence, is, according to the mystic, *qalb* or heart’ (‘Doctrine’, 237). Iqbal states that he will not ‘dwell upon the scientific necessity of mysticism for the solution of the human enigma’ since Du Prel has already shown ‘with great force and clearness that an

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> For a helpful survey and exposition of this controversy and principal players in it, see: Paul Franks, ‘All or nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon’ in Karl Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95–116.

<sup>41</sup> Carl du Prel, *The Philosophy of Mysticism* (London: George Redway, 1889), xxvi.

<sup>42</sup> Scholars who write on Sufism (in my opinion, rightly) discourage the use of ‘Sufism’ and ‘mysticism’ as interchangeable terms. However, in this paper, I follow Iqbal’s interchangeable usage of the terms.

examination of mysticism is necessary for a complete solution of the human enigma' (ibid, n.1). Instead, Iqbal says, he will content himself with 'a brief statement of the Islamic Metaphysical Mysticism as represented by Shaikh Abdu-l Karîm al Jilânî [i.e., 'Abd al-Karîm al-Jilî] in his famous work *al-Insânu-l-kâmil* (The Perfect Man)' (ibid).<sup>43</sup>

At the beginning of the article, Iqbal discusses the similarities and differences between mysticism/Sufism and philosophy in their approaches to knowledge and argues that mysticism/Sufism yields an approach superior to philosophy. He thinks that philosophy and mysticism are alike in being based upon metaphysics, that mysticism is just metaphysics with a 'religious phraseology', and becomes possible only with 'a system of metaphysics serving as its foundation' (ibid). Again like philosophy, mysticism is 'essentially a system of verification', that is, a way or a method of approaching and acquiring knowledge (ibid).

The difference between mysticism and philosophy is that while the former utilizes the faculty known as 'heart' ('*qalb*') in acquiring knowledge of things, the latter uses the faculty of 'intellect' or 'reason' to do so. *Qalb* is 'a word very difficult of definition', Iqbal tells us. Al-Jilî describes it as 'a mysterious combination of soul and mind', as 'the eye which sees the names, the attributes and the Absolute Being successively', and is 'by its very nature the organ for the recognition of the ultimate realities of existence' (ibid, 244).<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the Kantian dualism of subject and object, or knower and known, what *qalb* reveals 'is not seen by the individual as something separate from and heterogeneous to himself; what is shown to him through this agency is his own reality, his own deep being' (ibid). This characteristic of *qalb*, according to Iqbal, 'differentiates it from the intellect the object of which is always different and separate from the individual exercising that faculty' (ibid). In Iqbal's interpretation, this is expressed in al-Jilî's doctrine of 'the identity of

<sup>43</sup> In this article, I have referred to the following versions of the book: al-Jilî, *al-Insân al-kâmil fî ma'rîfat al-awâkhir wa-l-awâ'il* (ed. and comm. Abû 'Abd al-Rahmân Şalâh b. Muḥammad b. 'Uwayḍa; Beirut: Dâr-al Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1997) (hereafter: Beirut edn.); Abdülkerîm el-Cilî, *İnsân-ı Kâmil* (transl. Abdülaziz Mecdi Tolun; Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2nd edn., 2002) (hereafter: Istanbul edn.). 'Abd al-Karîm al-Jilî, *Universal Man: Extracts Translated with Commentary by Titus Burckhardt* (transl. Angela Culme-Seymour; Roxburgh: Beshara Publications, [repr.] 1995) (hereafter: *Universal Man*). The English translation just mentioned has only 12 of the book's 64 chapters; it runs to ch. 15, omitting chs. 8, 10 and 11. Therefore, it was only possible to provide references to it where the matter in hand falls within those 12 chapters.

<sup>44</sup> For al-Jilî's elaboration on heart/*qalb*, see *al-Insân al-kâmil* (Beirut edn.) 157–63; (Istanbul edn.) 287–96.

attribute and reality' and in Hegel's doctrine of 'the identity of thought and being' (ibid, 240).<sup>45</sup> There is not an irreconcilable separation between thought and being, between the noumenal and the phenomenal, between the subject (the knower, human reason, mind) and the object (the known, nature, universe). Rather, there is a deeper unity between them, or underlying their distinction. According to these two doctrines, the Absolute/God/thought, leaves its absoluteness and enters into a process of self-realization or self-manifestation in existence, in being. Iqbal interprets al-Jīlī as asserting that the '[i]dea is the stuff of which this universe is made: Thought, idea, notion is the material of the structure of nature' (ibid, 239). In this respect, since 'thought' and 'being' are related to each other, it is possible to understand 'thought' by reflecting on 'being': it is possible to acquire the knowledge of 'thought' (the Absolute, God) by reflecting on its manifestations in being, i.e. existence.<sup>46</sup>

Through mysticism, argues Iqbal, the subject acquires knowledge through a spiritual effort, and realizes it as a fact of experience or 'reality', whereas philosophy can acquire it only in 'theory' (ibid, 237).<sup>47</sup> Thus, there is a kind of knowledge that has been lived as a real experience, and a kind that is understood only intellectually, as an idea, after a process of reasoning. In Iqbal's view, this makes a difference to the effectiveness or capacity of the knowledge acquired. Knowledge acquired by reason/intellect through procedures of reasoning or argumentation can be subject to doubt if 'some logical flaw' is suspected or detected in the argumentation, and therefore that knowledge may be abandoned as ill-founded (ibid). If, however, the self has acquired the knowledge as a real experience, then any flaw in argumentation would not suffice to shake its foundations. Thus, Iqbal thinks that mysticism/Sufism is not a strictly theoretical and intellectual way of acquiring knowledge. It is a method of acquiring knowledge through spiritual experience, and it presents or explains its findings in its own metaphysical system and vocabulary.

<sup>45</sup> One of the fundamental claims of Hegel's philosophy, 'unity of thought and being' refers to the process of consciousness reaching to the stage of absolute knowledge. For a concise discussion of it, see Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: The Lectures of 1825–1826. Vol. III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy* (transl. Robert F. Brown and J. M. Stewart; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 3 vols., 1990), 141.

<sup>46</sup> On this issue Iqbal cites (239) al-Jīlī as follows: 'Dost thou not look to thine own belief? Where is the reality in which the so-called Divine attributes inhere? It is but the idea.' For al-Jīlī's own words, see *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 177.

<sup>47</sup> Here Iqbal uses the verb 'realise' to refer to this experience: 'a spiritual method by which the ego realises as fact what intellect has understood as theory.'

After clarifying the distinctions between *qalb*/heart and reason/intellect and demonstrating the superiority of the former to the latter in helping us to acquire knowledge of reality, Iqbal then goes on to put *qalb*/heart into practice to demonstrate how it provides a plausible answer to our most fundamental metaphysical questions—‘the human enigma’. To establish that al-Jīlī’s philosophy is a plausible solution to ‘the human enigma’—meaning that it does not lead to pantheism, atheism, fatalism and nihilism—Iqbal needs to demonstrate the existence of God, freedom, other minds, the external world, and the permanent existence of our selves. In the remainder of this article, I present Iqbal’s interpretation of al-Jīlī’s doctrines of ‘absolute unity’ and ‘the perfect man’ as examples of the Sufi solution to ‘the human enigma’.

## AL-JĪLĪ’S DOCTRINE OF ‘ABSOLUTE UNITY’

### *Distinguishing between the essence and existence of God*

Iqbal begins his account of al-Jīlī’s metaphysical system with his distinction between ‘essence’ (*dhāt*) and ‘existence’ (*wujūd*). Essence, according to al-Jīlī, is that ‘to which names and attributes are given, whether it is existent or non-existent’ (ibid, 238). The existent, on the other hand, are two things: Pure Being (God), and nature (the creation). Pure Being (*dhāt al-bārī*) is the existent in Absoluteness (*mawjūd mahḍ*), while nature (*dhāt al-makhlūqāt*) is existence joined with non-existence (*mawjūd mulhaqq bi-l-‘adam*). By this formulation, Iqbal thinks, al-Jīlī claims that a non-existent can have an essence, while an existent, can have an essence, as well as being existent (ibid).<sup>48</sup>

Al-Jīlī’s example of the former is the mythological phoenix (*‘anqā’* as it is known in Islamic philosophy) which exists only in name, and not in reality (ibid). This means that *‘anqā’* has an essence, but is

<sup>48</sup> For al-Jīlī’s discussion of ‘essence’ and ‘existence’ in respect of God, see *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 26; (Istanbul edn.) 52; in *Universal Man*, 3: ‘Know that by “essence” (*adh-dhāt*) one means, in a general manner, that to which the Names (*al-asmā*) and the Qualities (*aṣ-ṣifāt*) are attached by their principle (*fi ‘aynihā*), and not by their (contingent) existence (*fi wujūdihā*). Every Name and every Quality attaches itself to a subjacent reality which, itself, is its essence. As for existence (*al-wujūd*), it has two degrees; it is the pure Being, in so far as Essence of Creator (*el-bārī*), or the existence attained by nothingness, in so far as the relative essence of creatures.’

non-existent—in other words, it is a non-existent essence.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, a name can refer to what exists in name and in reality, for which al-Jīlī's example is God. God has an essence, and He is also existent—in other words, He is an existent essence (ibid).<sup>50</sup> In this scheme, God's essence is transcendent to the universe, while His existence is immanent in it. Al-Jīlī adds that while it is possible to explain God's existence, His essence cannot easily be understood or explained in words.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, he makes an attempt and describes God's essence as 'an existence which is non-existence—a sum of contradictions'.<sup>52</sup> This formulation, according to Iqbal, resembles Hegel's 'unity of opposites', or 'identity of opposites' (ibid).<sup>53</sup>

Distinguishing between the essence and existence of God is important because if no distinction is held between them, it can lead to pantheism (that God is in everything, or everything is somehow itself and God). In the course of 'the pantheism controversy', Beiser states that it was Kant's proof of the existence of God set out in his *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrunde zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (The Only

<sup>49</sup> See *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 30; (Istanbul edn.) 61; *Universal Man*, 9: 'The subject of a name may be non-existent as such and exist only ideally, as is the case of the Phoenix, who takes all its existence from its name, and in which qualities are deduced only from this name; for, according to the conventional allegory, the Phoenix means that which escapes intelligences and thoughts; so one represents it by a figure without equal in its magnitude.'

<sup>50</sup> See *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 30; (Istanbul edn.) 62; *Universal Man*, 9: 'The name of the Phoenix is then in the created order, the inverse of the name of God in the truth, for, if the named Phoenix does not exist in itself, that which is named *Allāh* is in Himself the pure Being. As one cannot reach the Phoenix except by the intermediary of his name—and in this respect the Phoenix exists—in the same way there is access to the knowledge of God, only through the intermediaries of His Names and His Qualities, and each Name and each (Divine) Quality being contained in the name *Allāh*, it follows that there is no access to the knowledge of God except by way of this Name.'

<sup>51</sup> On the difficulty of explaining God's essence, see *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 26–7; (Istanbul edn.), 53–4; *Universal Man*, 4–6.

<sup>52</sup> 'existence and non-existence' (*al-wujūd wa-l-'adam*): *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 30; (Istanbul edn.), 53–4; *Universal Man*, 5: '—to Thee belongs existence and non-existence (*al-wujūd wa-l-'adam*), and to Thee the becoming and that which is before time;—Thou art non-existent as Essence, existent in Thy Person (*an-nafs*).'

<sup>53</sup> For Hegel's concept of 'unity of opposites' or 'identity of opposites', see §48 in Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic* (transl. and eds. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 94–5 (cited hereafter as Hegel, *Science of Logic*).

Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God) that prompted Jacobi to associate Spinozism with pantheism (Beiser, 55). In Jacobi's view, Kant's proof was valid only for Spinoza's God, for a pantheistic conception of God. Accordingly, in Kant's proof the existence of God was prior to everything else, and everything else for its existence depended on God's existence. This could lead to a pantheistic conception of God if His existence and the existence of all that depends on it (such as man and the universe) were equated or identified. Beiser states that 'Kant himself would not be so hasty in equating God's existence with his essence. In his view, God's existence preceded *his* possibility as well as that of all other things; God had other properties which made him a specific kind of existent' (ibid). However, Jacobi, with 'his tendentious reading of Kant's work' argued that there was no distinction in Kant's proof between God's essence and God's existence, and therefore whatever existed was actually equal to God's existence/essence, thus yielding a Spinozist, or pantheist conception of God.

By pointing to al-Jīlī's distinction between the essence and existence of God, Iqbal shows how al-Jīlī differentiates between the existent beings, God, man, and the universe (nature) and avoids the pantheistic implications. In the absence of a distinction, critics could argue that in al-Jīlī's metaphysics—and, by implication, in Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of 'the unity of being', or 'the unity of existence' (*wahdat al-wujūd*) of which al-Jīlī's *al-insān al-kāmil* was an expansion and commentary<sup>54</sup>—there is no distinction between God and existents like man and universe, and this would amount to a pantheistic conception of God.

Iqbal goes on to discuss al-Jīlī's account of the attributes of 'the Pure Being'. 'The Pure Being' has two accidents ('eternal life in all past time' and 'eternal life in all future time'), two qualities ('God and Creation'), two definitions ('uncreatableness and creatableness'), two names ('God and Man'), two faces ('the manifested and the unmanifested'), two effects ('necessity and possibility') ('Doctrine', 238). Finally, it also has 'two points of view': 'from the first it is non-existent for itself but existent for what is not itself; from the second it is existent for itself and non-existent for what is not itself' (ibid).<sup>55</sup> Here again Iqbal thinks that al-Jīlī's speculations sound like Hegel's. He writes: 'With these bits of

<sup>54</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, 'Al-Jili, 'Abd al-Karim (c. 1366–1408 or 1417)' in Oliver Leaman (ed.), *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 261–2.

<sup>55</sup> For al-Jīlī's own account of the attributes of 'the Pure Being', see *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 28–9; (Istanbul edn.), 58; *Universal Man*, 6–7.



Hegelianism the author [al-Jīlī] closes the difficult speculation, and begins his second chapter on the name' (ibid).

Iqbal states that in al-Jīlī's metaphysics, 'the Pure Being' (God) leaves its absoluteness and undergoes three stages to realize itself in the universe, namely 'Oneness', 'He-ness', and 'I-ness'. In the first stage, there are no attributes or relations; however, since it is called 'one', this shows that the Pure Being has left its absoluteness. In Iqbal's words, 'oneness marks one step away from the absoluteness' (ibid, 239). While in the second stage, the Pure Being is still free from all manifestation, with the third stage, it reaches 'an external manifestation'. With this, the Pure Being leaves its 'He-ness' behind, and 'I-ness' emerges, which marks the emergence of man as 'an I', as an individual.<sup>56</sup> Iqbal thinks that this process, which explains the self-realization of the Spirit (*tajallī al-dhāt*, 'the unveiling of the essence'), would be known in Hegelian philosophy as the doctrine of 'the self-diremption of God' (ibid).<sup>57</sup>

### *Clarifying God's immanence and transcendence*

According to Iqbal, al-Jīlī's conception of God is both immanent and transcendent. While God's essence is transcendent, his existence is immanent to the universe. Iqbal explains that al-Jīlī is careful to preempt misinterpretations that could lead to pantheist conclusions. He refers to one of al-Jīlī's analogies to explain the relation between nature and God. In it, al-Jīlī describes nature as 'frozen water' (*al-thalj*) and God as 'water' (*al-mā'*) (ibid, 241).<sup>58</sup> Since these two (frozen water and water) are of the same substance, this could lead to pantheist interpretations,

<sup>56</sup> For al-Jīlī's own account of the unveiling of 'the Pure Being' (*majlā al-dhāt*), see *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 76–8; (Istanbul edn.), 139–43; *Universal Man*, 56–9.

<sup>57</sup> For Hegel's concept of 'the self-diremption of God', see §18 of his *Science of Logic*, 46. What Hegel refers to as 'Logic' Iqbal refers to as 'the essence of God' or 'the Pure Being'. Also see §85 where (135, my italics) Hegel uses the terms 'Logic' and 'God' with the same meaning: 'the logical determinations in general, can be regarded as the definitions of the absolute, as *metaphysical definitions of God*.' For Hegel's explicit use of the term 'diremption', see Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (transl. and edited by George di Giovanni; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 471 (my italics): 'The absolute is the absolute form which in its *diremption* of itself is utterly identical with itself, is the negative as negative or the negative that rejoins itself and in this way alone is the absolute self-identity [...] Here, Hegel is using 'the absolute' and 'God' interchangeably.

<sup>58</sup> *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 51; (Istanbul edn.), 96; in *Universal Man*, 30: 'The world is comparable to the ice, and *al-ḥaqq* to the water which is the origin of this ice. Now, the name 'ice' is only lent to this coagulation, and it is the name water which is understood according to its Essential Reality (*ḥaqīqa*).'

such as, ‘the error of looking upon God as immanent in nature or running through the sphere of material existence’ (ibid, 242). To avoid such misinterpretations, al-Jīlī adds that while ‘immanence implies disparity of being; God is not immanent because He is Himself the existence. Eternal existence is the other self of God, it is the light through which He sees Himself. As the originator of an idea is existent in that idea, so God is present in nature’ (ibid).<sup>59</sup> Thus, Iqbal argues that for al-Jīlī, God cannot be considered only immanent because He Himself is the existence. In a way, the question of immanence or transcendence does not arise for al-Jīlī’s conception of God and universe because God is both inside the universe through His existence and also outside it through His essence. After this, Iqbal refers to the difference between God and man by saying that God’s ideas materialize themselves, but man’s do not, and adds that ‘[i]t will be remembered here that Hegel would use the same line of argument in freeing himself from the accusation of Pantheism’ (ibid).<sup>60</sup>

*Establishing the objective reality of the phenomenal and the noumenal realms*

After clarifying the distinction between God’s essence and the existence of nature and man, and God’s immanence and transcendence, Iqbal goes on to discuss the issue of the objective reality of ‘the-thing-in-itself’, God, or ‘the Absolute Being’ and nature and man, and whether knowledge of them is possible or not. To do this, Iqbal discusses al-Jīlī’s ideas on the objective reality of ‘the phenomenal realm’ (the material world, being) and ‘the noumenal realm’ (thought, idea) for which al-Jīlī uses the terms ‘world of attributes’ (*khalq*) and ‘world of reality’ (*ḥaqiq*) respectively.

<sup>59</sup> *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 52; (Istanbul edn.), 97; in *Universal Man*, 31–2: ‘As for the domination of the Compassionate, one means by that the act of God establishing Himself as master of things by His Power, His Science, by His faculty to encompass the existences while being present in them, in the manner of he who is seated on a throne, and that in a transcendent manner, without his having localization (*ḥulūl*) of God, nor contact with the things; and how would the localization and the contact be possible, seeing that He is (essentially) the existences themselves? This mode of the Divine Presence in the existences is attached to His Name *ar-rahīmān*, because He is Compassionate for the created in manifesting Himself in them, in manifesting the created in Himself; for the two things are true.’

<sup>60</sup> For a brief summary of Hegel’s discussion of the pantheism issue, see §151 in Georg Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 224–5. For a more detailed discussion, see ‘The Concept of God’ in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. One Volume Edition. The Lectures of 1827* (ed. Peter C. Hodgson, transl. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, J. M. Stewart; Berkeley: University of California Press: 1988), 114–28.

Iqbal compares al-Jilī's ideas with various Hindu and modern European-German doctrines and thinkers, such as Hindu idealism, 'the doctrine of Maya', Berkeleyan and Fichtean idealisms, Kant's 'Ding an sich' and Hegel's doctrine of 'the identity of thought and being'. In the end, Iqbal thinks that al-Jilī's solution to these issues is closer to Hegel's solution. He states that, in a way similar to the Hegelian doctrine of 'the identity of thought and being', al-Jilī's doctrine is called 'the identity of attribute and reality' (ibid, 240). Al-Jilī's and Hegel's doctrines solve the problem of dualism and the problem of the impossibility of attaining knowledge of the noumenal realm by considering a kind of unity between the subject (the knower, human reason, mind) and the object (the known, nature, universe). Such unity is not merely epistemic but also ontological since, for both al-Jilī and Hegel, the phenomenal realm is the objectification of 'the Absolute Being'. In al-Jilī's words, nature (the phenomenal realm) is the idea of God.<sup>61</sup> This means that the knowledge of the noumenal realm can be acquired through experience of and reflection on its manifestation or objectification in the phenomenal realm. I will now briefly discuss how Iqbal analyses al-Jilī's doctrine of 'the identity of attribute and reality' in comparison with various other thinkers and doctrines.

Let me begin with Iqbal's warning about al-Jilī's choice of terms. Iqbal states that the phrase, 'the world of attributes' for the material world is slightly misleading. What al-Jilī really holds, according to Iqbal, is that 'the distinction of attribute and reality is merely phenomenal and does not at all exist in the nature of things' (ibid). This is because the material world ('the world of attributes') is the objectification of the 'Pure Being.' In other words, the 'Pure Being', 'Absolute Being' (*al-dhāt*), '[t]he *Ding an sich* and its external expression or the production of its self-diremption, are really identical, though we discriminate between them in order to facilitate our understanding' (ibid, 240). Iqbal thinks that it is a useful distinction 'because it facilitates our understanding of the world around us, but it is not at all real' (ibid). This means that al-Jilī 'recognizes the truth of Empirical Idealism only tentatively and does not admit the absoluteness of the distinction' (ibid).<sup>62</sup> The clarification is

<sup>61</sup> *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 22–3; (Istanbul edn.), 51.

<sup>62</sup> Iqbal here (ibid) continues with further clarification: 'as long as we do not realise the identity of attribute and reality, the material world or the world of attributes seems to be a veil; but when the doctrine is brought home to us the veil is removed; we see *dhāt* itself everywhere and find that all the attributes are but ourselves. Nature then appears in her true light; all otherness is removed and we are at one with her. The aching prick of curiosity ceases and the inquisitive attitude of our minds is replaced by a state of philosophic calm. To the person who has realised this identity, discoveries of science bring no new information

important because al-Jīlī's discussion of 'the nature of the Attribute' shows us the difference between his doctrine and Hindu idealism. Whereas in Hindu idealism and in 'the doctrine of Maya' the phenomenal realm (al-Jīlī's 'world of attributes') is considered a realm of illusion or dream, al-Jīlī considers it to have real existence (ibid, 239).

Iqbal thinks that al-Jīlī would disagree with Kant because Kant's 'Ding an sich', or 'the-thing-in-itself', or 'the Absolute Being' would be like a non-entity in Kant's metaphysics because knowledge of it is unattainable. By contrast, for al-Jīlī the 'Ding an sich' would itself be the essence of the universe because for him 'the material world is but the objectification of the Absolute Being; it is the other self of the Absolute—another which owes its existence to the principle of difference in the nature of the Absolute itself' (ibid, 240). In other words, according to Iqbal, for al-Jīlī 'there is nothing behind the collection of attributes, [and] the attributes are but the real things' (ibid). Although al-Jīlī thinks (as discussed above) that God and nature are two different things, and that they have objective existence of their own, they are nevertheless not detached or disconnected from each other. They are united to each other through 'the unity of attribute and reality'—or 'the unity of thought and being' to use Hegel's terminology. This means that it is possible to acquire knowledge of the noumenal realm, 'Ding an sich', 'thought' or 'reality' through the knowledge of its objectification in the phenomenal realm, through its manifestation or external expression in 'being' ('the world of attributes').

Finally, Iqbal thinks that al-Jīlī's doctrine is also different from the Berkeleyan and Fichtean idealisms which consider the phenomenal realm, the material world, or 'world of attributes' as an imagination of 'I', the thinking subject. Differently from these views, Iqbal states that al-Jīlī believes that the material world ('world of attributes'), has real, objective existence. Although the material world, Iqbal adds, is the 'outward husk of the real being, [...] this outward husk is not the less real' (ibid, 239). Accordingly, rather than Berkeley and Fichte, Iqbal thinks that al-Jīlī's 'view leads him to the most characteristically Hegelian doctrine—Identity of Thought and Being' (ibid). In this respect, Iqbal thinks that in al-Jīlī's metaphysics, there is a unity between 'thought' and 'being', 'mind' and 'matter', and 'the noumenal' and 'the phenomenal'. To formulate this unity, Iqbal refers to al-Jīlī's book where he asserts that 'Idea is the stuff of which this universe is made: Thought, idea, notion is the material of the structure of nature' (ibid). In other words, nature, for al-Jīlī, 'is nothing but a crystallised idea' (ibid).

and religion with her *rôle* of supernatural authority has nothing to say. This is the spiritual emancipation.'

### *Establishing that God is a personal creator*

While discussing the attributes of the Pure Being (God), al-Jīlī talks about the power of creation as it manifests itself in self-realization. The self-realization, or ‘the self-diremption of God’, Iqbal thinks, would cause a problem with respect to the issue of creation *ex nihilo*. Here, Iqbal notes that al-Jīlī’s understanding of the doctrine of ‘the unity of Being’ differs from Ibn ‘Arabī’s. While Ibn ‘Arabī holds that the universe existed in the knowledge of God before its creation, al-Jīlī argues (according to Iqbal) that ‘this would imply that God did not create it out of nothing’ (ibid, 245). This would mean that before God created the world, the world existed as an idea, and the existence of an idea would mean the existence of something (not nothing). In response, al-Jīlī ‘holds that the universe, before its existence as an idea, existed in the self of God’ (ibid).<sup>63</sup> For al-Jīlī, Iqbal explains, ‘existing’ in the self of God means that God created the world out of nothing because there is not yet a distinction between God and even the idea of the world.

### *Clarifying God’s relation to time*

Similarly, the issue of God’s relation to time, that is, ‘the priority of God’ and ‘the posteriority of creation’, could also be interpreted in a pantheistic way if there was no difference of time between the existence of God and the creation of the universe. According to Iqbal, al-Jīlī warns that ‘when we speak of the priority of God and posteriority of creation, our words must not be understood as implying time, for there can be no duration of time or separateness between God and His creation’ (ibid, 242). According to al-Jīlī, time, contiguity in space and time, are themselves creations, and therefore he argues that it is not possible for ‘one piece of creation’ to intervene between God and His creation. He adds: ‘Hence our words before, after, where, whence, *etc.*, in this sphere of thought, should not be construed to imply time or space’ (ibid).<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> For al-Jīlī’s different view on this issue, see *Al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 86–7; (Istanbul edn.), 158–9. ‘Divine power, in our view, is to make non-existent into existent. Our view on this issue is against the view of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī because the Shaykh said: “Allah did not create things from nothing, but rather He made it so that their existence in knowledge (*wujūd ‘ilmī*) became existence in reality (*wujūd ‘aynī*).” Although there is truth in this idea, it is built on a weak point because with respect to His Divine power (*qudratuhu*), I exonerate God from being unable to create things from nothing and to turn pure non-existence (*al-‘adam al-maḥḍ*) into pure existence (*al-wujūd al-maḥḍ*).’ (My translation.)

<sup>64</sup> For al-Jīlī’s warning on the issue of the priority of God and posteriority of creation, see *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 57–8; (Istanbul edn.) 106; in

## THE DOCTRINE OF ‘THE PERFECT MAN’ AS EXPOUNDED BY AL-JĪLĪ

Iqbal says that in al-Jīlī’s metaphysics, until the emergence of man, it was only God who was related to the created universe (nature), and it was God who was realizing Himself in that universe. In so doing, God was also maintaining the continuity of nature because He was always connected to it, or in relation to it. With the emergence of man, the ‘I’, and the separation of God and man, however, a gap appears between the two, and this creates a problem for the continuation of nature (ibid, 244). So, al-Jīlī thinks that a ‘joining link’ becomes necessary to fill this gap and maintain the continuation of nature. The ‘link’ cannot be provided by just any man, but by one who goes through a spiritual development, and reaches a different level of ‘man-ness’, that is, ‘god-man’ or ‘the perfect man’ (ibid).

Accordingly, al-Jīlī considers that similar to the three stages of ‘the Pure Being’ realizing Himself in existence, man also goes through three stages of ‘spiritual training’ during which he receives illumination from God. The difference between the two is that while man’s three stages are a process of ascent, the Pure Being’s are a process of descent.<sup>65</sup> In the process of illumination, man learns about ‘the divine names’. Iqbal writes: ‘In the first stage of his spiritual progress he meditates on the name, studies nature on which it is sealed; in the second stage he steps into the sphere of the Attribute and in the third stage he enters the sphere of [...] the Essence’ (ibid, 239).<sup>66</sup> As a result of this process, ‘the divine attributes’ of the Pure Being, such as independent life or existence, knowledge, will, power, and so on, reappear in man, and at the end of

*Universal Man*, 37: ‘When the Prophet was asked where God was to be found before creation, he replied: “in the darkness”, because manifestation always proceeds from a state of non-manifestation, although there it is only a question of an anteriority purely principal, not temporal. God is too sublime for there to be between Him and His creation a temporal relationship; in the same way that there is, between Him and it, neither separation, nor discontinuity, nor a relationship of constraint, since all these relationships are themselves created and therefore could not be interposed between God and His creatures,—unless one concludes in a chain without end, which would be absurd. There is no doubt that His anteriority like His posteriority, His priority like His ulteriority, are but principal aspects and not temporal or spatial relationships; in the same way that He was in the darkness before the creation, He is necessarily in this state after the creation.’

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed description of these processes, see chs. 13, 14 and 15 of *al-Insān al-kāmil*, and the same in the Turkish and English translations.

<sup>66</sup> See *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 64; (Istanbul edn.), 48.

this process, man becomes a ‘god-man’, or ‘the perfect man’, and becomes capable of participating in ‘the general life of Nature’ and ‘see[ing] into the life of things’. Here, Iqbal again draws a parallel between al-Jīlī’s and Hegel’s thinking, and claims that the third stage of the development of man resembles ‘the chief phase of the Hegelian Dialectic’ (ibid).<sup>67</sup> With the emergence of ‘the god-man’ the link between God and man and universe is re-established, and with this, Iqbal says, ‘the Absolute Being, which had left its Absoluteness, returns unto itself’ (ibid, 244).

Thus, ‘the perfect man’ is a ‘joining link’ between different levels of beings, such as the level of Absolute Being (God), and the level of man and the universe. Iqbal clarifies that this process of returning back to itself does not take place for ‘the god-man’ as well. The Absolute Being returns to itself, but god-man stays in the universe. If ‘the god-man’ had also returned to the Absolute Being, then there would not be any ‘link’ to maintain the continuation of nature. Hence, without the ‘link’ the god-man provides nature ‘there would have been no nature, and consequently no light through which God could have seen Himself’ (ibid). So, when ‘the spiritual training’ of man is finished, and ‘when that particular spiritual realisation is over, man is man and God is God’ (ibid).

#### *Establishing that the goal of man is not to get dissolved in God*

After clarifying that in al-Jīlī’s metaphysics, God, man and nature have objective reality, Iqbal goes on to discuss another issue to demonstrate how al-Jīlī’s ideas do not lead to pantheism. Recall that in al-Jīlī’s metaphysics man goes through a three-stage process of development in his progress towards perfection where he gets illumination from God and learns about the names of God. Iqbal reports that al-Jīlī explains this illumination process as follows: ‘when God illuminates a certain man by the light of His names, the man is destroyed under the dazzling splendour of that name, and when thou call[est] God, the call is responded to by the man’ (ibid, 243).<sup>68</sup> According to Iqbal, ‘[t]he effect of this illumination would be, in Schopenhauer’s language, the destruction of the individual

<sup>67</sup> What Iqbal calls ‘the chief phase of the Hegelian dialectic’ is the last of the three major stages of thought in Hegel’s method when ‘unity of opposites’—or ‘unity in difference of opposites’—is achieved. For an elaboration of the three stages see §79–83 in Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 125–34.

<sup>68</sup> See *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 64; (Istanbul edn.), 118; in *Universal Man*, 42: ‘When God, the most High, reveals Himself to one of His servants by a Name, this servant is delighted beyond himself under the fulgurations of the Divine Name, so that, if then thou dost invoke God by this name, it is the servant who will answer thee, the Divine Name will apply henceforth to him.’

will, yet it must not be confounded with physical death because the individual goes on living and moving like the spinning wheel, as Kapila would say, after he has become one with Prakriti' (ibid). And Iqbal adds: 'It is here that the individual cries in pantheistic mood: 'She was I and I was she and there was no-one to separate us' (ibid).

At first sight, these may give the idea that the doctrine of 'the perfect man', hence Sufism, is pantheistic because man seems to be destined to lose his objective existence and become one with God. This is called 'the doctrine of *fanā*'.<sup>69</sup> According to this doctrine, it is believed that, in the process of spiritual development, man aims to be united with God and become dissolved in the existence of God through the destruction of the will/self. According to Iqbal, however, the strand of Sufism to which al-Jīlī belongs holds that the spiritual experience man goes through in becoming 'the perfect man' is temporary, not permanent. This means that although there seems to be a moment of unity between God and man, lingering in that moment of unity is not in the nature of that process. In his analysis of al-Jīlī's metaphysics, Iqbal demonstrates that in fact the goal of man is not *fanā*, destruction of the will/self, or unity with God, but rather individualization. That is to say, the goal of man is not to return to God and be dissolved in His existence, but to remain as a man—a spiritually evolved and a better man, but still a man: 'The god-man is he who has known the mystery of his own being; who has realised himself as god-man; but when that particular spiritual realisation is over, man is man and God is God' (ibid, 244).<sup>70</sup> In other words, man has objective reality and life in al-Jīlī's metaphysics. He does not cease to exist; he does not disappear and become nothing.

#### *Clarifying the issue of man's freedom and will*

Discussing the issue of will and freedom of God and man, Iqbal states that al-Jīlī first makes a distinction between man's will and freedom (which al-Jīlī calls 'the individual act of will') and God's will and freedom (which he calls 'the universal will').<sup>71</sup> Al-Jīlī argues that it is only 'the universal will' that is uncaused, and 'the individual will' is

<sup>69</sup> See, Juan E. Campo, 'baqa and fana' in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 89–91.

<sup>70</sup> See *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 64; (Istanbul edn.), 75; in *Universal Man*, 15: 'And know that the perception of the Supreme Essence consists in that thou knowest, in the path of Divine intuition, that thou art Him, and He is thee, without there being fusion of the two, the servant being servant and the Lord being Lord, not that the servant becomes Lord nor that the Lord becomes servant.'

<sup>71</sup> See *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 84–5; (Istanbul edn.), 155.



caused by the uncaused will of God.<sup>72</sup> Iqbal does not see any problem in this conception of freedom and will for man because although man does not have absolute or uncaused freedom, he still has a certain level of freedom which secures that he is not merely a machine and his life and actions are not totally caused by deterministic principles. In this respect, Iqbal thinks that al-Jīlī's conception of man's freedom resembles the Hegelian doctrine of freedom where the acts of man are both free and determined (*ibid*, 245).<sup>73</sup>

## POSSIBLE COUNTER-ARGUMENTS AND QUESTIONS

In the foregoing, I have presented Iqbal's article on al-Jīlī as a discussion of the problem of nihilism. Since any interpretation is open to questioning, here I will discuss two possible challenges to my interpretation. Firstly, it could be argued that the problem that Iqbal discusses in the article on al-Jīlī is not the problem of nihilism, but the problem of pantheism, that what Iqbal is concerned with is demonstrating that al-Jīlī's metaphysics—and indirectly Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics—is not pantheistic. To this, I would respond by drawing a parallel between my interpretation of Iqbal's article and how 'the pantheism controversy' was interpreted. Beiser argues that although historically and philosophically a very significant debate, 'the pantheism controversy' has been largely ignored, and he explains why:

The reason for this neglect primarily lies with the controversy itself, in that its deceptive appearance masks its underlying significance. It has an outer shell—the biographical issue of Lessing's Spinozism; an inner layer—the exegetical question of the proper interpretation of Spinoza; and a hidden inner core—the problem of the authority of reason. [...] It has often been assumed that the main problem was only whether Lessing was a Spinozist, or how we should interpret Spinoza's pantheism. To understand the deeper significance of the pantheism controversy—and indeed the significance that it had for the participants themselves—we must recognize its underlying philosophical dimension. We have to see that Lessing and Spinoza were only symbols, which had a much wider cultural and philosophical meaning (Beiser, 47–8).

<sup>72</sup> On this issue, al-Jīlī argues *against* Ibn 'Arabī. See *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Beirut edn.), 86; (Istanbul edn.), 157 (my translation).

<sup>73</sup> For a detailed discussion of Hegel's concept of freedom, see the Introduction §4–28 in Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (transl. and notes T. M. Knox; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 20–33.

Similarly, I argue that the same deceptive appearance can prevent us from seeing the inner core of Iqbal's analysis of al-Jili's metaphysics. In its outer shell, the article can be interpreted as an outcome of Iqbal's concern with al-Jili's—and indirectly Ibn 'Arabī's—pantheism. However, in its inner core, the article is about the problem of the authority of reason, i.e., the problem of nihilism, since nihilism was the inevitable consequence of relying on reason in solving our fundamental metaphysical problems, 'the human enigma'. In brief, it can be said that the article is about the problem of nihilism because the problem of pantheism, in the context of 'the pantheism controversy', is the problem of nihilism.

Secondly, it could be asked: does Iqbal merely analyse al-Jili's metaphysical system as a plausible solution to 'the human enigma' out of a scholarly interest, or does he agree with al-Jili as well. In other words, by showing that al-Jili's metaphysics is not pantheistic or does not lead to pantheistic conclusions, did Iqbal just attempt to correct a misunderstanding/misinterpretation that existed in the history of Islamic thought which claimed that Ibn 'Arabī or Sufism is pantheistic, or did Iqbal himself believe that Sufism does not have a pantheistic conception of God? In response, I argue that Iqbal did not write this article merely out of a scholarly interest in correcting an existing misinterpretation or just to show that al-Jili's metaphysical system is, like Hegel's, a plausible solution to 'the human enigma', but he also agrees with al-Jili's solution. This is so because Iqbal believes that the solution is to be found in mysticism/Sufism, and that he analyses the metaphysical system of al-Jili—in parallel with Hegel's—only as a successful example of the mystical/Sufi approach to 'the human enigma'. Iqbal considers al-Jili's and Hegel's metaphysical systems to be two comparable plausible solutions developed in two different philosophical traditions—Islamic/Sufi and European/Christian. Accordingly, Iqbal thinks that al-Jili's system is an anticipation of Hegelianism, and a reproduction of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity 'except his [al-Jili's] god-man is Muhammad instead of Christ' ('Doctrine', 245). This is not a problem, Iqbal adds, because al-Jili 'looks upon the doctrine as something common between the two forms of religion and accuses Christians of a blasphemous interpretation of the doctrine—of regarding the Personality of God as split up into three distinct personalities' (ibid). To this Iqbal adds his own views and argues:

Our own belief, however, is that this splendid doctrine has not been well-understood by the majority of Islamic and even Christian thinkers. The doctrine is but another way of stating the truth that the Absolute Unity must have in itself a principle of difference in order to evolve diversity out of itself. Almost all the attacks of Muhammadan theologians are directed against vulgar beliefs while the

truth of real Christianity has not sufficiently been recognized. I believe no Islamic thinker will object to the deep meaning of the Trinity as explained by this author [al-Jīlī], or will hesitate in approving Kant's interpretation of the Doctrine of Redemption. Shaikh Muḥyū-d Dīn ibn 'Arabi says that the error of Christianity does not lie in making Christ God but that it lies in making God Christ. (ibid)

## CONCLUSION

If my understanding of Iqbal's article on al-Jīlī is correct, we can draw the following conclusions regarding Iqbal's philosophy. Firstly, for a better understanding of Iqbal's philosophy in respect of its historical and intellectual context and of the philosophical problem he was dealing with, it should be situated within the context of, and as a response to, the problem of nihilism which was debated during 'the pantheism controversy' in modern German philosophy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Commenting on ignorance of this controversy in contemporary European scholarship, Beiser argues that discussion of the speculative systems of post-Kantian philosophy has been disoriented because 'in no small measure these systems grew up as a response to the fundamental problem [the problem of nihilism] raised by the pantheism controversy. What Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel were trying to do was to preserve the authority of reason in the face of Jacobi's provocative criticisms' (Beiser, 48). Similarly, without understanding the impact of 'the pantheism controversy' on Iqbal's philosophy, we become disorientated in our effort to make sense of Iqbal's ideas, which can also be considered an example of the speculative systems of post-Kantian philosophy, since his philosophy/system also developed in response to the fundamental problem raised by the controversy—the problem of nihilism. Indeed, without situating Iqbal's ideas in the context of the philosophical problems that arose out of 'the pantheism controversy', we cannot even explain why Iqbal decided to write the article on al-Jīlī at all.

Secondly, from a methodological perspective, although situating Iqbal's, or any other Muslim philosopher's, ideas in their particular historical and intellectual context is important in that it helps us to understand the sources of influence on their ideas, we should be careful not to reduce those ideas to a mere copy of their contexts. In other words, although intellectual history or history of ideas provides us with a useful set of tools for understanding a philosopher in historical and intellectual context, we should also pay attention to the philosophical value of the ideas and arguments. As Alessandro Bausani rightly states, many of the studies 'written by Westerners are still tainted, either

consciously or not, by a colonialistic bias'.<sup>74</sup> He argues that in these studies Iqbal 'is studied, with a certain ill-concealed awe but with no real living participation, just as an aspect of the revival of Muslim peoples—a phenomenon to be scientifically analyzed, even in a sympathetic spirit, but never to be felt and accepted on a par with similar schools of thought in Europe'.<sup>75</sup> By studying Iqbal as a philosopher who situated himself at the crossroads of European and Islamic philosophical traditions, I aimed to go against this trend, and demonstrate both how Iqbal's ideas should be situated in the context of the problem of nihilism, and also as a response to this problem.

Finally, if I am right to claim that Iqbal did not write his article on al-Jīlī merely out of a scholarly interest but also because he agrees with al-Jīlī's ideas, then this interpretation may have broader implications for Iqbal scholarship, particularly regarding the claim that Iqbal was a pantheist, or held pantheistic views before going to Europe for higher education in 1905.<sup>76</sup> Given that the article was published in 1900, we can conclude that Iqbal was not a pantheist before 1905, or did not have a pantheistic conception of God. Sharing al-Jīlī's views, Iqbal's conception of God was as a personal creator God both transcendent and immanent. In this respect, we may say that this misrepresentation of Iqbal—that he was a pantheist in the pre-1905 period—is a consequence of the failure to explain how Iqbal's ideas developed in the context of 'the pantheism controversy'.

<sup>74</sup> Alessandro Bausani, 'The Concept of Time in the Religious Philosophy of Muḥammad Iqbāl', *Die Welt des Islams*, 3/4 (1954): 158–86, at 158–9.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 158–9. According to Bausani, 'this defect is particularly apparent in papers like that by A. Jeffery, Il modernismo musulmano dell'indiano "Sir" Moḥammad Iqbāl in *Or. Mod.*, XIV, 1934, pp. 505–13'.

<sup>76</sup> For instance, analysing Iqbal's poetry written before 1905, Javid Iqbal and M. M. Sharif argue that Iqbal had a pantheistic conception of God: Javid Iqbal (ed.), *Stray Reflections: The Private Notebook of Muḥammad Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2006), 'Afterword', 169–70. M. M. Sharif, 'Iqbal's Conception of God' in M. Raziuddin Siddiqi (comp.), *Iqbal as a Thinker: Essays by Eminent Scholars* (Lahore: Ashraf Press, [1944] 1973), 100–1.

**Abstract**

This paper attempts to rethink the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) and challenge the still prevailing tendency in Iqbal scholarship to view it merely as an outcome of the influence of the ideas of various Western/European philosophers. I present Iqbal's arguments in their particular historical and intellectual context to show that they developed in response to a specific philosophical problem and that Iqbal looked for a solution to that problem in Islamic tradition. I suggest that Iqbal's philosophy is best understood in the context of, and as a response to, the problem of nihilism as it was debated in modern German philosophy during 'the pantheism controversy' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To demonstrate this, I analyse Iqbal's article on 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī to show his concern with the problem of nihilism, and his solution to it based on al-Jīlī's Sufism.