



Hermeneutical Problem of Communicating Religious Experience in Iqbal's Thought

Hawasi

Faculty of Letters and Cultures, Gunadarma University

Correspondence Author:

Hawasi

E-mail: hawasijasidi@gmail.com

Abstrak

Kata Kunci:

bahasa diskursif,
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tentang
pengalaman
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hermeneutik

Artikel ini mengelaborasi kemungkinan bahasa diskursif sebagai medium untuk menjelaskan pengalaman religius atau mistik dan posisi bahasa diskursif dalam pengalaman semacam itu. Data dalam penelitian ini berdasarkan pada karya tentang pengalaman keagamaan seperti yang ditemukan dalam karya utamanya, yaitu Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Religius dalam Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif dengan perspektif hermeneutik tentang bahasa untuk menjelaskan dan menjawab problem pengalaman religius dan mistik menurut Iqbal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Iqbal mencoba menafsirkan secara hermeneutik tentang pengalaman religius atau mistik dalam dua kategori realitas yang berbeda. Yang pertama disebut sebagai bahasa dari pengalaman religius atau mistik yang tak terkomunikasikan, tak tertransformasikan, dan tak terkonseptualisasikan. Yang kedua adalah bahasa tentang pengalaman religius atau mistik yang mencoba berbicara tentang pengalaman religius atau mistik dalam bentuk bahasa diskursif yang dapat dikomunikasikan.

Abstract

Keywords:

discursive
language,
language of
religious
experience,
language
about religious
experience,

This article elaborates the possibility of discursive language as a medium for explaining religious or mystical experience and how discursive language has position in such experience. Data of this research is based on Iqbal's work on religious experience as found in his masterpiece, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Qualitative-descriptive method by hermeneutical perspective on language were used to elaborate and answer problems of religious and mystical experience according to Iqbal. The result of study shows that Iqbal tries to hermeneutically interpret religious experience or



hermeneutic
interpretation

mystical experience in two different categories of realm. The first is language of religious or mystical experience which discusses the religious or mystical experience as something uncommunicable, untransformable, and unconceptualized. The second is language about religious or mystical experience which tries to speak about religious or mystical experience in the form of communicable and discursive language

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate aim of human life is to know reality and to act in accordance with that knowledge. Sharp philosophical discussions center on human knowledge, and these discussions occupy a central position in philosophy, especially in modern philosophy. Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr(2000:39) argues that knowledge is the starting point of philosophical advance to establish a solid philosophy through investigations, studies and attempts to discover the primary principles of the powerful intellectual structure. This is very important as it throws light on the basic theory of knowledge as expounded by Iqbal, mainly the role of reason and intuition in understanding knowledge of God in the form of religious or mystical experience.

It appears from this that there is a religious “data”, when it is interpreted properly, which gives us the knowledge of God. While discussing about ‘heart’ or intuition Iqbal says it is something “sees”, and its reports, if properly interpreted, are never false. It implies that religious experience is also a kind of datum which is not sensory or physiological, and which requires interpretation, like the ordinary experience, in order to become a valid knowledge.

Actually Iqbal accepts the relative autonomy of reason while taking revelation of religious knowledge as the rock upon which the structure of religion is built. When discussing ‘Knowledge and Religious Experience’ of Reconstruction, he writes:” But to rationalize faith is not to admit the superiority of philosophy over religion. Philosophy, no doubt, has jurisdiction to judge religion, but what is to be judged is of such a nature that it will not submit to the jurisdiction of philosophy except on its own terms.....Thus, in the evaluation of religion, philosophy must recognize the central position of religion and has no other alternative but to admit it as something focal in the process of reflective synthesis” (Iqbal, 1960: 16).



Iqbal also warns us from the danger of other one-sided view of intuition. Its great emphasis on intuition, as manifested in some mysticisms, contributes the gap between reason and intuition as happened to al- Ghazali. "The technique of media valmysticism by which religious life, in its higher manifestations, developed itself both in the East and in the West has now practically failed. And in the Muslim East it has,perhaps, done far greater havoc than anywhere else" (Iqbal, 1960:188). What is important in Iqbal's thought is that he rejects exclusive separation between reason and intuition, between philosophy and religion. Rather they spring up from the same root and complement each other.

Iqbal makes some interesting observations on the nature of mystical experience and also accepts its cognitive validity. It is in religious or mystical experience that man apprehends the complex aspect of this dynamic reality. This experience has an out- ward or rational character as well as an inward or mystical one. The test of its genuineness is not exclusively pragmatic; but philosophical or speculative as well, since such an experience is not without cognitive content. Intuition has been conceived for instance by al-Ghazali and many other mystics as a faculty of knowledge which is unique and is of a different kind from thought and perception. This has led many to doubt the validity of intuition. But Iqbal differs here. He holds intuition to be a faculty of knowledge the same like other faculties of knowledge. It is indeed a higher form of knowledge, but it is qualitatively of the same nature as ordinary faculties. It is true that it is problem of feeling but it does not mean a descent into subjectivism. It is also objective as sense-perception. Iqbal, then, concludes that the feeling will end in the consciousness of an object. It is because Iqbal argues that there is no blind feeling is as to have no idea of its own object (Enver, 1944:19).

According to Iqbal religious experience is an intuitive experience which is different from perception and different from thought. In fact, religious experience is a unique experience different to every other kind of experience. It is feeling, but it does not mean descent into subjectivism. Feeling is essentially cognitive in its character, and it is objective as sense-perception. Iqbal's explanation on the cognitive element of mystic feeling can be shown when he writes:



“It must, however, be noted that mystic feeling, like all feeling, has a cognitive element also; and it is, I believe, because of this cognitive element that it lends itself to the form of idea. In fact, it is the nature of feeling to seek expression in thought. It would seem that the two – feeling and idea – are the non-temporal and temporal aspects of the same unit of inner experience” (Iqbal, 1960:21).

Then, Iqbal emphasizes that religious or mystical experience is real like other realms of experience: Iqbal writes: “For the purpose of knowledge, then, the region of mystic experience is as real as any other region of human experience and cannot be ignored merely because it cannot be traced back to sense-perception.” (Iqbal, 1960: 23).

The mystical experience cannot be so subjective and personal that it is impossible to explain to someone else what it is like, or how to acquire it. This sort of problem led to the creation of the concept of *‘ilm al-hudhuri* (knowledge by presence), a key notion in illuminationist thought. The idea is that there is a form of knowledge which is so obvious and so simple that we cannot doubt it; so the skeptic who would try to deny it is unable to insert his wedge. Iqbal realizes that there is a problem by accepting this account of knowledge. The trouble with using the nature of personal experience to establish understanding of the self is that the only sort of self which emerges is rather weak one. That is, all one can prove is that there is some notion of a subject which accompanies experience, but no real information about that subject is given by that sort of experience. On the other hand, what an emphasis on the subject reveals is that, to a degree, the nature of personal and private experience is significant. We should not reject mystical experience merely because it has no connection with what we tend to regard as the ‘real’ world.

METHOD

The Qualitative-descriptive and hermeneutic method were used in this research. The data collected in this research were analyzed hermeneutically to interpret the data in the form of sentence to get understanding (*versetehen*) and meaning (Bleicher, 1980: 1). Process of understanding and interpreting the text are one single entity to describe the text (Sumaryono, 1999: 31). Meanwhile, the technique of collecting the data was library research by seeking and collecting some literatures related to Iqbal’s thought on religious or mystical experience. The source of data for research is Iqbal’s works, mainly his masterpiece, *The Reconstruction of*



Religious Thought in Islam. In one of the chapters of the book Iqbal elaborates the possibility of religious or mystical experience expressed in discursive language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious or mystical experience gets serious attention in contemporary era. From psychological point of view, particularly psycho-therapy, religious values offers spiritual solution for the crisis. The religious values experienced by a man can reduce social pathology, emotional, and physical deases as studied by Bergin (1994). Therefore, religion gets a great attention again from many scholars to study from various perspectives. Before Bergin's research on religious value and its impact to human health, Munawar-Rachman (1990) tried to study religious experience from language philosophy. He shows that language philosophy contributes to give a reflective argumentation of religious experience which is not provided by theology. A such kind of reflective argumentation, actually, was attempted by William James to study religious or mystical experience from rational elaboration. James' attempt must be considered as one of deep studies on religious or mystical experience in modern era.

In his work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature* (1985), James tries to study the realm of religious experience found in some religious traditions. He shows that the realm of religious experience is possible by mentioning some characterisits of religious experience. In contemporary era, James' psychological investigation on religious or mytical experince is developed by some scholars, such as Rudolf Otto, W.T. Stace, R.C. Zehner, and Ninian Smart. Views of the scholars are critically analized, for and againts, from philosophical perspective on religious or mystical experience. Philosophihical analysis on religious or mysical experience elaborated can be found in Katz and other scholars entitled *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (Katz (ed), 2001). The book epistemologically and linguistically shows that religious or mystical experience is not monolithic in interpretation. Traditions of religion involve to color variety of religious or mystical experience. It means that certain tradition of religious or mystical experrence is potentially different from each religion. Disputed problems of variety of religious or mystical experience give empirical questions as well as conceptual issues until today (Smart in Kazz (ed.), 2001: 27). Therefore, James' finding that religious or mystical experience has universal characteristics gets various critical responses. James' study



was responded by some scholars and thinkers, such as Muhammad Iqbal in his work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1934) and Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi in his work, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence* (1999). Religious or mystical experience is simply understood that there is a such experience related to a religious man or a religious community when spiritually interacting or communicating with God. Field researches in Indonesia were done to find the phenomena of religious experience particularly in moslem spiritual community. The researche done by Anas (2003) phenomenologically tried to study religious experience or popularly is wellknown as sufistic experience in Jama'ah Maulid al-Diba Girikusumo. Meanwhile, Al-Kaf (2003) elaborated a religious experience experienced by a figure of sufi, Imam al_Haddad.

Religious experience itself is a kind of "peak experience" which is subjective for the man who experiences the religious or mystical experience. The problem emerges when religious experience is expressed in the foms of language. A sufi or religious man , sometimes tries to state the religious experience as representation or conceptualization (Bagir in Hidayat, 2011: 12). The existence of religious or mystical experience is so complex that it cannot be denied just from the unsuficiency of language used. Therefore, in Islamic tradition, the expression uttered by the sufi or religious man potentially opens controversy for public. To avoid misunderstanding, it is common in Islamic esoteric tradition use takwil. It is because, in Islamic tradition, besides tafsir or formal-rational interpretation, there is an other interpretation which is well-known called takwil as a kind of spiritual interpretation (Hadi W.M., 2000:149).

On the hand, language produced by religious experience consists not only as medium of communication (in words or symbols) but also its ontological and escathological dimensions (Hidayat, 2011; 73). Takwil in Islamic esoteric tradition widely opens to interpret religious or mystical experience in Islam by combining empirical, rational, and historical approach with intuitive knowledge. In modern as well as postmodern philosophical tradition well-known as hermeneutics as developed by Schleimarcher, Gadamer, and Ricouer. Hermeneutics itself can be understood as a tradition of thinking developed in contemporary Westren philosophy originated from a philosophical reflection concerning the concept of understanding or *erstehen* (Bruns, 1992: 1). Meanwhile in modern Islam such kind of hermeneutic tradition is developed in



Islamic mysticism which is called 'irfan (Muthahhari, 2002). Hermeneutical tradition, both in the modern West or in Islamic tradition of 'irfan also emphasize the importance of language. Language is "the home of man" which is a place to think, to speak and to write (Sumaryono, 1999: 26). It means that hermeneutics can be applied in empirical and rational realm but also in religious traditions (Sumaryono, 1999: 28).

Religious experience investigation, in its development, can be seen from rational approach: philosophy of language, psychology, hermeneutics, and so on. Rational approach is useful to get validity of religious or mystical experience. Elaboration of religious or mystical experience becomes scientific judgement about how religious or mystical experience varies in each religious tradition. Katz (2001: 102) explains that the background influenced the varieties of religious or mystical experience can be culture and ideology.

In Islamic esoteric tradition religious experience is studied in 'Irfan. 'Irfan, according to Murtadha Muthahhari, is rational elaboration about intuitive experience and its existence through rational language (Muthahhari, 2002: 7). 'Irfan tries to interpret mystical realm by translating it into rational language as explanation after the experience. 'Irfan provides rational demonstration can help public who are interested in understanding the ambiguity of language expressed by sufi (Keller, in Katz (ed.), 2001: 124) after experiencing a religious or mystical experience. Different from theological or psychological point of view, 'Irfan, as study of Islamic mysticism, emphasizes the important role of discursive language in justifying religious or mystical experience (Fazeli, 2011: 3).

Great contributions of Islamic sufistic tradition in a long history to develop the study called 'irfan had shown the importance of the experience in history. Modern psychological approach developed by William James inspired Iqbal to demonstrate the possibility of religious or mystical experience. In developing takwil Abdul Hadi W.M. puts Iqbal as one of muslim thinkers who uses takwil in his works in modern era. Concerning Iqbal's work Abdul Hadi W.M. gives his opinion that: "... Pada zaman kita takwil yang demikian kita lihat pada karya-karya Iqbal, dalam bukunya *Membangun Kembali Pemikiran Keagamaan dalam Islam* dan sejumlah besar sajak-sajaknya" (Hadi W.M., 2000: 149).



From the statement of Abdul Hadi above Iqbal's works can be categorized as the products of hermeneutical interpretation in modern era. Iqbal's works show that he is a poet as well as a thinker who closed to takwil tradition developed by sufi or mystic in Islam.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In his book, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal actually tries to give an explanation about religious or mystical experience. He states that we have to make distinction experience as a natural fact, significant of the normally observable behaviour of reality, and experience as significant of the inner nature of reality. As a natural fact it is explained in the light of its antecedents, psychological and physiological; as significant of the inner nature of reality we shall have to apply criteria of a different kind to clarify its meaning (1960:26). Iqbal tries to give interpretation on religious or mystical experience. What Iqbal states is in the category of, in Katz's words, as interpretation about religious or mythical experience (Katz (ed.)2001: 39). Stace (1960) explains that the level of interpretation will be different but not separated. The interpretation should be contextual because of the complexity of each religious traditions in expressing religious or mystical experience.

Religious experience as well as mystical experience, however unusual must be regarded as a perfectly natural experience. Therefore, according to Iqbal, it is the function of Sufism has been to systematize mystical experience. Iqbal, 1960: 127). Here, Iqbal actually offers a kind of theoretical science which is useful to explain mystical experience. For that purpose, mysticism can be reconciled with a whole range of philosophical views. The task of philosophy is to explain and to avoid misinterpretation by using discursive language. In this contact, philosophy can be used as a tool to rationalize mystical experience. Which Iqbal calls as an intellectual test. "By the intellectual test I mean critical interpretation, without any presuppositions of human experience, generally with a view to discover whether our interpretation leads us ultimately to a reality of the same character as is revealed by religious experience." (Iqbal, 1960:27). Critical interpretation done by Iqbal in testing religious or mystical experience intellectually can be understood that Iqbal is closed to *takwil* rather than *tafsir* tradition to interpret religious phenomenon in Islamic tradition. Here, Abdul Hadi (2000: 149) concludes that Iqbal's *takwil* can be shown by his effort to unite empirical, rational, historical with intuitive knowledge in



interpreting text concerning religious or mystical experience in Islamic esoteric tradition. Iqbal, in this context, brings rational discourse on religious or mystical experience in contemporary era which uses hermeneutics in interpreting text in broad sense.

What Iqbal means with intellectual test resembles with theological philosophy or 'irfan. As Mutahhari says 'irfan bases its deductions on principles discovered through mystic experience (kashf) and then reverts to the language of reason to explain them. To be more precise, the 'arif wishes to explain those things that he claims to have witnessed with his heart and his entire being by using the language of reason. (Mutahhari, 2002: 92). To bridge this dualistic view of reason and intuition, Iqbal offers an epistemic relation by integrating both of them. Presential knowledge is more based on intuition, meanwhile acquired or representational knowledge is based in reason. But they are related each other. In other words, there is concomitance between presential knowledge and acquired knowledge. The explanation of Taqi Misbah Yazdi can give a clarification to understand Iqbal's epistemology:

".....the mind always takes a picture of what is present to it like an automatic machine. From these it gets specific forms and concepts and then analyzes and interprets them. For example, when one becomes afraid his mind takes a photo of the state of fear which it can remember after the state has left. Furthermore, it apprehends its universal concept and by apprehending 'I am afraid, 'or 'I have fear,' or 'Fear exists in me.' It interprets the appearance of this psychological state with a marvelous alacrity in the basis of its previous knowledge and identifies its cause." (Yazdi, 1999: 106).

From Yazdi's explanation above can be shown It means that one who experiences religious experience or mystical experience is also enriched by his/her previous experience of internal and external reality. That is why that the interpretation of the mystics to their experience would be different between one mystics to others. Some uncommon expressions uttered by al-Hallaj and al-Bistami show the different capacity of knowledge they have to acquisition the same Reality. From a philosophical point of view, knowledge is generally identified with grasping the immaterial form or essence of things, as opposed to their material embodiment. A very important distinction is that between conception (*tasawwur*) and assent (*tasdiq*). The former is the grasp of an object without a judgement being made about it, whereas the latter involves a judgement, and in fact represents a relationship between the mental representation and the object which it represents. Concepts are the matter of knowledge, and



assent is its form, in a sense. Different to Iqbal's thought, al- Ghazali's thought, according to Oliver Leaman, fits far better with the approach to religion of the ordinary member of community, who tends to interpret religious experience into ordinary language. (Leaman, 1999:45). The emphasis on intuitive-dog- matic knowledge is more understandable than intuitive-rational knowledge.

In grasping ultimate reality in religious experience the role of intuition is active and dominant but the role of sense-perception and reason, in the most intensive level, are pas- sive. Iqbal always relate intuition with metaphysical problems, for example ultimate reality or God, as expressed in the following: "As region of normal experience are subject to interpretation of sense-data for our knowledge of external world, so the region of mystic experience is subject to interpretation for our knowledge of God." (Iqbal, 1960:18). Iqbal states that mystical experience cannot be communicated to other, except by seeing its pragmatic result; that is the birth of happiness of the mystics. Iqbal uses philosophy and shows that philosophy as a pure rational speculation becomes one of his tools in solving religious problems. In this context Iqbal is in line with Mulla Sadra as analyzed by Fazlur Rahman, who criticized pure mysticism which does not use philosophical analysis. (Rahman, 2000: 7). The truth of religion must be shown and supported by the truths found philoso- phically. That is why that religion has not to be dichotomized or contradictory with phi- losophy. Philosophy would be very useful to answer some religious problems in the age of rationalism. Philosophy an sich is not able to create any beliefs that religion has because its function is to rationalize and analyze critically. As Iqbal says that philosophy has right to judge on religion but philosophy cannot give inferior place to religion among its data. (Iqbal, 1960:2). In short, even though philosophy is needed for religious interpretation but it cannot change the fundamental position of religion in our life. The experience itself is a personal aspect. Finally, Iqbal's formulation with its identification can be characterized as the following:

Iqbal's explanation points to the formulation of fundamental ideas toward the object studied. The main point of Iqbal's thought is religious experience (Rahman, 1989:39). In one aspect, Iqbal analysis of religious experience still in the frame of metaphysics-ontology but in another aspect Iqbal tries to bring religious experience to epistemological framework as shown



by Fazlur Rahman. Basically, Iqbal's deep interest on religious experience is his manifestation to defend religious experience and interpret it objectively in modern terms in order to be understood by modern people. Even though Rahman and al-'Attas reject the term "reconstruction", which is implied by their rejection of some of Iqbal's evaluations of Islamic intellectual traditions and modern science and philosophy, there is one important point on which all of them agree. Namely, that there is today a need for stating Islamic metaphysics in the "modern" language, that is to say, the language familiar to Muslims living in the modern world; a language which is very much coloured by modern scientific-philosophical theories. In other words, this is a problem of communication (Bagir, 1996:29).

In the words of Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi the topics discussed by Iqbal as interpretations, disclosures and findings of conscience are called "scientific gnosis". Sometimes by adding reasoning and inferences they take the form of philosophical discussions (Yazdi, 1999: p.72). The link between them focuses on rationality; a philosophical approach to religious experience as a rational process. By this, Rob Fisher gives two argumentations: "First, we are pointing to the fact that reason has a fundamental part to play in a religious tradition's reflection on its experiences and beliefs. Part of the process of reflection involves looking closely at the language, doctrine, symbols, models, and myths the tradition has and uses. Second, we are pointing to the fact that in expounding its faith, a religious tradition must be able to use reason in producing logical arguments and making justifiable claims." (Fisher in Connolly, 1999: 110).

He turned to the field of psychology but found its present state unsatisfactory. After elaborating James' Varieties of Religious Experience Iqbal criticizes: "Modern psychology has only recently begun to realize the importance of a careful study of the contents of mystic consciousness, and we are not yet in possession of a really effective scientific method to analyze the contents of non-rational modes of consciousness." (Iqbal, 1960: 17). To answer the tendency of modern psychology Iqbal gives a response: "A purely psychological method, therefore, cannot explain religious passion as a form of knowledge, it is bound to fail in the case of our psychologists as it did fail in the case of our newer psychologists as it did fail in the case of Locke and Hume." (Iqbal, 1960: 26).



In one aspect Iqbal is in line with William James that the difference of the mystic states from the ordinary rational consciousness does not mean discontinuance with the normal consciousness. It is because James acknowledges that mystical experience has notice quality, therefore it has states of knowledge; states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by discursive intellect (James, 1958: 293). Iqbal's epistemological analysis, in some aspects, resembles with William James'. The problem is how to seek a descriptively adequate vocabulary to accomodate result analysis without deviance (More, in Katz (ed.), 2001: 173). An adequate discursive language becomes important to bridge this problem.

Because of its notice quality, mystical experience is concomitant with empirical experience, as William James states: "This incommunicableness of the transport is the keynote of all mysticism. Mysticism truth exists for the individual who has transport, but for no one else. In this, as I have said, it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensations more than that given by conceptual thought. Thought, with its remoteness and abstractness, has often enough in the history of philosophy been contrasted unfavorably with sensation. It is a commonplace of metaphysics that God's knowledge cannot be discursive but must be intuitive, that is, must be constructed more after the pattern of what in us is called immediate feeling, than after that of preposition and judgment. But our immediate feelings have no content but what the five senses supply; and we have seen and shall see again that mystics may emphatically deny that the senses play any part in the very highest type of knowledge which their transports yield." (James, 1958: 311). But, James' analysis of religious experience only focuses on the psychological aspects of religion, precisely on pragmatic aspect, as shown by Walter H. Capps:

"James's analysis focused on the functions religion performs within the lives of sensitive human beings. He understood that religion is formed within that set of reactions to what human beings regard as a (or perhaps the) primal reality. Here recognized that varieties of responses are in order, depending on significant part on the attitudinal orientation of the individual." (Capps, 1995: 45).

The characteristics of mystical experience as enumerated by Iqbal also run almost parallel to those presented by William James. From the two procedures that Iqbal chooses, it seems that both of them require the involvement of reason. Readers are invited by Iqbal to think. Some implications that rise from Iqbal's formulation of religious experience are: Iqbal has tried



to meet this challenge of communicating Islamic metaphysics, as he understood, to the young modern Muslims who had been “influenced by modern philosophy”. However, it seems that there are still some problems here, especially regarding the terminology he used. Both Rahman and al-‘Attas disapprove Iqbal’s couching the Islamic metaphysical concepts in a particular scientific and philosophical theory – despite their views above regarding the necessity of modern expression of Islamic metaphysics. Surely there is fine line between these two things; and Iqbal, according to them, has fallen into the former. For example, as observed by al- ‘Attas, Iqbal used terminology which is derived from modern, Western evolutionist philosophy and science as represented by Bergson, Nietzsche and Whitehead, and thus obscuring the ideas itself. To do justice to Iqbal, we should also remember that his Reconstruction was one of the first attempts at expressing Islamic metaphysics in a modern language; even today merely translating an Islamic metaphysics work into a modern European language remains problematic. The difficulties faced by Iqbal, therefore, have been greater (Bagir, 1996:30). We may say that Reconstruction was among the first serious works devoted to this problem – the one that is genuine and, in many way, still fares much better than many of the works of today’s Muslims scholars.

Philosophical critique of twentieth century concerning metaphysical way of thinking towards religious experience is needed in the era that language has central role. Therefore, language philosophy should be used in explaining religious or mystical experience. Language philosophers, like Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, criticize metaphysical as well as idealistic approach in understanding religious experience. Wittgenstein, for example, tries to approach religious experience not through metaphysical way but through language point of view. This is a new tradition which tries to explain “content” metaphysics from language perspective. Through language analysis, blurred concepts and categories will be clarified (Munawar-Rachman, 1990: pp.84-91).

The critique actually rises because Iqbal did not finish his main project concerning the objectivity of religious experience into language analysis. Therefore, Iqbal faces difficulty to search the way out argumentatively, except only giving some explanation of five main characteristics of religious experience. Even though Iqbal had opened the way to explore this kind of subjective experience into objective and philosophical investigations, but in some



aspects, he failed to explain religious experience discursively. Some aspects forgotten by Iqbal are the problems of language. He did not differentiate and verify, for example, the difference between religious experience as a realized knowledge and religious experience as expressed in human's languages. This problem, in Islamic epistemology, is studied in 'irfan; as understood by Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, the linguistic science of mystical apprehension, and the expression of mystical ways of experience both in the introvertive journey of ascent and the extrovertive process of descent (Yazdi, 1992: p.22). The aspects discussed in 'irfan are about problems of metamysticism and language of mysticism.

Classifications of Religious or Mystical Experience: Iqbal's Response

Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi classifies religious or mystical experience into three. These classifications are in order to avoid any confusion of understanding mysticism (Yazdi, 1992: p.160). The three categories of religious or mystical experience can be explained as the following:

First, ineffable mysticism: the experience of mysticism that is not conceptualized in terms of public understanding, and therefore has no normal public language at all. It has peculiar private language, which is not publicly understandable. This language is related to the genuine state of mysticism. It consists of apparently blasphemous, and sometimes meaningless and paradoxical. In these circumstances they speak of what they experience, not of what they are thinking of, or of what they willing to say. This is why we cannot categorize it as a conventional form of language. In this classification we can mention al-Hallaj as an example of Sufi who has paradoxical statement. Iqbal also tries to accept and interpret the well-known words of Hallaj – 'I am the creative truth.' (Iqbal, 1960: p.96) by stating: "In the history of religious experience in Islam which, according to the Prophet, consists in the 'creation of Divine attributes in man,' this experience has found expression in such phrases as – 'I am the creative truth' (Hallaj), 'I am Time' (Muhammad), 'I am the speaking Quran' (Ali), 'Glory to me' (Ba Yazid)." (Iqbal, 1960: p.110). Second, introspective and reconstructive mystical thinking as the pure object language of mysticism. This is what we called the language 'of' mysticism. Third, philosophical or scientific metamysticism that talks "about" mysticism. The first classification can be categorized as 'pure empirical mysticism'. The second is categorized as the object of language of mysticism proper. In third classification, actually, mysticism is designed metalinguistically to approach it from various angles: semantic, logical, scientific, metaphysical, epistemological, etc. Mysticism can be



reflected upon and interpreted through the conceptualization and introspection of mystics, and can be taught and spoken of in our ordinary language. But W.T. Stace warns us that this interpretation and conceptualization should by no means be confused with the mystical unitary consciousness (Stace, 1960a: 31-38). Therefore, all interpretation and conceptual understanding of mystical and religious experiences fall within the domain of phenomenal knowledge, not noumenal knowledge or knowledge by presence. It is necessary to understand that mystical consciousness is quite different from the interpretation of it. For this, Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi gives an explanation: "No mystical consciousness can ever be identical with any mode of knowledge by correspondence, either in theory or in truth, " and "No knowledge by correspondence can ever be identical with any degree of mystical consciousness either in truth or in theory." (Yazdi, 1992: 109).

To make it clear Yazdi gives some approaches concerning this problem (Yazdi, 1992: 165-167). Yazdi mentions that there is the descriptive empirical inquiry into the problem of mysticism which is of the category of language 'about' mysticism. This sort of inquiry is historical, scientific, anthropological, or sociological. William James, as Yazdi writes, is one of those few famous thinkers who, using this scientific principles, tried to capture four essential but empirical characteristics of mysticism. These are ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. Here, James does not ask or try to answer any epistemic, semantic, analytic or metaphysical questions about mysticism. His language is therefore an empirically scientific kind of metamystical language, but not a metaphysical one. There are also analytic, critical, metaphysical, and logical ways of approaching mystical thought. These consist entirely of non empirical analysis of the problem of mysticism. This approach to a philosophy of mysticism is based on posing questions such as the following: What is the meaning of mysticism? What makes it different from religion? Is there any rational justification for the essential and principal claims of mystical propositions? What is the definition or meaning of mystical expressions and concepts such as "Unity", "the One", "the oneness of existence", "the notion of light", and so on.

These questions are logical, semantic, epistemological or metaphysical ones. Mystical thinking of this kind does not try to answer questions as to how, practically, we can obliterate our limited selves and unite with the One, although these are typical questions in the mystical language, referred to in 'irfan. Many ancient, medieval, and contemporary philosophers have in



one way or another viewed mystical thinking through this approach.

Taqi Misbah Yazdi reminds that any realm of experience, including religious or mystical experience, must be traced its epistemological foundation. Therefore, in discussing epistemology, it will be made clear that the value of intellectual understanding is not merely no less than that of sensory and experiential knowledge, but is even of an even higher level than these. Even the value of experiential knowledge it self will be found to be due to the value of intellectual understanding and philosophical propositions (Yazdi, 1999: 35). Therefore, Iqbal is in line with Yazdi that mystical experience, as a higher level of experience, should be formulated discursively by explaining five concepts and characteristics of mystic experience. Here, Iqbal does not, however, think of mysticism in a mystical manner; he rather thinks and talks “about” the objective truth of mysticism. It is the introspective knowledge of mysticism that is manipulated in concepts and expressed by the articulated object language of ‘irfan. Iqbal argues that mystic feeling also has a cognitive element that lends itself in the form of idea or in the seek of thought expression (Iqbal, 1960: 21).

The importance of expressing this kind of intuitive experience in the form of discursive language is for the need of public verification rationally. Here, it is the role of philosophy (rational thought) to describe metaphysics (Wittgenstein in Thompson, 2005: p.41), including religious or mystical experience in the form of discursive language, but the primary form of mystical knowledge remains unconceptualized, ineffable, and unanalyzable. Here, Iqbal tries to prove the validity of mystic experience in the context of justification, not in the context of discovery in logical and discursive language. Although Islamic philosophy, including Islamic mysticism, is greatly influenced by Islamic religion but it does not mean that it is not rational because of its context of discovery but must be judged from context of justification whether it is rational and scientific or not (Bagir, 2005: p.89). It is the only way out to see religious or mystical experience within the wider context of natural theology, that is within the context of an integral intellectual and even moral vision of the nature of ultimate reality, and of the meaning and purpose of human life, including a claimed religious experience, only within the conceptual apparatus that is brought to it and which must be justified on ground other than experience which it interprets (Throner, 1999: p.72).

There is reflective and introspective, scientific but non-philosophical, thinking in which



a mystic tries by the power of his intellect to reconstruct in a sophisticated way the features of whatever he has already seen or apprehended in the course of his mystical experiences. This is what is called as the genuine mystical language, or the science of mysticism, for the simple reason that it speaks 'of' mysticism not 'about' mysticism and it is designed to recapitulate the state in which a mystic was already involved. Within the scope of this kind of mysticism, any philosophical or scientific question 'about' mysticism is incoherent to the system, and is regarded as absolutely irrelevant and inadmissible. But it does not mean that the language about religious or mystical experience is not relevant. The development of metamysticism can be entry point to seek a kind of language about mysticism in order to demonstrate the treasury of religious or mystical experience.

As an emphasis Donald M. Mackinnon needs to remind concerning the position of language::

"It is through the act of communication that a mystic's inclusive vision is defined, not immediately, but in imperfections that require constant correction. Because if with language he reaches areas outside the limits of his visions, language is still a human tool. ..., So, images and words are tools and levels that humans must use; since the object must triumph over the subject, this victory must be expressed in relation to words and images, as in everyday life, which of course provides the setting for one event and the treatment of another." (Mackinnon, in Katz (ed.), 2001: 204-205).

Any concrete or abstract realm, including religious or mystical realm needs knowing. To know a phenomenon or noumena humankind cannot free from language as a sign to refer something. By using language a phenomenon can be describe conceptually and help people to understand the meaning of a phenomenal or noumenal world.

CONCLUSION

This paper elaborates the problem of understanding religious or mystical experience and its relation to the possibility of discursive language as proposed by Iqbal. This is based on the fact that recently many people are still misunderstanding in classifying religious or mystical experience as pure experience and its expression. Therefore, rational explanation through discursive language may help people to understand this metaphysical problem. By this, Islamic mysticism specifically and mysticism in general are open to be criticized rationally in order to



clarify the right (divine) mysticism from pseudo mysticism. This effort can be addressed to Iqbal who tried to bring Islamic mysticism tradition in discursive language. In certain aspects Iqbal's effort to explain the problem of religious or mystical experience are not comprehensive. His analysis does not go farer to the importance of philosophy of language that provides hermeneutic and discursive language. The development of philosophical language from the West can be used as tool to explain the richness of religious and mystical writings and traditions of all religions. This effort is tried by Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi in his analysis of religious or mystical experience.

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