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PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND MUHAMMAD IQBAL ON HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOCIALITY: A CRITICAL COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

This study is a comparative analysis of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Muhammad Iqbal focused on how the themes of consciousness and sociality are developed and interconnected in their respective worldviews. Research efforts sought the exposition of these themes throughout the oeuvres of both authors and in letters and journals, published and archival. Taking a short article by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch as inspiration, this study is the first sustained comparison of Iqbal and Teilhard de Chardin and the only sustained comparative study of Teilhard with any Muslim thinker. The scope of research in this project has also brought numerous primary and secondary sources within the respective orbit of each thinker into conversation for the first time and it marks the first published citation of previously unused or sealed archival resources held by Georgetown University.

The analysis of consciousness in Teilhard and Iqbal has revealed (1) the importance of their shared inheritance from philosopher Henri Bergson (2) a shared commitment to the unity of consciousness and (3) a shared commitment to a particular kind of panpsychism within the context of panentheism. With respect to sociality, both thinkers write of the phenomenon as a transformative union bearing out the future of consciousness through the joining together of disparate peoples. Iqbal envisions this union as the coming together of the umma bound together by the centripetal force of Islam, whereas Teilhard imagines the entire cosmos forming the Body of Christ in a transhumanist eschaton. Ultimately, Iqbal’s view is more grounded and more
attentive to the immediate dangers of imperialism, inequality, and power differentials than Teilhard’s cosmic vision. Despite such differences, and despite their respective critiques of mysticism, it is shown that both Teilhard and Iqbal share a mystical paradigm devoted to knowledge, love, and the building of a better world.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, “God, His Angels, the inhabitants of heaven and earth, even the ant in his hill, and the fish in water call down blessings on those who share beneficial knowledge.”

It has been my good fortune to benefit from the guidance and support of extraordinary teachers and mentors. Here I wish to acknowledge Amy Hollywood, who encouraged me to study mysticism and pursue an academic vocation; Paul Heck, who is my inspiration in the study of Islam and the life of the mind generally; Carole Sargent, whose trust and investment in me has meant so much; and Daniel Madigan, whose special gifts of insight and humility have made me a better person.

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DEDICATION

L'amour est une aventureuse conquête.

Il ne tient, et se développe, comme l'Univers lui-même, que par une perpétuelle découverte.

As we begin our tenth year of marriage, this dissertation is for Mollie Rose and so am I.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Sharing an interest in a dynamic worldview and the thought of French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Muhammad Iqbal and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin ask many of the same questions. Ursula King describes Teilhard’s life’s work as an “attempt to relate the Divine and the world in the most intimate manner, expressed through his efforts in seeing science and religion as part of the same quest for ultimate unity.”¹ Of science and religion, Teilhard says, “The same life animates both.”² Iqbal was not himself a scientist but he respected the spiritual dimension of scientific research, “The truth is that all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of Nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer.”³ I am not the first to note the resonance between these two thinkers. It is mentioned by Ursula King, and Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, the translator of Iqbal’s work into French, published a short article on the topic.⁴ She notes their shared sense of the modern human predicament, “the desolation of man in the twentieth century within a universe where he feels isolated and lost” and the need for a humanism marked by a “change of optics that must be made . . . a consideration of man ‘not as the static center of the world, as has been long believed, but as the axis and arrow of evolution—which is much more beautiful.’”⁵ This is the only published comparison of Teilhard with a Muslim thinker I am aware of and it is an invitation for deeper analysis. I believe a sustained comparison of Teilhard and Iqbal will illuminate strengths, deficiencies, and

⁵ Ibid., 51.
assumptions in both thinkers. In truth, such a comparison is long overdue and its absence is a
sign that neither of these thinkers is receiving the consideration they deserve. Current discourse
and teaching in the study of religion is diminished by a failure to more fully include the insights
of Teilhard and Iqbal within the conversation. I refer to “the conversation” in the broadest
possible sense but these thinkers offered particularly relevant insights on the development of
mysticism and the relationship between science and religion.

On a fundamental level, my project’s purpose is to demonstrate the importance and value
of my two thinkers in creating better-informed analyses of contemporary theological problems.
They were forward-thinking enough to creatively address some of the most difficult transitions
in the politics and worldview of the early 20th century. My thesis is that Teilhard and Iqbal both
provide holistic responses to the challenge posed by the ascendancy of scientific materialism.
Their complex thought systems are united by a sense of purpose in the face of external
challenges and by many substantive similarities emerging from their shared interest in the
theological implications of human progress. Differences between Teilhard and Iqbal arise out of
their respective commitments to Christianity and Islam and from their distinctive life
experiences. Through comparison, these differences can inform lacunae in the individual thought
systems: Teilhard places emphasis on the future convergence of humanity in the body of Christ;
Iqbal emphasizes unity (tawhid) at all levels and especially in the individual human person. As a
geologist enjoying the privileges of colonial power, Teilhard has the luxury of speculating on
aeonian synthesis. Iqbal is much more attentive to power differentials and the problems facing
humanity in the immediate future.
This project will be organized around these two key concepts in Iqbal and Teilhard: human consciousness and human sociality. These categories are best understood with reference to the broader studies of consciousness and mysticism. This widens the scope of my contribution since these larger conversations will be informed by the interpretations of Iqbal and Teilhard they make possible. In my first chapter, this introduction, we will look briefly at the biographies of each thinker before proceeding through a short literature review of past comparative projects involving their work and an investigation of their respective opinions on each other’s religious tradition; Teilhard on Islam, Iqbal on Christianity. From there we will engage a discussion of the comparative method and how it will be applied in this project before providing an explanation of our comparative categories: consciousness and sociality. The second chapter addresses the distinctive treatments of consciousness in the work of Teilhard and Iqbal individually before offering a comparative treatment meant to highlight differences while also showing how their respective ideas can build on each other. Chapter three takes on the topic of sociality, how it is that humans come together, in the same way. Chapter four follows on this by showing how Teilhard and Iqbal fit into the broader study of mysticism; including an analysis of their critical or reformist tendencies toward traditional mysticism and an investigation of how their notions of consciousness and sociality might be best understood as part of a new mystical paradigm. The fifth chapter is a conclusion, evaluating what has been learned in the progress of this thesis, assessing the new possibilities for Muslim-Christian understanding on Teilhardian and Iqbalian terms, and identifying future possibilities for research.
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881 – 1955)

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was born into an aristocratic family in the Auvergne province of central France. His mother, Berthe-Adèle de Dompière d’Hornoy, was a great-grandniece of Voltaire known for her piety and devotion to the Christian mystics. Ursula King credits Teilhard’s mother for his lifelong devotion to the sacred heart of Jesus. Teilhard himself recalls her impact on his childhood disposition, “I was affectionate, good, and even pious: by that I mean that under the influence of my mother, I was devoted to the Child Jesus.” Teilhard’s father, Emmanuel Teilhard de Chardin, was a gentleman farmer, managing several estates while finding time for the traditional diversions of hunting, fishing, and racing in addition to specialized intellectual pursuits. Trained as an “archivist-historian” at the École des Chartres, Emmanuel was an avid reader and a member of “all the local learned societies.” He was familiar with English and instructed his children in Latin until they went off to school. Of special importance for Teilhard, his father was keenly interested in natural history and collected samples from the abundant resources of the surrounding countryside, a volcanic region. Teilhard developed his interest in the durability and epochal history of rocks as a young boy following his father in the Auvergne. This would lead him in time to a doctorate in geology but also to the fundamental insight of his theological career: “There is a communion with God, and a communion with the earth, and a communion with God through the earth.” In the example of

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Teilhard’s parents it is easy to trace a connection to the centrality of both matter and spirit, science and mysticism in his developed thought. In his words, from his father he gained “a certain balance, on which all the rest is built, along with a taste for the exact sciences.”¹¹ From his mother he attained the “spark” enabling him to recognize an “amortized” universe and “super-hominized love.” In simpler terms, his ability to connect his biological and cosmological conclusions to Omega, a personal God, is credited to the spark carried to him by his mother; “it was through her that it reached me from the current of Christian mysticism and both illuminated and inflamed my childish soul.”¹²

Teilhard reports that from his earliest childhood he experienced a longing for a “unique all-sufficing and necessary reality.”¹³ His earliest memory is a reflection on the fragility of matter and, by extension, life itself. His mother had clipped his curls, “I can remember so well witnessing for the first time the distressing sight of a lock of hair being burnt up in the fire, and how my disappointment with the organic instantaneously reacted on the very person of Christ . . . if I was to be able fully to worship Christ, it was essential that as a first step I should be able to give him ‘solidity.’”¹⁴ His search for the non-perishable led Teilhard to make literal “iron gods,” the lock pin of a plough, a bolt on the floor of his nursery, and shell splinters from a firing range. But the hardness of iron perishes still, “I so well remember the pathetic despair of the child who one day realizes that iron can become scratched and pitted—and can rust.”¹⁵ In this childhood quest for permanence Teilhard turned to volcanic rocks and fire itself with unsatisfying results. It

¹³ Ibid., 16.
¹⁴ Ibid., 42.
¹⁵ Ibid., 19.
was only later in life that he was able to reflect back, realizing “that the degree of Consistence of which I then dreamed is an effect not of “substance” but of “convergence.””

The family home of Sarcenat ran on a schedule and Teilhard’s preparatory education included lessons managed by his parents and tutors. At ten or eleven years old, the boys were then sent east to Jesuit boarding school at the École Libre de Notre-Dame de Mongré in Villefranche-sur-Saône. Though it is no longer run by the Jesuits, the school still exists and retains an Ignatian influence on its curriculum. Ursula King reports, “The Jesuits claimed to teach their pupils the sanctification of science by religion and the service of religion by science, a relatively advanced formula for that time, not without its impact on Teilhard.” Teilhard performed admirably in the competitive school environment and won seven prizes in his final year but only one for religious knowledge. It is possible to look to Teilhard’s teacher Henri Bremond for a partial explanation. Reflecting some thirty years later, he remembered Teilhard’s passion for rocks “transporting his mind far away.” Bremond also generally disapproved of the “sèche et froide raison” central to the catechetical education of the time and would go on to be caught up in the modernist crisis. Losing his standing with the Jesuits due to his friendship with George Tyrrell, he remained a priest and later became an immortal of the Académie française. Teilhard’s interest in lived religion was quite passionate. He joined the Sodalities of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and the Immaculate Conception while at school. Seeking a way of life consecrated to God, he discerned a vocation to the Jesuits and entered the novitiate at Aix-en-Provence in 1899.19

16 Ibid.
19 This is misprinted as 1890 in Claude Cuénot’s biography.
Three years after entering the Jesuits, the anti-clericalism of the Third Republic compelled Teilhard’s community to flee to the channel island of Jersey. There he pursued his scholastic studies at the Maison Saint Louis and occupied his free time with geology, “‘Brother’ Teilhard never went for a walk without his geologist’s hammer and naturalist’s magnifying glass.” Teilhard’s friend Pierre Leroy reports that he learned the techniques of scholastic philosophy during this period but did not adopt its spirit. King and Cuénot both indicate that Teilhard was preserved from the reactionary climate of the modernist crisis by a circle of close friends, “Auguste Valensin, a fine humanist deeply affected by the theories of Blondel, was to remain a chosen confidant and it was he who, with Pierre Charles, was to open Teilhard’s eyes to the wonders of theology.” In 1905 Teilhard left to serve his three-year regency as a secondary school science teacher in Cairo. This would be his only sustained residence in a predominantly Muslim country. Teilhard visited the homes of his Muslim students and lamented the lack of time to learn Arabic. Still, much of his time was spent with the colonial community: the Jesuits and scientific experts who were becoming increasingly aware of Teilhard through his publications concerning the rocks and fossils wherever he found himself stationed. Later in this chapter, we will return to Teilhard’s encounter with Islam in Cairo. Of his first work as a teacher, it is sufficient to say he was likeable in personality but abstruse in his lessons.

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20 The association loi de 1901 spearheaded by Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau permitted the government to disband religious communities.
22 Ibid., xx.
24 First-time readers of his work may enjoy a similar experience. A student of education myself, I would like to offer a longer treatment of Teilhardian pedagogy in the future.
In 1908, Teilhard traveled to Hastings in southern England for four more years of theological studies during which he was ordained a priest on August 24, 1911. At Hastings Teilhard was again taught scholastic theology in the manualist tradition and he studied the Bible in Hebrew and Greek. David Grumett has argued for the importance of Hastings as an enclave of Jesuit intellectuals freed from their pastoral and social responsibilities back home. The origins and important developments of *La nouvelle théologie* cannot be constrained to Lyons in the 1930s, he argues. During these years of study, Teilhard began to articulate his understanding of the relationship between matter and spirit. Pierre Leroy explains that, for Teilhard, matter and spirit are not two separate substances, “They are two distinct aspects of one single cosmic stuff and there is between them no conflict to baffle our intelligence.” Donald Goergen, OP describes the relationship between matter and spirit as two sides of the same coin in Teilhard’s thought. It was at Hastings that Teilhard first read Henri Bergson’s *L’Évolution créatrice*, a central influence on his thought that would have its impact on Muhammad Iqbal as well. Ursula King explains, “Reading it made Teilhard discover the dynamic pattern and rhythm running through the whole universe—a universe fully alive and unfinished.” In 1912 Teilhard pursued further scientific courses in Paris and made contacts with several scholars engaged in the study of paleontology, specifically the evolutionary history of human life. On the cusp of entering his final years of Jesuit formation, Teilhard was firming up the outlines of his particular vocation as a priest-scientist at this time. Cuénot puts it beautifully, “Teilhard, like Jacob wrestling with the

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angel, spent his days strenuously wrestling with matter until it yielded the divine.”

But circumstance presented a different contest and Teilhard was called up for service in World War I in December of 1914.

Three months before Teilhard was classified “fit for duty,” trenches were dug in the Battle of the Marne and hope for a quick war greatly diminished. Teilhard asked to serve on the front and was assigned as a stretcher-bearer to the 8th regiment of Moroccan light infantry, which became the 4th Mixed Regiment of Zouaves and Tirailleurs comprised of Tunisians, Moroccans, and European settlers in North Africa during the following year. This would be Teilhard’s second sustained encounter with Muslims. In a letter to his cousin Marguerite, Teilhard jokingly tells her, “I’m rather, of course, in partibus infidelium.” In the same note he writes, “I felt proud to march behind a regiment of chéchias.” Teilhard got on well with the other soldiers on account of his good-natured humility and spiritual example. He was called “le sidi Marabout,” a term for a religious teacher or holy man in the Maghreb, and his comrades “wanted him near when they were dying.” Courageous under fire, “the soldiers of his regiment came to believe that he was specially protected by baraka.” Teilhard’s indifference to death at this time is oft-noted in biographies; “Persuaded that death is only a change of state, he would go out calmly to bring back the wounded under a hail of bullets.”

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29 Cuénot, Teilhard de Chardin: A Biographical Study, 16.
30 Immediately prior to the Battle of the Marne, hope for a swift end to the war would have favored the Germans who had advanced within 30 kilometers of Paris through their execution of the Schlieffen Plan during the Battle of the Frontiers.
32 Ibid., 47.
struggle between his natural instincts and faith in a life to come, “It’s indeed the supreme difficulty to be ready to disappear in death.”\(^{36}\) Teilhard rejected attempts to promote him away from his men and served with distinction as a corporal until the end of the war. He was cited in orders, received the \textit{médaille militaire}, and was made a \textit{Chevalier of the Légion d’Honneur} at the request of his former regiment in 1921.\(^{37}\)

Teilhard produced a considerable amount of scholarship during his wartime service and many of his later ideas were inchoate in short essays written within or around trenches and sent off to \textit{Études} for potential publication.\(^{38}\) The flip side is that Teilhard himself considered the content of these writings better expressed in his later work. In his 1916 essay \textit{Cosmic Life} we find reference to Bergson, “sacred evolution,” and a special consciousness of one’s connection with the current of evolution. “I realized that my own poor trifling existence was one with the immensity of all that is and all that is still in the process of becoming,” writes Teilhard.\(^{39}\) In the 1917 essay \textit{The Struggle Against the Multitude} Teilhard develops his understanding of being as unity, “true growth is effected in a progress toward unity, less-being increases with fragmentation.”\(^{40}\) He goes on to argue that this unification must be shepherded, i.e. guided by the supreme shepherd—Christ. In August of 1917, Teilhard finished \textit{The Mystical Milieu}, a more comprehensive explanation of his early thought building upon \textit{Cosmic Life} and \textit{The Struggle Against the Multitude}. Here he reveals the centrality of love in his worldview, “Just as there is

\(\text{\footnotesize{36}}\) Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Making of a Mind: Letters from a Soldier Priest}, 137.
\(\text{\footnotesize{38}}\) This puts me in mind of Ludwig Wittgenstein who developed his \textit{Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus} during wartime service at the same time; numerous authors worked in similar conditions.
\(\text{\footnotesize{39}}\) Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{Writings in Time of War}, 17.
\(\text{\footnotesize{40}}\) Ibid., 95.
but a single matter created to maintain the successive growths of consciousness in the cosmos, so there is but a single fundamental feeling underlying all mystical systems; and that is an innate love of the human person extended to the whole universe.”\textsuperscript{41} Shortly afterward he reveals his emphasis on the continuity of self in mystical union, “What the soul has to attain, in fact, is not an annihilation of self that causes its own personal being to disappear, but an identification that will fulfill its being; and it is in order to do this that it must not, in any part of itself, in its texture, or in its motions, be distinguishable from the clear and vibrant milieu into which it sinks.”\textsuperscript{42} Teilhard articulates this same idea a little over ten years later in \textit{The Divine Milieu}, “in action I adhere to the creative power of God; I coincide with it; I become not only its instrument but its living extension.”\textsuperscript{43} Teilhard is deeply concerned with coherence of thought and action; in his own life he marked no separation between his life as priest, mystic, and scientist.

In \textit{The Mystical Milieu}, Teilhard writes of the mystic, “For a long time, thinking he is the same as other men, he will try to see as they do, to speak their language, to find contentment in the joys with which they are satisfied.”\textsuperscript{44} In a footnote, René Hague mentions an observation from Madeleine Barthélemy-Madaule on this statement; “Who would say this of anybody but himself,” she asks.\textsuperscript{45} In mysticism, Teilhard was both a theorist and a practitioner. While it is possible to draw a distinction between theory and personal experience from the outside, Teilhard himself found the two to be mutually informative. The war was akin to a mystical experience for Teilhard; he describes his service in \textit{Nostalgia for the Front} as “almost mystical.” At the front he

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{44} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{Writings in Time of War}, 119.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., n5.
was liberated from social conventions and cast into a great task requiring the whole of his energies. He became part of a “soul greater than his own” (une âme plus grande que la mienne) and felt a sense of loss upon returning to safety. Here again he is careful to point out, “His individuality is, of course, safe. No other conscious center, distinct from his soul, appears to him.” Reproducing one of his Stories in the Style of Benson in The Heart of Matter, Teilhard describes an experience of the incommunicable beauty of Christ focused on the eyes of an icon, “in which I saw an infinite depth of life, enchanting and glowing,” and a final expression of “unspeakable agony or, on the contrary, an excess of triumphant joy.” He goes on to say that since this occasion he has only seen a hint of such an expression once more—in the eyes of a dying soldier. Written on the evening before the attempt to recapture Fort Douaumont at Verdun in 1916, Teilhard describes this story as representative of his mindset at the time. Service in the First World War played an integral role in the development of Teilhard’s thought. The degree to which his most important ideas can be traced back to his wartime essays is remarkable. Even Nostalgia for the Front, an essay ostensibly about the experience of soldiering, is itself a meditation of mysticism, unity, and human progress.

After leaving the service, Teilhard returned to his scientific studies at the Sorbonne in 1919. Within two years he received certification in geology, botany, and zoology. In 1922 he

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47 Robert Hugh Benson (1871-1914) was the son of an Archbishop of Canterbury who, like Newman, moved from high church Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. He was a noted writer across multiple genres and titled monsignor before his sudden death at 42.
49 Douaumont is now home to a nécropole nationale, an ossuary containing the remains of over 100,000 young men killed at Verdun; it is an overwhelming sight.
successfully defended his thesis on the mammals of the French lower Eocene and began a teaching assignment at the Institut Catholique de Paris.\textsuperscript{52} He might have settled down at this point but both his disposition and the theological climate of the Catholic Church at the time were against the possibility. Teilhard had a passion for field research bound up with his idealization of human progress. He compares this drive to his service in the war, “The enigmatic and importune me who loves the front obstinately, I recognize him: it is the ‘me’ of adventure and research—that one who always wants to go to the extreme limits of the earth to obtain visions new and rare, and say he is ‘in front.’”\textsuperscript{53} In his final essay, written the year he died, Teilhard expands on the same idea, “No intellectual seeker worthy of the name can work or can continue to work unless, in the depths of his being, he is sustained by the idea of carrying further, and to its extreme limit, the progress of the world he lives in.”\textsuperscript{54} Presumably, a teacher could proceed in this same spirit but, for Teilhard, the scientific “front” was always in the field. In 1923 he seized an opportunity to join Émile Licent, SJ for a year studying the basin of the Yellow River from a base at Tientsin (Tianjin) in Northern China. This would be the first of several expeditions to China, comprising two decades of his life. In 1926 he embarked on another year-long study of the region surrounding Tientsin and later joined the \textit{croisière jaune} in 1931 as a scientific adviser with new Chinese and American connections in Peking.

Ursula King has placed great importance on Teilhard’s time in the east as an influence on his thought. She writes, “The arrival in China completed Teilhard’s inner development and brought his mystical vision into full focus.”\textsuperscript{55} She is able to cite Teilhard himself on this point

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{53} Teilhard de Chardin, “La Nostalgie Du Front,” 333; my translation.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{54} Teilhard de Chardin, "Research, Work and Worship," in \textit{Science and Christ}, 216.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{55} King, \textit{Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World}, 25.}
\end{footnotes}
who, in The Heart of Matter, affirms that the “pan-Chrastic mysticism” found in The Mass on the World and The Divine Milieu matured “in the two great atmospheres of Asia and the War.”\textsuperscript{56} In an introduction to the former, Bernard McGinn writes, “Teilhard’s conviction about the divine presence in matter marks him as one of the most original Christian cosmic mystics but . . . his mysticism is also deeply trinitarian, Christological, and eucharistic.”\textsuperscript{57} Teilhard explains the circumstances eliciting The Mass on the World in his offertory prayer,

\begin{quote}
Since once again, Lord—though this time not in the forests of the Aisne but in the steppes of Asia—I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the strivings and sufferings of the world.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

As the sun approaches the edge of the Ordos Desert, Teilhard invokes “the whole vast army of living humanity,” especially those who believe in and work for progress. Once again, as in the vision described in his Three Stories in the Style of Benson, all of creation is the sacramental host—the body of Christ. And in this host, the desire for unity, “a desire, irresistible, hallowing, which makes us cry out, believer and unbeliever alike: ‘Lord, make us one.’”\textsuperscript{59} According to Ursula King, Teilhard’s idea of human unification had taken on a new resonance in China. She writes, “The encounter with China was a momentous experience for him . . . The discovery of the heart of this vast continent, at a time when only the simplest forms of travel were possible, revealed to him the immensity of the earth, but also the rich diversity of its people.”\textsuperscript{60} At the

\textsuperscript{56} Teilhard de Chardin, The Heart of Matter, 47.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 305.
\textsuperscript{60} King, Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 97.
front, Teilhard gained a vision of the concentrated energy of humanity. In China, he discovered the size of the human wave.

Beneficial as it was for Teilhard’s scientific career and intellectual development, the continuing sojourn in China was also occasioned by conflict with church authorities. Caught up in what is called the “modernist crisis” in Catholic historiography, he was subject to the spirit of the anti-modernist measures taken by Pope Pius X in 1907. Of special note are Lamentabili sane exitu, the encyclical Pascendi dominici gregis, and the motu proprio Sacrorum antistitum, also called the “oath against modernism.” Among the condemned propositions in Lamentabili sane exitu, “Scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine concerning God, creation, revelation, the Person of the Incarnate Word, and Redemption be re-adjusted.”

Teilhard’s difficulties increased with his popularity. Back in Europe after his first trip to China, he began taking on speaking engagements and developed a following among the students in Paris and seminarians in Hastings. By 1924 an unpublished essay Teilhard had written on original sin for a theologian colleague somehow made its way to the Vatican. Short and unpolished, “Historical Representations of Original Sin” starts with the contradictions between the science of evolution and the creation story: “The more we bring the past to life again by means of science, the less we can accommodate either Adam or the earthly paradise.” Despite pains to maintain orthodoxy in canvassing potential responses to the dilemma, the audacity of the essay in premise

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61 Readers familiar with Roman Catholicism will note that a breakaway group of “traditionalist” Catholics led by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre took the name Society of Saint Pius X to signal their anti-modernist opposition to the Second Vatican Council. Known also for his personal piety, Pius X was canonized in 1954 and many non-schismatic parishes and buildings bear his name.

62 Pius X, Lamentabili sane exitu, 64.

and the imprecise or erroneous theological content were evidently unsettling to his superiors. Teilhard was instructed to remain silent on the subject in the future and told he must sign his name to a list of six propositions. Lost for decades, a copy was recently discovered in Rome by actor Paul Bentley while conducting research for a new play on Teilhard. The full document is still awaiting publication, but David Grumett has meanwhile confirmed Teilhard’s consternation over the assertion, “The whole human race takes its origin from one first parent, Adam.”64 With support from friends and his immediate Jesuit superiors, Teilhard attempted to negotiate the matter without success. John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker note, “The Jesuit Superior General of this period was Vladimir Ledochowski, a former Austrian military officer who sided openly with the conservative faction in the Vatican.”65 After some deliberation on leaving the Society of Jesus and a week-long prayer retreat using a portion of the Ignatian exercises, Teilhard ultimately decided to sign the document as an act of obedience in 1925.66 Loyalty notwithstanding, he was subsequently stripped of his license to teach and lost his position at the Institut Catholique de Paris. While Teilhard was permitted to return to Paris intermittently, his work in China carried an exilic resonance from this point forward.

Unable to reconcile his vision with Church authorities during his lifetime, Teilhard despaired of his work ever seeing publication. His first monograph, The Divine Milieu, was finished just two years after he signed the six propositions. Its content was approved by Jesuit authorities in Lyons and Belgium but an episcopal imprimatur was held until the manuscript

64 In an email to author, February 28, 2018.
66 Grim and Tucker also point out that Teilhard signed the document during the same week as the Scopes Monkey Trial in the United States.
could be reviewed in Rome. Permission to publish was denied and the text would not be published until two years after Teilhard’s death. Until that time, interested readers had to make do with passing around copies; the fourteen mimeographs, including several copies of *The Divine Milieu*, owned by Teilhard’s friend Nancy Corson Carter and now held in the archives at Georgetown University are a representative example. The year after finishing *The Divine Milieu*, Teilhard began work on essays that would grow into his magnum opus, *The Human Phenomenon*. An effort to synthesize and fully explain his worldview, this project was begun in earnest by the summer of 1938 and finished in 1940. Here he presents the successive stages of evolutionary history moving along an axis of complexity-consciousness from particle to pontiff; and ultimately, to the Omega Point. He immediately began efforts to publish the manuscript with its interdisciplinary nature and prior bad history with the Vatican authorities set against him.

Trapped in Beijing throughout World War II, Teilhard was unable to return to Paris until 1946. At this same time he became a candidate for the chair in prehistory at the Collège de France while attempting to revise *The Human Phenomenon* in an effort to please Rome and secure permission to publish. This did not go well. In 1947 the book was threatened with inclusion on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, where it would join Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* incidentally. In 1948 a plan to lecture at either Harvard or Columbia fell through owing to Vatican silence on his situation. Later in that same year he was summoned to a meeting with the Superior General of the Jesuits to discuss the issues still outstanding. Finally, in 1949

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68 Dubalen, Marie Therese – Carter, Nancy Corson Collection, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University.
70 The Superior General at that time was the Belgian Jean-Baptiste Janssens who was also the recipient of a spontaneous apologia and statement of loyalty from Teilhard in 1951.
he was denied permission to take the chair in prehistory and forbidden to publish The Human
Phenomenon despite his many revisions. Once again, copies of the manuscript made the rounds
in interested circles.\textsuperscript{71} And, lest we paint too dire a portrait, this same period saw Teilhard
created an officer of the Légion d’Honneur and an académecien of the Institut de France,
Académie des sciences.

Without a position in France and with a return to China made impossible by the
communist victory, Teilhard ultimately decided to move to New York City. He lived with the
Jesuit community attached to the Church of Saint Ignatius Loyola on Park Avenue and accepted
a research position with the Wenner-Gren Foundation, where he had initiated their “Early Man in
Africa Program.”\textsuperscript{72} Teilhard encouraged the exploration of human origins in Africa and joined
two expeditions to South Africa during the first half of the 1950s despite bouts of poor health.
Teilhard himself said he was “stranded or perched” in America and Ursula King calls the period
his “American exile.”\textsuperscript{73} He had been forbidden to return to Paris for an extended stay and denied
permission to attend a conference at the Sorbonne in 1955, the last year of his life. These
setbacks were difficult for Teilhard to bear. He would have liked nothing more than to see his
published work initiating a wider, global conversation of his ideas. His friend Pierre Leroy
describes his “unendurable anguish” and “burden of spiritual distress,” but also reports that
Teilhard took heart again as he returned to work in his New York office.\textsuperscript{74} Ursula King observes
that, “he wrote more religious and philosophical essays in the years 1946-1955 than during any

\textsuperscript{71} King, Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 203.
\textsuperscript{72} “The Story and People of Wenner-Gren,” Wenner-Gren Foundation, http://www.wennergren.org/history/story-
\textsuperscript{73} Cuénot, Teilhard de Chardin: A Biographical Study, 327.
\textsuperscript{74} Leroy, “Foreword” in The Divine Milieu, xxxvi.
other period of his life—his bibliography lists over ninety titles for this time.” 75 It is fortunate so much of his writing has survived. In a last-minute decision, Teilhard made his friend Mademoiselle Jeanne Mortier the executrix of his literary estate through a handwritten note on a piece of Études letterhead in 1951, thus removing the publishing rights from the Society of Jesus. Concerning his legacy, Teilhard said, “If my writings are from God, they will go on. If they are not from God, they can be forgotten.” 76

In a book-length defense of Teilhard’s orthodoxy, Henri de Lubac argues, “Of all his thought, even scientific, it would be true to say that it was one long meditation on death.” 77 Concerning death, “he realized its grim power to decompose and dissolve, but he knew, too, that this physical relapse into the multiple can become, for each human existence, the fullness of unity in God.” 78 Teilhard had a Christian faith in the life to come reinforced by his conviction that the cosmic span of evolution could only make sense if it was able to cross the death barrier with consciousness intact. Teilhard had heart problems and suffered a heart attack in 1947 and a second illness in 1949 requiring an extended convalescence. One of only two audio recordings of his speech was made in between these events and the sound is clear and strong. Cuénot describes his voice as “aristocratic, warm and well modulated, expressive” but notes also “a certain nervous tension or anxiety, cardiac in origin.” 79 Three months before his death he enjoyed a visit from his friend Pierre Leroy and, during a walk through the city, stopped to tell him he “now

76 Ibid., 212.
79 Ibid., 382.
lived permanently in the presence of God.” On Easter Sunday in 1955, Teilhard went to mass at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral on Fifth Avenue and attended an afternoon concert before returning to the apartment of his friend Rhoda de Terra. “Going back to some friends, he was congratulating himself on a ‘magnificent day’ and was in excellent spirits. He was about to take a cup of tea and had just put down a paper on the window-sill when he suddenly fell full length on the floor, toppling over like a stricken tree.” Struck suddenly by a massive heart attack, Teilhard died shortly afterward. One month earlier, he had told some companions he hoped to die “on the day of resurrection.”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin lived a deliberate and extraordinary life spanning from the closing decades of the Victorian era to the 1950s. Bearing witness to the great upheavals of the early 20th century, Teilhard served with distinction as a stretcher-bearer in World War I, embraced the modern turn toward the physical sciences by earning a doctorate in geology, and found himself on the wrong side of Catholic authorities as his church struggled to chart its own position amidst changing intellectual currents. World traveler and consummate intellectual, Teilhard is a prototype Indiana Jones; as a cleric he possesses some of the near-mythic charm brought to the screen by Bing Crosby during the heyday of the hero priest. Lancaster Merrin, the heroic elder priest of The Exorcist, was based partially on Teilhard’s appearance and example. His Zouave compatriots in The Great War referred to his baraka or spiritual power in

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80 King, Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 227. Perhaps this was a reference to Luke 1:19, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God” or Teresa of Avila, “I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of God.”


82 Ibid., 386 n10.

83 In the film Going My Way, for instance.

84 My friend William Peter Blatty confirmed this to me in an email shortly before his death in 2017.
the trenches; his friend Pierre Leroy, SJ attests, “just to speak to him made you feel better.” In a whirlwind of such archetypes and reminiscences we are confronted with a man who lived in a world of “doubt and perplexity” and chose to take these problems head-on. The grave difficulty is that his biography and the fondness of his friends have given much of the writing about Teilhard the feel of hagiography. In fact, one encounters a comparable dilemma in approaching Muhammad Iqbal; there is something compelling and seductive about thinkers who seem to be ahead of their time.

But a nimbus can be a blinding phenomenon and admiration for a thinker might endanger objectivity. The remedy, I think, is to look closely at Teilhard’s own writing and thought; it deserves continuing reassessment and critique. This is what Teilhard himself wanted. He had hoped others would carry his ideas forward after his death. Even the authority structures of the Catholic Church, the source of so much consternation for Teilhard, have come to embrace aspects of his thought. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger writes approvingly of his cosmic vision in *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. Pope Francis cites his contribution to our understanding of the “destiny of the universe” in *Laudato si’,* his second encyclical; subtitled “on care for our common home.” To my mind, the greatness of Teilhard is in his imaginative approach to problems old and new through the creative synthesis of scientific discovery and mystical theology. His genius is of the same kind as Einstein’s in its originality “unfettered by definite tracks.” It is comparable to Aquinas in its devotion to scripture and the Christian tradition. Mary Carruthers reminds us that how we think and talk about creative genius changes over time but the neurological processes

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86 Ibid., xiv.
88 Francis, *Laudato si’,* May 24, 2015, n53.
and best practices for their nurture have not changed all that much.\textsuperscript{89} In short, Teilhard possessed the kind of originality prized in all fields of study, scientific and poetic. He was also possessed of a singular vision, remarkable and rare in its coherence. It is a worldview that came together and held together in the person of Teilhard. It may be impossible or undesirable for current readers to accept it whole cloth. But such a holistic vision is attractive in disjointed times and is well worth the time for study and appraisal. In coming to grips with Teilhard the man, I will give the last word to Claude Cuénot who has the right of it in saying, “Teilhard was a Jesuit, and of the high Jesuit aristocracy. In him you find all the qualities that mark the wide-ranging Jesuit spirit: scientific skill and intelligence, the aristocratic temperament, the missionary passion and zeal for education, the love of the youth of Europe, intellectual intransigence allied with absolute loyalty to the Church and the Holy See.”\textsuperscript{90}

\textbf{Teilhard in Comparative Studies}

Currently there are only six monographs on the comparative study of Teilhard’s thought with non-Christian religions, five of these are focused on eastern religions, i.e. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. One study includes Zoroastrianism. R.C. Zaehner wrote \textit{Matter and Spirit: Their Convergence in Eastern Religions, Marx, and Teilhard de Chardin} in 1963 and \textit{Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin} in 1971.\textsuperscript{91} Amal Kiran, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo, also published a comparative study of Aurobindo and Teilhard as \textit{Teilhard de Chardin and Our Time} in 2000.\textsuperscript{92} Anne Hunt Overzee published \textit{The Body Divine:}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{89} Mary Carruthers, \textit{The Book of Memory} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
\bibitem{90} Cuénot, \textit{Teilhard de Chardin: A Biographical Study}, 385.
\bibitem{91} Confusingly, the original title for Zaehner’s \textit{Matter and Spirit} is \textit{The Convergent Spirit: Toward a Dialectics of Religion} and the book is often cited as such in British scholarship.
\bibitem{92} Amal Kiran, \textit{Teilhard de Chardin and Our Time} (Connecticut: The Integral Life Foundation, 2000).
\end{thebibliography}
The Symbol of the Body in Teilhard de Chardin and Rāmānuja in 1992 and Bede Benjamin Bidlack published The Body and Divinization in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ and Daoist Xiao Yingsou in 2015. Ursula King’s Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions was published in 2011 and revised in 2015, the culmination of research going back to 1970. Several of King’s previously released articles on the subject of Teilhard and interreligious dialogue have been collected in The Spirit of One Earth: Reflections on Teilhard de Chardin and Global Spirituality, published in 1989.

R. C. Zaehner’s first book-length treatment of Teilhard appears as volume eight in the Religious Perspectives series edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen. In a way, this is a series committed to apologetics, seeking the religious perspectives of its title in response to secular or materialist challenges. Anshen describes the series in her introduction as “an endeavor to show that there is no possibility of achieving an understanding of man’s total nature on the basis of phenomena known by the analytical method alone.”93 Anshen explains the collection of perspectives from a diversity of religious traditions as a response to common problems and a shared recognition “that human morality and human ideals thrive only when set in a context of a transcendent attitude toward religion and that by pointing to the ground of identity and the common nature of being in the religious experience of man, the essential nature of religion may be defined.”94 Behind all of this is the specter of Marxism and also scientific advancement which has “overturned man’s conception of the essential order of nature” in an “apocalyptic epoch.”95 Published in 1963, this book appeared in the year following the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It is not

94 Ibid., 12.
95 Ibid., 13.
surprising that Teilhard seemed a likely topic for a series committed to voicing religious perspectives on the modern world. With the English translation of *The Human Phenomenon* published in 1959, it is possible to say that his ideas formed part of an interreligious project within five years. This, however, is a project committed primarily to providing a variety of religious responses to the intellectual challenges and existential threats of its time rather than an exploration of how different religious traditions relate to each other.

Zaehner’s contribution considers the relationship between matter and spirit from the point of view of Teilhard, Marx, and “eastern religions.” He organizes his analysis around the dialectical tension between two tendencies within religions, and it seems that he means all religions: one tendency “drawing the individual ever deeper into himself, down into the ‘kingdom of God’ that is ‘within you,’ and the other integrating him ever more closely with the religious community.” The former tendency he associates with “Indian religions” and the latter with both Zoroastrianism and Marxism. For Zaehner, then, the attraction of Teilhard is that his concept of convergence offers a way to ease this tension, a way to closely bind the salvation of the individual with that of the community. On a global scale, Zaehner claims, the Teilhardian vision announces the “slow convergence of all man’s religious thinking into the Catholic Church which is now in the process of being built up and which, under the ‘convergent spirit,’ that informs it, must ultimately reach its full expansion in that it will come to include all men and ‘God will be all in all.’”

While loyalty to the Catholic Church and its special mission is a hallmark of Teilhardian thought, Zaehner’s reading is not without difficulties grounded in

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97 Ibid., 19.
Teilhard’s own corpus. For one, Teilhard is insistent in many places that the uniqueness of the individual is not lost in a unity by which she is fully personalized. Zaehner also describes the “convergent Spirit” as “busy kneading mankind into a coherent mass however much individual men may kick against the pricks,” whereas Teilhard would be more comfortable with language describing humanity as drawn together through the attractive force of love. Zaehner himself is clear about his goals, “This book itself, of course, does not attempt to be an objective study on comparative religion, rather it is a subjective interpretation of the religious history of man seen from an individual angle within the overall structure of the Catholic Church.” Without passing judgment, it is sufficient to say that Zaehner’s goal is not the same as Teilhard’s.

Drawing inspiration from a short story by Albert Camus, Zaehner distinguishes between solitary and solidary religions on the basis of whether they appear to be concerned with individual or group salvation. He describes Hinduism and Buddhism as solitary religions and attributes their failure to appeal to the intelligentsia in their home countries of India and China to that fact; they cannot “play a significant part in an age in which solidarity is likely to loom far larger than solitude.” Zaehner acknowledges solidary impulses in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Marxism. Marxism, as he explains later in the volume, can be treated as a type of religion, “an evolutionary Messianism with the proletariat cast in the role of the Messiah” bringing the hope of a classless paradise on Earth in the future. In order to stand up against Marxism a religion must be able to present a communal message in a rapidly unifying world while reckoning with new advancements in science and technology. Zaehner argues that

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 41.
100 Ibid., 170-175.
Christianity, particularly Catholic Christianity, is the only viable candidate for this role since Islam is “wholly incapable of adapting itself to the new secular and scientific civilization which it can neither assimilate nor stave off.”\textsuperscript{101} Teilhardian themes operate in the background of this line of thought but he is seldom directly cited. Still, the foundation of Zaehner’s thesis is that the world is evolving in a convergent way and that Catholic Christianity can and will absorb and transform all other creeds, Marxism included.\textsuperscript{102} It is difficult to plot this approach on a continuum between optimism and pessimism as suggested by Susan Sack’s analysis of Teilhard’s reception in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{103} Here his thought is a kind of polemical weapon or, at the very least, an organizing principle for a challenge to communism.

The middle portion of Zaehner’s book provides a commentary on Teilhard’s thought in relation to Christian and non-Christian creation accounts. He writes, “The birth of consciousness is thus a true birth prepared by the Spirit in the womb of space-time for billions of years; and like all births it is a time of shattering distress.”\textsuperscript{104} The fall, on this reading, is a transition of the human species from unconscious harmony into conscious individuality. Zaehner borrows from The Divine Milieu the metaphor of a broken mirror trying to reflect the sun and then argues that the “Indian religions” are mostly concerned with polishing the individual fragments of the mirror and the “Semitic religions” with reforming the fragments into a perfect whole.\textsuperscript{105} He levels the most classic critique against Teilhard; that he does not take sufficient account of sin or evil, and accuses Marxism of the same. Zoroastrianism, by contrast, was willing to confront the reality of

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 64.; original reference to a broken mirror in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 85.
evil en masse. In Zoroastrianism, “The transfiguration of all mankind into the glory of the Final Body coincides with the defeat of the Devil whose mere existence had made God less than infinite.” With the exception of its extended meditations on evil in the world, Zaehner finds significant points of comparison between this system and the Teilhardian. But “Zoroastrianism is dead,” reports Zaehner, and so it is up to Christianity to carry the banner of a religion in solidarity through both God and matter against Marxism. Zaehner uses Teilhard here to inform a discernment among religions for the one creed best equipped to offer a balanced path toward salvation for a global community awakening to the possibilities of scientific progress. Coincidentally, the best-suited religion is Zaehner’s own but the real question is whether this kind of approach exhausts the Teilhardian contribution to the examination of religious pluralism or whether it constitutes one plausible approach among many.

Nearly ten years later, R. C. Zaehner published *Evolution in Religion: A Study in Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*. Aurobindo (1872 – 1950) was an Indian nationalist who became an influential yogi and spiritual reformer. Zaehner initially bases his comparison of these mystics on two points in common, “the repeated experience of cosmic consciousness and a profound belief in evolution, the goal of which they saw to be the divinization of man.” Later he expands on this, writing that “they are united in their mistrust of formalist and legalistic religion, in their insistence on the primacy of the mystical life, and in their belief that evolution is nothing less than the ascent from the kingdom of matter to the

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108 Ibid., 7.
kingdom of spirit through man who is the bridge between the two.” Among their differences, of course, is that Teilhard was a Catholic Christian who perceived a resonance between Christian dogma and evolution with a special role for the Catholic Church in the upward course of humanity, whereas Aurobindo perceived a special role for Hindu philosophy, i.e. the Vedānta.

Building on these points, Zaehner’s work in this volume is more of a comparative exercise and more focused on Teilhard’s writing than his previous book. He critiques Christianity, “Some of us have faith, fewer have hope, practically none of us has love; and without love there can be no Christianity.” And, as Teilhard would have it, there could be no convergence and no building up of the body of Christ. Zaehner also acknowledges the corporate love present in the Hindu tradition as expressed by Sri Aurobindo. To do comparative work with a Teilhardian emphasis means, for Zaehner, to identify religious trends whereby people might “feel as a living reality that unity in diversity suffused by love that not only Christianity proclaims.” In this, he has not moved away from the dichotomy mapped out in his first book; he associates love and a movement toward convergence with solidary rather than solitary spiritual development. Ultimately, Zaehner still sees the Catholic Church as one-day encompassing all of humanity but he acknowledges, using a Teilhardian timescale, that this may take place millions of years in the future. With the acknowledgement of convergent trends in other religions and the patient acceptance of a cosmic timescale, this is a more thoroughly Teilhardian approach to religious pluralism than what we found in Zaehner’s contribution to the Religious Perspectives series.

109 Ibid., 25.
110 Ibid., 113.
111 Ibid.
Ursula King has been conducting research and writing on Teilhard and non-Christian religions, particularly eastern religions, since 1970. Unlike Zaehner, who draws almost exclusively from *The Human Phenomenon* and *The Divine Milieu*, King’s work analyzes the greater portion of Teilhard’s writings: speeches, essays, and articles both published and unpublished during his lifetime. Her work provides some of the only reflection on the characteristics of Teilhard’s philosophy of religion and contains numerous calls for more work to be done on the topic. Of special significance is her essay “Religion and the Future: Teilhard de Chardin’s Thought as Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue,” the sixth chapter of *The Spirit of one Earth*. Here she suggests four headings for discussing Teilhard’s major ideas on religion: (1) The historical multiplicity of human religious experience, (2) The present religious situation of mankind, (3) The necessary integration of two types of faith, and (4) The role of religion in shaping the future. In exploring these categories she marks a divide in Teilhard’s thought between the “static” religions of the past and the “dynamic” religions necessary for the future. She explains that Teilhard is calling for “a new religion full of ‘dynamics’ and ‘conquests,’ a religion that can utilize all the ‘free energy’ of the earth to build humankind into greater unity.”

This is not to say that we are to abandon the religions of the past or that Teilhard was advocating for a post-Christian creed. Instead, he felt that contemporary humanity had come to worship the world; a world better understood by science and a world experienced in a process of becoming, accelerated by human aspirations. This new religious feeling is at odds with traditional worship of a transcendent God but “Teilhard thought that there might be a remedy to this situation… in a wider conception of the Christian faith, a faith that would truly incorporate

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113 Ibid., 105.
the values of the world and animate human beings in their search for the future.”¹¹⁴ The dynamism of the new religion must be a dynamism in response to human needs.

By emphasizing the divide between dynamic and static religious tendencies in Teilhard’s thought, King’s analysis has a different tenor than Zaehner’s. She speaks to this directly, “R. C. Zaehner has remarked that Teilhard’s position represents an essentially Christian mysticism—a mysticism of affirmation and solidarity as against a mysticism of negation and isolation. It would perhaps be more apt to interpret Teilhard’s all-embracing vision from a wider perspective as related to an extrovertive or outward-looking rather than an introvertive or inward-looking type of mystical experience.”¹¹⁵ It is not just that Teilhard’s understanding of religion is linked with his predictions of convergence or that certain religious structures seem more apt to support convergence in an organizational sense. Instead, and of equal importance for Teilhard, one must also consider the forces animating convergence and how this process accords with the contemporary zeitgeist. King argues that Teilhard foresaw and encouraged a “genuine dialogue between the existing religions, a dialogue that involves existential participation, leading to the mutual enrichment of the various religious traditions.”¹¹⁶ In this way, the dynamic elements of the world religions do not form a static category by which religions are to be ranked. Dynamism is instead a tendency toward becoming, a mechanism for reaching out, groping (tâtonnement) toward the future.

In the eighth chapter of The Spirit of One Earth, Ursula King provides some of the only research and analysis on Teilhard’s contribution to the World Congress of Faiths, an early

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 109.
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 117.
¹¹⁶ Ibid.
organizing force for interreligious dialogue. As the author of the most recent biography of Teilhard, King has made the effort to situate his work historically. This is an important contribution since several of his posthumously published essays were originally written in response to specific requests from his friends and colleagues. In the case of the French branch of the World Congress of Faiths, Teilhard wrote the inaugural address and made five additional contributions including his transcribed participation in a discussion session.¹¹⁷ Many important aspects of Teilhard’s thought were developed and refined in these contributions and, therefore, in the midst of ongoing conversations with scholars in the history of religions and representatives from non-Christian traditions. King reports, “The council members of the French branch included, among others, an Iranian Sufi, a Confucian, the Hindu Swami Siddheswarananda from the Ramakrishna Mission, and the French philosophers Etienne Gilson, Gabriel Marcel, and Edouard Le Roy.”¹¹⁸ Establishing this context is critical since it demonstrates Teilhard’s practical support for interreligious dialogue and provides some evidence for King’s contention that Teilhard’s mysticism “feeds back into social action.”¹¹⁹

Ursula King’s most extensive book is *Teilhard and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World*, a 2011 revision of her *Toward a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions* published in 1980. The emphasis on eastern religions is connected with Teilhard’s biography as he spent three years teaching in Egypt during the regency portion of his Jesuit novitiate and many more years living and conducting scientific research in Asia, especially China, after 1923. King opens her book with an overview of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 141.
¹¹⁸ Ibid., 136.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 131.
Teilhard’s thought and then moves into a kind of focused intellectual biography where Teilhard’s reading and direct experiences with eastern religions are described as an “ongoing quest” throughout the second half of his life.\textsuperscript{120} Because of Teilhard’s own insistence on the importance of “seeing,” King feels justified in claiming that Teilhard acquired a knowledge of eastern religions through exposure.\textsuperscript{121} She makes a convincing argument from primary sources for the strong personal impact of Teilhard’s time in Asia and for his frequent consultation of books and scholars on the topic of eastern religions. She is less convincing when writing, “Without the experience of the East, it is certain that his thought would not have developed in the way it did” since it is difficult to prove a counterfactual. Ultimately she is arguing that themes supportive of universality and interreligious dialogue in Teilhardian thought are grounded not just in his reflections on evolution but also on real-life exposure to non-Christian traditions. This is certainly possible and Teilhard did write comparatively on eastern and western traditions, focusing particularly on different renderings of a key dichotomy he perceived between eastern and western mysticism.

The second half of \textit{Teilhard and Eastern Religions} explores the ways in which Teilhard distinguished between different types of mysticism with emphasis on his east-west dichotomy. If we can imagine both human evolutionary progress and mystical undertakings as a cone, then unity can be found either at the base or the point. At the base, this is the unity of relaxation and the dissolution of difference. At the top is a different sort of unity, one of maximal differentiation. King provides a list of citations from Teilhard and traces out how in some places this distinction is described as one between East and West: “an Eastern solution” and a “Western

\textsuperscript{120} King, \textit{Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World}, 92-107.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 3.
solution,” the “road of the East” and the “road of the West,” the “Eastern ineffable of relaxation” and the Christian “ineffable of tension.” In other citations the approaches are not localized: “union of dissolution” versus “union by differentiation,” for instance.\(^{122}\) In this way Teilhard does not conceive of these two spiritual orientations exclusively in terms of historical-geographic designations. Further, King stresses that Teilhard’s “road of the west” is still to come, it does not represent Christianity as it has been but Christianity as it could be. She writes, “… neither the ‘road of the East’ nor ‘the road of the West’ can be fully equated with any particular religious tradition; each indicates a major spiritual orientation present in both eastern and western traditions.”\(^{123}\) King’s argument, with supporting citation from Teilhard biographer Claude Cuénot, is that Teilhard’s thinking in terms of “Eastern” and “Western” mysticism is not meant to provide a ranking of religious traditions so that one comes out inevitably and ultimately superior to others. This seems correct in the sense that ranking religious traditions in such a way would be to operate in static categories rather than dynamic concepts, a method antithetical to Teilhard’s overall system. On the other hand, Teilhard seems perfectly willing to rank religions at a given moment and writes of dynamic trends in Islam as a “convergence toward Christianity.”\(^{124}\)

In *Teilhard de Chardin and Our Time*, Amal Kiran (also known as K. D. Sethna) works out a comparison between Teilhard and the “Vedantic vision” of Sri Aurobindo. One of Sri Aurobindo’s earliest disciples, Kiran’s comparison emerges out of a decades-long interest in both thinkers and a portion of its text comes from articles written for *Mother India*, a magazine

\(^{122}\) Ibid., 146.

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 149.

produced by Aurobindo’s ashram, in the 1970s. Stressing themes of panpsychism and spiritual evolution in Teilhard, Kiran claims, Teilhardian thought “is really Indianised Christianity as modified and modernised by his brilliant many-faceted reading of biological fact.”

Kiran’s thesis is that Teilhard was in many ways a mystery to himself because he did not realize the parallels between his thought and original Vedanta. Teilhard’s reduction of “eastern religions” to self-annihilation and his commitments to the Roman Catholic Church blinded him to the true nature of his ideas. Well-cited and well-argued, this is a fascinating book but it is difficult to accept an argument dependent on the supposition that Teilhard himself was profoundly confused about his own ideas. Kiran does not imagine a Teilhard who slipped into unorthodox statements here and there, he imagines a Teilhard who is completely separated from traditional Christianity and far closer to Hindu philosophy therefore.

Anne Hunt Overzee’s *The Body Divine: The Symbol of the Body in the Works of Teilhard de Chardin and Rāmānuja* is a thematically focused and comparative study of Teilhard first developed as her dissertation. She describes her approach as “quite simple,” writing,

"In part I I look at the ‘lineages’ of the divine body in the religious traditions of Teilhard de Chardin and Rāmānuja respectively, and show how each thinker understood and used the divine body within the context of his own theological understanding. In Part II I bring my findings together and explore the structures of consciousness the divine body symbol reveals in the writings of both… and the functions those structures serve in their respective worldviews."

She rightly locates historical precursors for Teilhard’s Christology in Colossians 1:17 and Origen’s description of the universe as a giant organism. She also offers brief treatments of

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125 Kiran, *Teilhard de Chardin and Our Time*, 92.
126 Ibid., 343.
128 Ibid., xiii-xiv.
Aquinas and Newman to demonstrate that Teilhard’s thought is grounded in tradition even as it drew on evolutionary theory to confront contemporary concerns. In the same way, Rāmānuja’s depiction of the body of Brahman is a synthesis of traditional sources, i.e. the Vedas, Vedic commentaries, and his own scholarly lineage.

In the second portion of her book, Hunt Overzee develops an interesting comparison between Teilhard and Rāmānuja by identifying shared metaphoric functions of the “divine body”: the divine body as model of the integration of consciousness and the divine body as model for the transformation of consciousness. She parses this more closely by describing the divine body as: “key to divine-world unity,” “key to divine personhood,” and “key to self-knowledge” with both ontological and epistemological functions. The centrality of the divine body in each thinker is the basis for comparison; it is a “root metaphor,” “this is a metaphor which has become dominant within its contextual usage to the extent that other interpretative perspectives of reality have become subordinate to it.” Her approach acknowledges differences between her two subjects while stressing the insights available from what she calls “fundamental similarities.” There is much to be lauded in this approach; Hunt Overzee organizes the disparate complexity of Teilhard in such a way that she is able to talk about his understanding of the divine body clearly and coherently enough to inform her comparison. This is no small task. At the same time, I have some hesitations about her use of the word “metaphor.” There is nothing of untruth implied by the word “metaphor,” but Teilhard is quite adamant about the phenomenal reality of his system. When Teilhard writes about the formation of the noosphere

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129 Ibid., 11-29.
130 Ibid., 30-44.
131 Ibid., 88.
132 Ibid., 151.
as comparable to the formation of the first multi-cellular organisms, has he really made a leap from observable phenomenon to metaphor? Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he has moved from the observed to the not-yet-observed, or that he has moved from the “without” of things to speak of the “within.” As he puts it in *The Human Phenomenon*, “This is no metaphor—and far more than poetry.”

In the final two pages of her book, Hunt Overzee makes a fascinating but all-too-brief observation about the implications of a divine body model of the cosmos on the relationship among religious traditions. She writes,

> If the cosmos is an inter-related whole, then we are unquestionably linked to those of very different worldviews and spiritual practices from our own, and equally indeed to those who are atheistic in outlook. Is it possible, in this context, to look at any one religious tradition as being in the sole possession of ‘the truth’, or indeed for a ‘family’ of traditions to be sole interpreters of the human experience?\(^\text{134}\)

For Hunt Overzee, the divine body model is paradigmatic, it is larger than Teilhard and Rāmānuja and carries implications for contemporary theological discourse and understanding. The implication is that she, like Ursula King, would agree there is more work to be done on Teilhardian thought in relation to religion, religions, and interreligious dialogue. This work must include the divine body model and the corresponding interrelatedness of the cosmos but there are relevant portions of Teilhard’s thought stretching well beyond these aspects.

In 2015, Bede Benjamin Bidlack published a thematically similar study, *In Good Company: The Body and Divinization in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ and Daoist Xiao*

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Yingsou.\textsuperscript{135} This work, again comparing thinkers from different traditions and centuries apart, first presents their context and thought separately to avoid “the possibility of conflating or obscuring their theologies.”\textsuperscript{136} Bidlack then puts the two in conversation in an effort to “destabilize Teilhard’s category of body to expand his theology.”\textsuperscript{137} In particular, a core thesis of the book is that Xiao Yingsou’s work offers a more nuanced set of categories for the varying sorts of physicality in varied sorts of bodies such that the different levels of Teilhard’s thought between the individual and the Cosmic Christ can be more carefully parsed. This work is both creative and successful in its explication of Teilhard using non-Christian categories and it captures something of the spirit of Teilhardian convergence in its effort to bring two traditions together without compromising their individual identities. Bidlack is aware of this element of his work when he writes, “By proposing a \textit{mutually} relational model of body, soul, and cosmos, the present work seeks to motivate a healing of relationships between God, cosmos, others, and self.”\textsuperscript{138} If his work is a herald for similar studies to come, then the future is indeed bright for Teilhard studies but such work needs a solid foundation built up from the breadth of Teilhard’s own writing if it is to reach its full potential.

On May 14, 2016 the annual meeting of the American Teilhard Association included the lecture “Teilhard de Chardin and World Religions: Ultra Catholic or Ultra Human?” by Ilia Delio, OSF. Well attended with at least one hundred audience members, the event suggests there remains a strong core of American interest in Teilhard to build on. The topic of the lecture is

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 150.
asking whether or not Teilhard’s view of religion includes an overarching sense of Catholic Christian superiority. An advertisement for the event claims, “The position of Teilhard with regard to world religions still evokes a perception of hostility or rejection of other religions because of his Catholic beliefs.” This is a perception based on Teilhard’s own writing since he is often hard on non-Christian religions with a tendency to offer unfair descriptions of their beliefs. As previously mentioned, this is especially egregious in the case of eastern religions since Teilhard lived in China for years without becoming better acquainted with these traditions. Delio builds on Ursula King’s work to offer a defense of Teilhard by way of an explanation of his overall view. She rightly points out the cosmic dimensions of the Teilhardian vantage point and compares his view to that of the Apollo Shuttle. She did not say it, but perhaps she also had in mind the famous “Blue Marble” photograph of Earth taken by Apollo 17 in 1972. From such a perspective, religion is not about the salvation of an individual but rather about the destiny of all humanity, hence “ultra-human.”

According to Delio, religion for Teilhard is the biological counterpart to an evolutionary drive. It ought to drive progress. Christianity, then, is not normative for religion, it is normative of evolution in that it has a share in the responsibility to lead humanity toward the future. In terms of interreligious relationships, this leadership must come from a place of kenosis because Christianity does not fully encompass the core evolutionary energy of the cosmos. As Bede Bidlack suggested during the question and answer session, this approach is comparable to what we find in Nostra Aetate. Delio insists that interreligious encounter must be more than just the comparison and explanation of differing spiritual or liturgical practices. Instead, such encounter

ought to drive progress by driving political and social change. Delio shares in the same spirit of optimism expressed by Teilhard himself and her interpretations of his work are solid because, like King, she is so well-versed in the whole of his *oeuvre*. At the same time, her lecture may focus too much on the “ultra-human” aspects of his thought since it seems difficult to follow her suggestion that everything Christocentric or seemingly “ultra-Catholic” in Teilhard is resolved by the cosmic dimensions of his universal Christ. In other words, she is arguing that the Christ for Teilhard is not to be thought of as in the possession of a particular human religion; not unlike King’s suggestion that the “road of the west” indicates something that “could be” rather than something already extant. Additionally, Delio notes Teilhard’s commitment to science and progress. Does this at the same time mean that the world’s religions can be evaluated in regard to how much they share in these same commitments? Delio’s generous reading of Teilhard is open to the same critiques answering the work of Ursula King she is building on. At the very least, a plain reading makes it seem that certain religious perspectives, those that are decisively anti-scientific or anti-progress, are geared toward conflict rather than convergence with the Teilhardian vision.

In the authors who have written previously on the topic of Teilhard and non-Christian religions we can identify four distinct perspectives. First, in the earliest English writing on the subject by R. C. Zaehner we find Teilhard’s thought used as a means of apologetics against secular, atheist, and Marxist ideas. While this might be a reflection on the fact of pluralism, it is not a commentary on the implications of interreligious association except that this approach was and could still be used to mount a defense of both the religious worldview conceptually and

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the Christian worldview in particular. In other words, taking Teilhard as a *fidei defensor*, any *fides*, could create a common ground across denominational boundaries. This was the explicit editorial goal of the book series which published Zaehner’s *Matter and Spirit*. A second perspective, also employed by Zaehner, uses Teilhardian thought to rank religions or civilizations against each other in mostly static terms. In this way Teilhard’s ideas are used to designate markers of the religions and cultures best attuned to anthropogenesis, which is to say, the best religions and cultures. A third perspective employs an approach better aligned with current practices in the field of comparative religions; the most recent and sophisticated treatments are found in Hunt Overzee and Bidlack’s efforts to analyze Teilhard’s development or *ressourcement* of the divine body through comparison with non-Christian perspectives on the same theme. A fourth perspective, expressed most fully in Ursula King’s work with very recent extensions by Ilia Delio, views Teilhard as an early supporter of interreligious dialogue in a globalized world with respect toward religions as dynamic entities. For King and Delio, this is a perspective attentive to the historical record and the most accurate interpretation of Teilhard’s overall approach. They are suggesting comparative studies of Teilhard ought to foster interreligious dialogue and engagement toward building a better future.

There are two key problems in the previous literature on Teilhard and non-Christian religions. The first is that the majority of the authors surveyed do not reference the breadth of Teilhard’s work and focus primarily or even exclusively on his two books, *The Human Phenomenon* and *The Divine Milieu*. This may be excusable in that the earliest citations above appeared before Teilhard’s work was widely available in English or that individual theses, those concerning the divine body for instance, are supportable without bringing in the full range of
Teilhard’s thought on the subject of religion. The second problem, however, is that certain terminology has been used in relation to Teilhard without a full investigation of what he himself meant by such words, for example: “religion,” “mysticism,” and “spiritual.” On this latter topic, I believe Ursula King and Ilia Delio’s work provides the most thorough effort thus far on documenting Teilhard’s understanding of religion with attention to the spirit of his thought. This is not to say that their conclusions are unassailable and there is certainly more work to be done. It is, however, unsurprising that King, Teilhard’s most recent biographer, sets the standard for a comparatively high degree of fluency in his work and emphasizes the need to reflect on his writing in situ prior to extrapolation. For these reasons, this project is greatly indebted to Ursula King’s prior work.

**Teilhard and Islam**

Teilhard was first introduced to Islam and Muslims during his three-year tenure as a secondary school teacher at the Collège de la Sainte Famille in Cairo from 1905-1908. Founded in 1879 during the papacy of Leo XIII, the school continues to operate today. Teilhard was between 23 and 25 years old at the time. Henri de Lubac lists his official duties: “lecturer in physics and chemistry,” “museum curator,” and “assistant to the church administrator.”141 Teilhard was tasked with preparing his students for important examinations; a passing result would almost guarantee employment from the state. A thoughtful and conscientious teacher, Teilhard was evidently well-liked by his students and often visited with them during his travels around the city and country. He also had the amusing chore of making the daily rounds with the school van through the city streets. We have a solid rendition of his interests and activities during

these years through the collected volume of sixty-eight letters sent home to his family. As de Lubac notes in his preface to the edition, we can already see in these letters the developing literary talent found later in Teilhard’s wartime writing. We find many examples of Teilhard’s curiosity but he was “infinitely more concerned with science than with literature” and “he took a keener interest in observing nature than in observing society.” This must be factored in during appraisal of Teilhard’s harsh judgments on Islam later in life. Youth notwithstanding, Teilhard knew Muslims and saw Islam lived out with sincerity and variety. He ought to have learned more than he did and measured his critiques with deeper reflection. Reading the letters in their entirety, one gets a sense of Teilhard’s appreciation for the culture around him warring against or even overpowering sentiments and comments more colonialist and outright dismissive. Looking just at the letters, the resulting portrait of Teilhard and Islam, or “Teilhard on Islam,” is ambiguous.

Teilhard himself is quite clear about his primary focus on the natural sciences during his Cairo period. He writes his parents enthusiastically about his findings in the field: fish teeth and caterpillars, urchins and buprestidae. Writing of pottery fragments, he notes that his friend, Father Bovier-Lapierre, “is much more enthusiastic about these things than I am, and I enjoy his excitement when we come across a fragment of marble adorned with Kufic (ancient Arabic) lettering.” After a first visit to the “big Maspero museum,” he indicates a willingness to

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145 Meaning the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, also called the Egyptian Museum or Museum of Cairo. Once headed by the Frenchman Gaston Maspero, it was moved to its present location in Tahrir Square just a few years before Teilhard’s arrival.
return often to admire the Egyptian antiquities even though archaeology is not his “special line.” Teilhard laments, “the absence of any picture of some kind of life renders this whole accumulation of beautiful things lusterless, especially in a city which possesses the Egyptian museum.”

Still, Teilhard made some effort to develop a knowledge of Islamic culture in broad terms. He mentions several books on culture and describes visits to several mosques, both active and in ruins: “El-Akhim, the mosque with the bats,” Ibn Tulun, and “the old mosque of Amru.”

From his initial sea voyage, Teilhard complains of his inability to understand Arabic, “The foreign element definitely preponderates, and it irks me, as I cross the deck, to hear at least three or four languages being spoken of which I know none.” In a subsequent letter he offers this troublesome passage,

> These Orientals are big children, and I cannot forgive myself for not knowing Arabic; it would be so easy to make friends with them, and I am convinced that most of the prejudices come from the fact that we continually confront one another like statues, absolutely isolated from one another for lack of a common tongue. These people are good-hearted, and it would be easy to do them good, because they are simple and little used to being treated with consideration.

Over a year later, Teilhard laments once more that his “Arabic studies are only an ideal,” further commenting,

> I have hardly any time for them, and very few opportunities. I regret it sorely; Arabs are very happy when one talks to them, and apart from the very useful information one can

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147 Ibid., 155.
148 I believe he is referring to the Al-Hakim Mosque named after Al-Hākim bi-Amr Allāh, founded in 928 and entirely renovated nearly a thousand years later in 1980.
149 The Mosque of Amr ibn al-As, the first mosque established in Egypt by the general of Caliph Umar’s army in that region during its initial conquest.
150 Ibid., 16.
151 Ibid., 89.
get from them, they welcome it when one chats with them about moral, and even religious truths.  

It is impossible to make the claim with any confidence, but it is tempting to say that Teilhard had retained his desire to establish a connection with the local community while eschewing some of his paternalism after a year in Egypt. At least this might have been true for the window of time in which the letter was written. During the following year he revisits the point, “Every child here speaks at least three languages. I am sorry not to have had an Arab nurse.”

Teilhard makes few observations about Islam during his Cairo years; many of his statements view the religion as either a curiosity or regressive cultural force. In some of his first letters he says of Arabs in general, “On the whole, they seem to be a good folk.” And, “These Arabs really have an incomparably dignified bearing.” He twice mentions funerary customs, particularly the great outpourings of grief—“piercing shrieks.” On what was perhaps his first occasion observing Muslims at prayer he notes that they were facing Mecca, “the direction of which is carefully located.”

He writes to his parents of Ramadan each year: its sights, sounds, and smells. But he makes no comment on any connected piety except to say, “This penitential season appears, nevertheless, to cause them great jubilation.” In a telling comment, he writes, “Cairo remains completely Arab in spite of the civilization which has established itself alongside the ancient customs.” After describing the return of pilgrims from Mecca, he asks, “What do

\[\text{\tiny 152 Ibid., 196.}\]  
\[\text{\tiny 153 Ibid., 225.}\]  
\[\text{\tiny 154 Ibid., 16.}\]  
\[\text{\tiny 155 Ibid., 20.}\]  
\[\text{\tiny 156 Ibid., 104.}\]  
\[\text{\tiny 157 Ibid., 21.}\]  
\[\text{\tiny 158 Ibid., 46.}\]  
\[\text{\tiny 159 Ibid., 30.}\]
you think of a country which crystalizes customs we have already forgotten, and at the same time retains agricultural methods which have not changed by one jot since the days of the Pharaohs?”

But there is a hint of nostalgia when Teilhard refers to forgotten customs. Following a vivid description of the same pilgrimage event in the following year he writes, “The touching part of the ceremony is to see the natives crowding around the holy man returned from Mecca to kiss his hands; there is something very religious and very noble about it.”¹⁶⁰ This is the high-water mark for Teilhard’s appreciation of Islam while in Cairo. In a letter written almost halfway through his stay, Teilhard draws a connection between Islam and anti-modern tendencies. Upon seeing some Muslims drinking liquor, he comments, “I find it very excusable, for if they had to follow all the prescriptions of the Koran, they could really hardly live a modern life.”¹⁶¹ This same sentiment informs much of what Teilhard has to say about Islam decades later.

Writing in Peking in 1933, Teilhard explains his views on the source and purpose of religion. In response to the secularization theses of the nineteenth century, he insists that religion remains essential and has not been outgrown in the course of human progress. For Teilhard, religion is, in fact, intimately linked with progress. Before the advent of humanity, all of vital energy was taken up with survival and reproduction. But the human being “exceeds the work required by his animality.” Through cleverness and invention, humanity generates an “ocean of free energy.”¹⁶² Religion, functionally, is the necessary counterpart for this energy. It provides “a dominating principle of order, and an axis of movement, into the restless and undisciplined multitude of reflective atoms: something of supreme value, to create, to hold in awe, or to

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 153.
¹⁶¹ Ibid., 174.
Here, perhaps, we see something of the same Teilhard who recognized the potential power of humanity when observing troop movements during the war. Religion, for Teilhard, is not a source for easy answers or a means to alleviating tension and anxiety; religion drives the human spirit for progress and keeps it rightly ordered toward the divine. Teilhard writes, “The West has overthrown many idols. But, by its discovery of the dimensions and forward momentum of the universe, it has set in motion a powerful mysticism.” This is a mysticism characterized by a sense of cosmic immensity and a sense of presence in its fulfillment. For Teilhard, the universe must be moving toward something, or rather, some One—whom he elsewhere refers to as the Omega Point, i.e. Christ. To think otherwise would be to give the entire course of evolution over to chance and absurdity. Religion, therefore, is a means to direct our energy toward this Omega Point while also learning what we can of his true nature, the nature of human progress, and how to direct our worship.

With this understanding of religion in the broadest sense established, Teilhard is able to pass judgment on its particular forms. He titles this section “Religions put to the test” or “L’épreuve des religions” in French. Ursula King thinks one gets a better sense of the “trial situation” in the original language, it calls to mind the judicial ordeals of the medieval period. Giving one paragraph to Islam, Teilhard critiques it as otherworldly. Presumably, he is here concerned especially with his understanding of its mystical tradition. He later critiques the “mysticism of the east” for seeking unity through passivity and the withdrawal from things,

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163 Ibid., 99.
164 Ibid., 103.
165 I echo Teilhard’s tendency to use the male pronoun here while acknowledging a common difficulty of our gendered language; this Omega Point or Cosmic Christ is associated with the male figure found in scripture and yet far exceeds notions of male and female.
whereas “true human mysticism, born in the west” looks for unity by building up the world toward universal convergence.\textsuperscript{167} He acknowledges, “Islam has retained the idea of the existence and greatness of God.” But he follows this by claiming, “Islam has achieved the extraordinary feat of making this God as ineffective and sterile as a non-being for all that concerns the knowledge and betterment of the world.” He calls Islam a “principle of fixation and stagnation.”\textsuperscript{168} This is essentially an extension of the same opinions he had formed while in Egypt twenty-five years prior.

Teilhard looks to religion as a means to channel a sense of divine purpose and organize human energy toward progress. In his view “eastern Mysticism,” Islam included, champions the negation of the world and is indifferent to progress. “Western mysticism” and Christianity are the real current of both divinity and humanity’s future. With this approach, one might infer a causal relationship between a religious tradition and the economic and scientific progress of a society. In other words, Christianity and the “mysticism of the West” must represent the best of religion because they are attached to the societies which have made the most technological progress. They are the religions of the colonizers and not the colonized and the notion is reminiscent of ancient societies at war, in part, to prove the superiority of one god over another. This harshness in Teilhard is elsewhere attenuated and both King and Delio make a valiant effort to read his work against itself on this point, but the bare text remains. It cannot be shied away from. Teilhard writes that “Allah of the Koran . . . could never attract the effort of any truly civilised man.” And yet, Teilhard also acknowledges the possibility of renaissance and reform in Islam already “coming about in a group of high-minded thinkers alive to modern

\textsuperscript{167} Teilhard de Chardin, “Christianity in the World,” 105–6. 
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 104–5.
requirements.”

It is possible he had Iqbal in mind when he wrote this. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* was written three years before Teilhard wrote his essay on “Christianity in the World” and he was a voracious reader. But Teilhard’s positive outlook on Islamic reform is still decisively Christocentric; he calls such efforts a convergence toward Christianity. This is a strange position since he later makes it clear that different religions have led the forward charge of progress, the divinization of the world, at different times. Could Islam not overtake Christianity? Could they compete for the title? Could they be typologically recast into the same phylum and lead together? For Teilhard, the answer is no. Other religions must form up on Christianity, converge upon Christianity, and take part in Christianity as a “religion of action,” “faithfully extended to its utmost limit.” And so we have Teilhard’s two visions for the future of Islam: stagnation or Christianization. This is the difficulty with looking to the dynamism of religions as a Teilhardian solution to the Teilhardian problem here—the dynamism still leads to Christianity.

There are only three essays and no monographs reflecting exclusively or even substantively on Teilhardian themes and Islam. “Orient et Occident,” a 1963 French-language article by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, focuses on points of resonance between Teilhard’s thought and that of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). The second item barely warrants mentioning. In a 1969 edition of the French Catholic newspaper *La Croix, the homme politique Georges Le Brun Keris* affirms Teilhard’s most negative judgments concerning Islamic stagnation and adds a few of his own in a two-page editorial. The third article on Teilhard and

169 Ibid., 105.
170 Ibid., 112.
Islam was written by none other than W. Montgomery Watt, the famous orientalist perhaps best known for his biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Watt’s “Christianity and Islam in Teilhardian Perspective” appeared in a 1972 issue of The Teilhard Review, a publication produced for many years by the British Teilhard Association. Watt himself was the chairman of the Edinburgh branch of the Teilhard Centre, as the British Association was then known. His article is concerned with analyzing cultural evolution and history, particularly in regard to Christian-Muslim relations, in a Teilhardian perspective. Watt first makes a distinction between two kinds of survival for a community: organic continuity, meaning that the entity still exists, and technical continuity, meaning that an idea or technique of a collective has passed on, e.g. the passage of Ancient Greek culture into Western European. Watt goes on to create a brief Teilhardian philosophy of history wherein the awareness of God’s special role for Israel is akin to awareness of the forward thrust of radial energy in the evolutionary process. He writes, “This is the world into which Jesus came. The main axis of anthropogenesis must be regarded as passing through him, since mankind has reached a new stage of consciousness, namely, the consciousness of the possibility of being wholly united with the radial energy which directs the evolutionary process.” The early Christian struggle for survival and ultimate ascendancy as a religion of empire is also cast in evolutionary terms and with this understanding, Watt can examine the coming of Islam.

The replacement of Christianity by Islam in the seventh-century Middle East is a sign of Christianity’s close association with the Greco-Roman world and failure to appeal to the

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174 Ibid., 83.
“contemporary needs of these oriental peoples.”\textsuperscript{175} Watt is not explicit on the subject but this does seem to be an especially Teilhardian perspective since he too was concerned with the degree of correspondence between religious thought and human needs in a particular historical moment. The peoples of Arabia were “frustrated and their energies dammed back” until the coming of the Prophet Muhammad who had “inner promptings” caused by an “awareness of the forward thrust of radial energy.”\textsuperscript{176} Considering the rapid expansion of Islam and the cultural development of the Islamic Golden Age centered on the Abbasid caliphate in Bagdad, Watt argues “it is difficult to resist the conclusion that from about 660 until 1100 or later the principal axis of anthropogenesis was passing through the Islamic world.”\textsuperscript{177} Reflecting on conflicts during the Reconquista and Crusades, Watt argues that Europeans ultimately became more willing to learn from Muslims but still regarded Islam as a threat to their own identity while failing to offer any means to alleviate the “justified dissatisfaction of the Orientals which had led to the rise of Islam.”\textsuperscript{178} From here, Watt traces his evolutionary thread through the rise of European technological power to the developing post-Colonial milieu of the 1970s. He argues that this situation is not unlike that of the 600s except that “with the improvement of communications, the world is now closely interrelated.”\textsuperscript{179} This could imply that there is better opportunity for convergence in the present situation but Watt seems to put his emphasis on forecasts of a renewed struggle for survival with Catholicism and Islam standing as the most successful representatives of the monotheistic genus. By shifting the emphasis in this way, the

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
article puts evolutionary theory in service to an early draft of the “clash of civilizations” thesis. Watt’s article is brief and it strikes the reader as a lightly-sketched point of view rather than a definitive treatment. His conclusion acknowledges the importance of synthesis in Teilhardian thought, but Watt also emphasizes “struggle” to a degree that shows the shadow side of convergence. In other words, a convergence of Islam toward Christianity on these terms would necessarily eliminate a wide array of ideas and cultural practices. This may not, however, be an entirely faithful reading of Teilhard who seems to downplay cultural conflict. It could be added, furthermore, that much of Teilhard can be read as a description of what is rather than what ought to be. Perhaps there is nothing necessarily prescriptive in Watt’s characterization of religions as engaged in an evolutionary struggle but the leap from is to ought on the part of interested readers may be quite short indeed.

Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch (1909-1999) was a prolific translator and author on topics related to Islam who converted to the faith herself after discovering Muhammad Iqbal and Rumi. She speaks briefly of both Iqbal and Teilhard in biographical interviews published in French as *Islam, autre visage*. Here she asserts that Iqbal knew Teilhard personally and emphasizes their shared belief in human progress and the maxim that everything that rises converges toward “la soumission à Dieu.” Her article “Orient et Occident” is the only sustained comparison between Teilhard and a Muslim thinker that I am aware of. Arguing a basis for comparison, Meyerovitch cites an affinity between two thinkers who share the “same intensity and sincerity of religious sentiment connected with the universal, not through reductive syncretism, but from within

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tradition distinct for the acceptance of its orthodoxy, and lived in its plenitude.”183 She goes on to identify their shared sense of the modern human predicament, “the desolation of man in the twentieth century within a universe where he feels isolated and lost” and the need for a humanism marked by a “change of optics that must be made;” to use Iqbal’s words, “a consideration of man ‘not as the static center of the world, as has been long believed, but as the axis and arrow of evolution— which is much more beautiful.’”184 Significantly, Meyerovitch identifies a core similarity in how the thinkers view the relationship of matter and spirit. Iqbal regarding the human “corps-âme-esprit” as a unit and Teilhard writing that with matter and spirit “l’un ne vas pas sans l’autre.”185 On the other hand, a Christian and Muslim thinker cannot agree on all things and Meyerovitch does not shy away from this fact. She explains that for Teilhard the evolution of the universe is “dans le verbe incarné, par Lui, avec Lui” and for the Muslim this is “impensable.”186 This important caveat notwithstanding, Meyerovitch’s overall thesis concerning the shared vision of the future between Teilhard and Iqbal is compelling. As noted above, it is certainly possible if not likely that Teilhard would have considered Iqbal one of the Muslim reformers who tempered his disapproval of Islam.

**Muhammad Iqbal (1877 – 1938)**

Muhammad Iqbal was born in Sialkot, a city in the north-east of the Punjab Region of what was then British India. The city population has been predominantly Muslim for centuries and strongly supported both the All-India Muslim League and the Pakistan Movement. Iqbal’s grandfather had moved to Sialkot “not long after 1857” as part of a mass migration of Muslims

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184 Ibid.
185 Ibid., 58-59.
186 Ibid., 67.
escaping persecution in the Kashmir region after the British had established dynastic rule and the
title of maharaja on the Dogra leader Gulab Singh. Iqbal maintained a great attachment to this
ancestral homeland and he writes of both Kashmir and his Brahmin forbears in his poetry. Praised for his mastery of elegiac verse in form and substance, Iqbal mourns for his family’s homeland:

Known once on polished lips as Little Persia,
Downtrodden and penniless is Kashmir now;
A burning sigh breaks from the Heavens, to see
Their children crouch in awe of tyrant lords.

There was a melancholy note in Iqbal’s character throughout his life; Muhammad Daud Rahbar calls him “a sad soul,” especially when considering “the problems of the poverty-stricken Orient, of which the disunited Muslim world is a part.” But he was also known for his sense of humor, and fortitude; “the spiritual courage and faith which conquer doubts and darkness.”

Iqbal’s parents raised him in a “profoundly Islamic environment.” His mother, Imam Bibi, was a devout woman, described by the scholar Hafeez Malik as possessing “a deep consciousness of imān (belief) and ihsān (right-doing).” The importance of motherhood and the mother as a source of piety in Islam is difficult to overstate. A popular saying of the Prophet

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192 Rahbar, 45–48.
194 Malik, “Iqbal, Muhammad.”
asserts that paradise is at the feet of one’s mother.\footnote{Sunan an-Nasa’i, 3104.} Iqbal writes in an elegy for his mother, “In the scroll of existence your life was a golden page. Your life was from beginning to end a lesson in faith and the world.”\footnote{Muhammad Iqbal, “The Call of the Marching Bell,” in \textit{Collected Poetical Works of Iqbal}, trans. D. J. Matthews (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2014), 206.} Like Imam Bibi, Iqbal’s father, Shaikh Nūr Muhammad, did not have a formal education and was probably illiterate.\footnote{Annemarie Schimmel, \textit{Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal} (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 35.} Recognized for his intelligence and wisdom, Iqbal’s father made his living as a tailor and spent his free hours in the company of Sufis. Here it is worth mentioning an old Sufi rejoinder to the ulama, “You have your knowledge from a dead man who had it from a dead man while we had our knowledge from the living one who never dies.”\footnote{Arthur F. Buehler, \textit{Sufi Heirs to the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 6.} Nūr Muhammad held frequent study circles at his home for the discussion of Sufism and “his friends used to call him an \textit{un parh falsafi} (untutored philosopher).”\footnote{Malik, \textit{Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan}, 4.} Despite financial difficulties, Iqbal was enrolled in a Qur’an school at four years old. While the unlettered piety of his parents has its own pride of place, formal religious schooling grounded in the Qur’an is central to the Islamic tradition wherein knowledge carries a nearly numinous quality; knowledge is worship.\footnote{Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., \textit{Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education} (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 4–7; Franz Rosenthal, \textit{Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam} (Leiden: Brill, 1970).} Subsequent schooling and the leisure for study, \textit{otium philosophandi}, became possible through the success of Iqbal’s brother who entered a career as an Army engineer with the help of his father-in-law.

At the Qur’an school, the young Iqbal flourished under the tutelage of Sayyid Mir Hasan who introduced him to classical Persian and Urdu poetry. Decades later, when Iqbal was to be
awarded a knighthood by the British Crown, he insisted Hasan receive an honor as well. When it was pointed out that Hasan had not written any books, Iqbal asserted that he himself was the book. Hasan was awarded the title *Shams al-ʿUlama*. Schimmel notes that Iqbal’s knowledge of Arabic, particularly in his Qur’anic translations, has been critiqued, but it was sufficient for him to teach the subject later in life and Iqbal “still had the right measure of its greatness albeit he had left it because of other occupations.” Iqbal also learned *tafsir* from Sayyid Mir Hasan and established his lifelong love for the Qur’an, which he recited regularly and quoted often in his published work. Receiving what Mustansir Mir calls a “deep religious and mystical orientation” from his parents, Iqbal was advised by his father to “read the Qur’an as if it were being revealed to him direct from God.” This is advice influenced by Sufi practices of mindful reading, or rather, reading with “presence of heart” (*hudur al-qalb*). In her study of classical Sufism, Kristin Zahra Sands recounts the three-tiered reading strategy of Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 899): “first to hear the Qur’an as if the Messenger of God were reciting it to you, then to hear it as if Gabriel were reciting it to the Prophet, and then to hear it as if it were directly from God.” The result of such practice is both “sweet and awesome.” Although the Qur’an is emphatically not poetry, it would serve as an ongoing inspiration for Iqbal’s verse.

Iqbal’s biographers agree on the early recognition of his poetic talent. After learning the mechanics of Urdu and Persian through Sayyid Mir Hassan, Iqbal sought review of his verse from the established poet Nawab Mirza Khan Dāgh, the master of the *ghazal* and “Nightingale of

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206 Qur’an 36:69.
India.” The master was evidently quick to recognize Iqbal’s talent and sent him encouraging words.²⁰⁷ Iqbal began to participate in poetic symposia (musha ‘ara) and other public events in Lahore as a young man just out of college. In this way his work became well known in Urdu literary circles for its aesthetic merit and depth of reflection on a variety of social issues relevant to the Muslim experience in India. In 1915, Iqbal published his Asrār-i Khudi in Persian even though he had begun the work in Urdu. This could signal a deficiency in Urdu from Iqbal’s perspective but Hafeez and Lynda Malik speculate he was searching for a larger audience in the Muslim world.²⁰⁸ It is easy to find glowing and perhaps extravagant praise of Iqbal’s poetry. Translator V. G. Kiernan is more straightforward in noting that Iqbal’s knighthood in 1922 marked him as the “most eminent writer in India.” Kiernan further opines that Iqbal is the “greatest Urdu poet of the century.”²⁰⁹ In translation, the beauty of poetry can appear as if through a glass, darkly; but the extraordinary breadth of Iqbal’s knowledge and commentary is unmistakable and worthy of praise in any tongue.

Through the influence of Sayyid Mir Hasan, Iqbal was also introduced to secular and European education at a young age. A proponent of the Aligarh Movement, and its commitment to making “contemporary European education available to a primarily Muslim public,” Mir Hasan persuaded Iqbal’s father to enroll his son in the Scotch Mission College in Sialkot in 1893.²¹⁰ After two years, his teachers encouraged Iqbal to enter the Government College in the provincial capital of Lahore where he completed a bachelor of arts and a master’s degree in philosophy. These studies included both Arabic and English literature; thus, Iqbal was set upon

²⁰⁷ Mir, Iqbal, 3.
²⁰⁸ Malik, Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan, 18.
the path to becoming a bridge “of understanding between East and West” on the cusp of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{211} At Government College, Iqbal met and befriended Thomas Walker Arnold, the first editor of \textit{The Encyclopedia of Islam} and the author of \textit{The Preaching of Islam}. The latter, first published in 1896, is perhaps best known for its argument that Islam was not, in fact, spread by the sword. Iqbal was cautious in his acceptance of European orientalism, admiring some books and suspicious of intent and effect concerning others. He even (gently) critiqued Arnold for understating historical Muslim efforts to proselytize in India.\textsuperscript{212}

With Arnold’s encouragement, Iqbal traveled west for further studies in 1905. Within three years, he completed a BA at Trinity College, Cambridge, studied law at Lincoln’s Inn before being admitted to the bar, and completed his dissertation at Munich University, \textit{The Development of Metaphysics in Persia}. At Cambridge, Iqbal befriended the orientalist R. A. Nicholson and studied with the philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart. Nicholson would translate Iqbal’s \textit{Asrar-i-Khudi} as \textit{The Secrets of the Self} in 1920. During these years, Iqbal was able to make a firsthand study of western culture. A poem from this period captures some of his judgment:

\begin{quote}
Those Parliaments and their reforms,  
Charters and Bills of Rights—  
The Western pharmacopoeia swarms  
With opiate delights;

That rhetoric of the Senator,  
Flowing in fiery stream—  
God save the mark! The brokers’ war  
Of gold is its true theme.\textsuperscript{213}
\end{quote}

In addition to his other academic merits, Iqbal proved a prodigious student of German and developed a deep and lasting appreciation for Goethe. Of Goethe and Rumi, Iqbal writes, “In paradise that perceptive German happened upon the Master of the East.” Schimmel observes,

> It is indeed remarkable that after the centuries old influence of Persian poetry on Western and especially German thought which culminated in Goethe and Rückert, we have here, for the first time, a genuine attempt of a qualified Eastern poet, endowed with wide knowledge of Western literature and thought, to respond to this poetical movement and enter into a dialogue with Europe.

During this time, Iqbal also made the acquaintance of Atiya Begum Faizee who became a romantic interest and spent some time touring around Germany with him but the relationship did not proceed toward marriage. Iqbal, already the father of two children through an arranged marriage since 1892, would ultimately divorce his first wife and marry twice more. His second wife, Mukhtar Begum, died during childbirth in 1924. His third wife, Sardar Begum, “gave Iqbal love, devotion, and peace of mind” but she too died prematurely at only thirty-seven years old in 1935. She was the mother of Iqbal’s son Javid Iqbal (1924-2015) and Iqbal’s daughter Munira (b. 1930).

In 1908 Iqbal returned from Europe to begin work as an attorney, professor, and poet. He felt compelled by financial circumstances to remain committed to his law practice but came to refuse remuneration for his poetry and “never really aspired to earn more than he actually needed.” Mustansir Mir notes Iqbal’s admiration of *faqr*; literally, poverty, but broadly

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217 Ibid., 26.
conceived as a spiritual or Sufi cultivation of indifference toward wealth and power. Al-Ghazali’s magnum opus, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, contains a chapter on the virtue of poverty. Hafeez and Lynda Malik opine that “the true poet won out at the expense of the professor and the attorney, but not before years of personal turmoil.” On the matter of work and money, his son Javid reports, “Mother’s constant concern was that father did not do any work. I, too, used to wonder what he really did. If anyone asked me about the nature of his occupation, I felt embarrassed.” As soon as he made the move back to the Punjab, Iqbal joined the British Committee of the All-India Muslim League. Minus a short interruption and despite personal discomfort with politics, Iqbal remained associated with this organization for the rest of his life. When elections were introduced in 1926, Iqbal contested and won a seat in the Punjab Legislative Assembly from the Muslim district of Lahore by a wide margin despite a lack of personal campaigning. With a political voice at the national and local levels, Iqbal advocated for Muslim unity but did not involve himself in the gritty details of party maneuvering.

Politically, Iqbal is best known as the philosophical exponent of the two-nation theory and, accordingly, as one of the fathers of Pakistan. For Iqbal, Islam is a powerful centripetal force on its adherents. In his 1930 Presidential Address to the All-India Muslim League, he says of Islam, “It has furnished those basic emotions and loyalties which gradually unify scattered individuals and groups, and finally transform them into a well-defined people, possessing a

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220 Javid Iqbal, “Iqbal: My Father,” in *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia, 1971), 58. Sadly, Javid’s mother died just three days after Iqbal was able to fulfill her wish to move into their own house.  
221 Malik, “Iqbal, Muhammad.”
moral consciousness of their own.”

In an interesting confluence with Teilhard, Iqbal criticizes the west for separating matter and spirit, “Europe uncritically accepted the duality of spirit and matter probably from Manichaean thought.”

He traces a line from this dualistic mistake to the Protestant Reformation and, ultimately, to the containment of religion within the private sphere. For Iqbal, Islam cannot be purely private because its original revelation carried political ramifications. The prophetic experience demands social change; “It is not mere experience in the sense of a purely biological event . . . It is individual experience creative of social order.”

Iqbal is willing to critique and reform Islamic political theory but it must remain an Islamic political theory responsive to the needs of the Muslim community. This is pan-Islamist in the sense of a spiritual and practical, humanitarian unity across nation states but it still allows for and presupposes the existence of individual Muslim states. Indeed, it is nationalism in the sense of privileging the nation state as one’s primary loyalty rather than the existence of individual nation-states that Iqbal criticizes. From Iqbal’s perspective, nationalism is a source of disunity working in support of European interests by pitting Muslims against each other—Islam can be the corrective.

In the context of the Indian subcontinent on the eve of independence, he supported the creation of a separate Muslim state:

I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind, and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire, or without

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223 Ibid., 5.
224 This argument reveals a historical consciousness lacking in Teilhard’s work but it fails to give due consideration to the Peace of Westphalia and the preceding war.
225 Iqbal, Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal, 7–8.
the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.\textsuperscript{228}

In a 1937 letter to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who would become the first Governor-General of Pakistan and is heralded the “Father of the Nation,” Iqbal expressed a similar sentiment:

To my mind the new constitution with its idea of a single Indian federation is completely hopeless. A separate federation of Muslim provinces, reformed on the lines I have suggested above, is the only course by which we can secure a peaceful India and save Muslims from the domination of non-Muslims.\textsuperscript{229}

The Indian Independence Act established the partition of India and Pakistan on August 15, 1947. The first celebration of Independence Day in Pakistan occurred on the preceding day. The mass movement of peoples during the partition was associated with extreme acts of sectarian violence and a death toll approaching two million. The human, moral, and political legacy of this event and its attendant horrors has yet to be determined; the historian William Dalrymple puts it succinctly, “In a sense, 1947 has yet to come to an end.”\textsuperscript{230} But Iqbal never saw how things unfolded, he had died nearly a decade earlier.

Iqbal traveled to England in 1931 and 1932 as an invited participant in the London Round Table Conferences convened to discuss political reform in India.\textsuperscript{231} In 1933 he accepted an invitation from the king of Afghanistan, Muhammad Nādir Shah, to discuss educational reforms aimed at combining western schooling with traditional Islamic subjects.\textsuperscript{232} In 1935, Iqbal was forced to decline an invitation to deliver the Rhodes Memorial Lecture at Oxford since a throat ailment had greatly weakened his voice. Javid Iqbal describes his father as increasingly inactive in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{228}Iqbal, \textit{Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal}, 11.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{229}Malik, \textit{Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan}, 388.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{230}William Dalrymple, “The Great Divide: The Violent Legacy of Indian Partition,” \textit{The New Yorker}, June 29, 2015, \url{http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple}.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{231}Malik, “Iqbal, Muhammad.”}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{232}Malik, \textit{Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan}, 31.}
\end{footnotes}
his last years due to chronic liver trouble and increasingly poor eyesight.\textsuperscript{233} Despite this, he dreamed of writing new books on philosophy and the study of the Qur’an.\textsuperscript{234} Even though Iqbal’s friends and admirers visited him in the evening, he was lonely when they were away and lamented, “I spend the whole of my day lying here as if I were a stranger. No one ever comes and sits with me.” Muhammad Iqbal died while surrounded by his friends and admirers between April 20 and 21, 1938.\textsuperscript{235} Javid Iqbal ends a reflection on the event with one of his father’s verses, “Distinguish men of faith from men of hate, Seek out a man of God for your soul mate.”\textsuperscript{236} In Lahore, a small but beautiful mausoleum serves as his final resting place with some of his own verse recalling \textit{The Farewell Sermon of the Prophet} at the front:

Neither are we Afghans nor Turks,  
nor yet from the lands of Central Asia  
We belong to the garden, and descend from the same ancestors,  
Forbidden unto us are the distinctions of color or race,  
Yes! we are the harvest of a new spring.\textsuperscript{237}

\textbf{Iqbal, Christianity, and Western Thought}

Muhammad Iqbal’s encounter with the west is an important part of his legacy. But it is not just that he lived and studied in Europe but also that he engaged and struggled with western society and western ideas from a position of strength grounded in his own tradition, throughout his life. On both western thought and Christianity, we have a great deal of material from Iqbal; spanning the “stray reflections” recorded in a notebook in 1910, several treatments in his poetry, and a more sustained prose reflection in \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}. Much has been

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
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\item Schimmel, \textit{Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal}, 58.
\item Iqbal, “Iqbal: My Father,” 62.
\item Ibid., 65.
\item Malik, \textit{Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan}, 35; Hafeez and Lynda Malik close their own biographical treatment of Muhammad Iqbal with this same verse.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
written about the influence of western thought on Iqbal, the balance of appreciation and critique of the west in Iqbal’s work, and the fruits of comparison between Iqbal and western thinkers. Syed Abdul Vahid included a chapter on “Iqbal and Western Thought” in *Iqbal: His Art and Thought*, a text first published in Hyderabad-Deccan in 1944. *The Iqbal Review* has published numerous articles on these themes over the past five decades with the majority reflecting on the relationship between Iqbal’s thought and western philosophy as opposed to comparisons with Christianity. Tara Charan Rastogi also published a monograph on the topic of *Western Influence in Iqbal* in 1987. Ultimately, in looking at Iqbal’s appreciation of the west, we find much of the same ambiguity evident in Teilhard’s consideration of Islam and other “eastern religions.” In places, Iqbal is sharply critical. In others, he is sympathetic and affirming. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas called him a bridge between east and west; and bridges are liminal by definition.238

In *Stray Reflections*, Iqbal records an exceedingly disparaging perspective on European Christianity, “I do not include Christ among the world’s revolutionaries, since the movement initiated by him was soon absorbed by pre-Christian paganism. European Christianity seems to me to be nothing more than a feeble translation of ancient paganism in the language of Semitic theology.”239 This is not a new line of polemic from the Islamic perspective. The argument is simple: the pure message of the Prophet Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus) revealed as *al-Injil* (gospel) was distorted (*tahrif*) as a means to achieving reconciliation with the pagan power structure of imperial Rome. Gabriel Reynolds describes a representative example of this thinking from the end of the first millennium in *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ‘Abd al-Jabbar and the Critique*
The Qur’an, by contrast, is safe from such distortions because it was quickly preserved as the direct speech of God. Writing some twenty years later in The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Iqbal provides a more innovative reflection on Christianity, “The great point in Christianity is the search for an independent content for spiritual life which, according to the insight of its founder, could be elevated, not by the forces of a world external to the soul of man, but by the revelation of a new world within his soul.” He goes on to acknowledge Islam’s agreement with this insight while adding, “the illumination of the new world thus revealed is not something foreign to the world of matter but permeates it through and through.”

In short, Iqbal’s critique of Christianity here is quite similar to the critique of Christianity issued by Teilhard; the spiritual life is not separate from the world of matter—matter and spirit are intimately bound together.

The concept of tawhid is essential to understanding Iqbal’s thought. Annemarie Schimmel is correct in writing, “Indeed Iqbal has built his system—as far as we can call it a closed system—upon the principle of ṭauḥīd, the acknowledgment of the absolute uniqueness of God which is reflected in the unity of individual life, and the unity of religio-political groups.” It would be easy to assume that any emphasis on God’s oneness with respect to Christianity is, in fact, a withering critique of Christianity and the Christian understanding of the Trinity. But in The Shape of the Holy, Oleg Grabar makes the case that the 7th-century inscriptions concerning tawhid and the prophethood of Jesus in the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhrah) are a carefully chosen statement of mission and exhortation to the larger Christian population in the region rather than

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242 Schimmel, Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal, 86.
polemic. The building’s architects could have drawn on more censorious verses from the Qur’an had they wanted. Grabar argues that these inscriptions were probably a statement of Muslim identity and vision, part of “an evolving language associated with a Muslim way of expressing thoughts, fears and hopes that are themselves fairly universal” within a Christian milieu. In the same way, Iqbal argues that the individualistic conception of God in the Qur’an is not primarily aimed at denigrating Christianity. Even the phrase, “He begetteth not, and He is not begotten,” has less to do with correcting Christian falsehood and more to do with the Qur’anic desire to “accentuate its own view of a perfect individual.” In this case, Iqbal points out that Bergsonian evolution considers reproduction in opposition to the trend toward individuation and, therefore, the perfect individual does not reproduce.

Iqbal also acknowledges that both Christianity and Islam recognize the organic unity of life. He cites the Qur’an, “And we have created you from one breath of life.” He goes on to claim that while Christianity brought the message of equality to humanity, “Christian Rome did not rise to the full apprehension of the idea of humanity as a single organism.” The promise of the body of Christ was corrupted and unfulfilled. On this point he quotes Scottish philosopher Robert Flint, “No Christian writer and still less, of course, any other in the Roman Empire, can be credited with having had more than a general and abstract conception of human unity.” Iqbal claims this unfortunate state of affairs has continued throughout Christian history and the advent of nationalism and nation states has not made anything better. “It was quite otherwise in Islam;”

244 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 50–51.
246 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 112.
247 Robert Flint, The Philosophy of History in France and Germany (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 53; this reference is not fully cited in the endnotes to The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.
he maintains that Islam is a “social movement” and made the unity of peoples “a living factor in the Muslim’s daily life.”  

For Iqbal, this failing in Christianity is an extension of its failure to fully respect the material world. The idea that Christianity is too otherworldly has a long-running history in Islamic critiques of the religion. Iqbal writes, “By setting up an ideal of otherworldliness it no doubt did succeed in spiritualizing life, but its individualism could see no spiritual value in the complexity of human social relations.” If, at times, Teilhard adopts colonial attitudes when denigrating Islam, Iqbal sees the facts of colonialism and nationalism as suggestive of fundamental problems in Christian spirituality. And if Teilhard might admit that Iqbal was the “high-minded reformer” he thought Islam needed, perhaps Iqbal could have said something similar of Teilhard with respect to Christianity.

In an article for *Iqbal Review*, S. A. Vahid complains of “Christian missionaries” who downplay Iqbal’s poetic merit because they disagree with his religious ideas. With effusive praise, Vahid says these authors are depriving a Christian audience of the “transcendent genius” of one of the “greatest poets in the world.” When pointing out that scholars of religion or politics may not be qualified to evaluate Iqbal’s merit on artistic terms, Vahid is on solid ground. But he does not back up his argument when transitioning to the claim that Christian missionaries and writers felt threatened and “planned an offensive against Iqbal and began attacking him in every way possible.” Vahid sharply criticizes Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s characterization of Iqbal as unsystematic and lacking in theological acumen. The chief problem is that Cantwell Smith believes

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252 Ibid., 13.
Iqbal is “contradictory and unsystematic;” “he is the Sufi who attacked Sufism, and perhaps the liberal who attacked liberalism.”253 Cantwell Smith might be mischaracterizing Iqbal’s position as a reformer here but I am uncertain if this error is an expression of sub rosa Christian hegemony. Vahid also notes that both Sir Hamilton Gibb and Annemarie Schimmel have accused Iqbal of misinterpreting the Qur’an, particularly by taking some verses out of context, to support his arguments in The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. Such a claim is anathema to Vahid and evidence of the anti-Iqbalian strategy mentioned above. He even lumps in Schimmel with such polemics after citing her beautiful tribute to Iqbal, “. . . he has been touched by Gabriel’s wing.”254

Indeed, Schimmel even completed some of her research on Iqbal while staying at the home of S. A. Vahid in Karachi.255 Vahid believes in a disastrous sea change in orientalism, “The days of Brown, Nicholson and Massignon are gone; now Schacht, Smith and Schimmel are moving figures, who do not care for objective study, but spend out their resources for aims other than those appreciable to scholars and students of human civilizations.”256 It is unclear if any critique of Iqbal is possible on Vahid’s terms, especially a critique from a non-Muslim European.

In his book Iqbal: His Art and Thought, S. A. Vahid devotes the fourth chapter to “Iqbal and Western Thought.” Among Vahid’s theses are the acknowledgment that Iqbal was influenced by western thought and that this influence can be traced. He adds that Iqbal “. . . was essentially what Bertrand Russell calls a ‘practical philosopher.’”257 In other words, Iqbal’s time in the west helped him to understand the practical impact of ideas and positions. Comparing Iqbal with Kant,

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254 Schimmel, Gabriel’s Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal, 387.
255 Ibid., ix.
256 Vahid, “Iqbal and His Critics,” 23–24.
Vahid explains that, unlike Kant, Iqbal did not need to arrive at faith through reason, “Iqbal starts with intuition and mystic experience as the only way to inner knowledge.”\footnote{Ibid., 84.} In a longer comparison between Iqbal and Nietzsche, Vahid considers two much-discussed concepts: the Übermensch and eternal recurrence. Nietzsche also critiques Christianity as too otherworldly and emphasizes the earth instead.\footnote{Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, trans. John Reginald Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Classics, 1961), 44. “Ich liebe die, welche nicht erst hinter den Sternen einen Grund suchen, unterzugehen und Opfer zu sein: sondern die sich der Erde opfern, dass die Erde einst des Übermenschen werde.”} But Iqbal’s “Perfect Man” does not engage the world after moving beyond good and evil; instead, “he discovers the ultimate source of law within the depths of his own consciousness.”\footnote{Vahid, \textit{Iqbal: His Art & Thought}, 88.} With respect to eternal recurrence, Vahid reports that Iqbal is critical of its tendency to relax the tension in humanity. The idea of an inevitably circular history is the enemy of aspiration and progress—this is intolerable for Iqbal. Vahid also considers the influence of Henri Bergson, the author of \textit{Creative Evolution}, on Iqbal. The core difference here is that Bergson believed the forward push of life existed for its own sake, whereas Iqbal found evolution to be purposeful and assimilative in accordance with his religious beliefs. Vahid concludes by noting that Iqbal’s thought owes much to predecessors, east and west, but this takes nothing away from his own originality.

In \textit{Western Influences in Iqbal}, T. C. Rastogi is perhaps a little too hard on Vahid when she says he marks similarities between western thinkers and Iqbal without acknowledging any influence. She is right, however, to underscore Iqbal’s ability to draw from both European and Islamic sources. There is no defensible reason for trying to ground all of Iqbal’s work in Islamic sources when a major part of his innovation is expressed through the marriage of cultures.
Reaching beyond philosophy, Rastogi notes Iqbal’s conscious patterning of his *Javid Nama* on *The Divine Comedy*. She also takes note of his desire to compose on the model of *Paradise Lost* and examines Miltonic influences on Iqbal’s own references to a rebellious Iblis. Canvassing more than twenty western thinkers studied, cited, or mentioned by Iqbal, Rastogi provides a more comprehensive overview than any preceding scholar. In her conclusion, she restates her thesis succinctly, “There is thus enough of the West in Iqbal.” And, “The assimilation of thoughts and impressions from the sources not indigenous is in itself not derogatory; rather it gives new dimension and direction to literary efforts.” But in all of the attention paid to Iqbal’s use of European sources and ideas, there are few studies of his thought in the context of comparative religion and theology.

**Consciousness in Teilhard and Iqbal**

For Teilhard, consciousness is the distinctive human characteristic marking a new stage in the evolutionary development of the cosmos—*psychogenesis*. This development is the culmination of evolutionary processes stretching backward to the beginnings of the universe; evolution itself can only be rightly understood as developing along the “axis of complexity-consciousness.” In other words, the building blocks of consciousness, conceived as primitive consciousnesses themselves, reside in every existent thing, every particle. Teilhard writes, “The term ‘consciousness’ is taken in its broadest sense to designate every kind of psyche, from the most rudimentary forms of interior perception conceivable to the human phenomenon of

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262 Ibid., 172–84.
263 Ibid., 251.
reflective consciousness.” The Teilhardian vision is a scientific perspective wherein every element of natural phenomena is a “function of an enormous and uniquely conjugated process of ‘corpusculization’ and ‘complexification’” working toward “interiorization,” which is to say, “conscientization.” The advent of human consciousness, self-reflective consciousness, marks a transition from evolution to auto-evolution; the latter characterized by a human responsibility to progress through advancing degrees of centricity toward union.

Concerning consciousness, Iqbal argues for its essential unity (tawhid), “In the life process of the deeper ego, the states of consciousness melt into each other.” This, in contrast to the famous Jamesian description of a “stream of consciousness.” “Consciousness is something single, presupposed in all mental life, and not bits of consciousness, mutually reporting to one another,” writes Iqbal. The emphasis on unity is a marker of the relationship between God and creation and the special relationship between God and human selfhood (ego) in Iqbal’s thought. He writes, “The world, in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego, is the self-revelation of the ‘Great I am.’” Every atom possesses its own ego but human egohood “has reached its relative perfection” and the human being “occupies a genuine place in the heart of Divine creative energy, and thus possesses a much higher degree of reality than things around him.” For Iqbal, therefore, human consciousness is unified, private, and a developmental

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266 Teilhard de Chardin, ”The God of Evolution,” in *Christianity and Evolution*, 238.
268 Ibid., 38.
269 *Mir, Iqbal*, 88.
271 Ibid., 57.
272 Ibid., 58.
indicator of reality in relationship to the ultimate reality. Consciousness is a guide, “Its function is to provide a luminous point in order to enlighten the forward rush of life.”

Both Iqbal and Teilhard consider consciousness the most important evolutionary development and human consciousness the transition point toward new possibilities. Both willing to ascribe a telos to evolution, they attribute proto-consciousness or proto-psychic properties to all existent things. Consciousness, broadly conceived, has reached a new and self-reflective fullness in humanity but it is not limited to humanity. This panpsychism has a long history in the philosophy of consciousness and it does provide a potential answer to the hard problem of consciousness, i.e. the problem of providing an account of how phenomenal consciousness arises from the physical constructs of the brain. Such an answer, speculative and potentially metaphysical, is unlikely to satisfy modern materialists; it is best understood as a counter to that way of seeing the world. Given the ascendancy of scientific materialism, it might seem safe to consider panpsychism outmoded. We might agree that the “nineteenth century was the heyday of panpsychism” and go further still by deciding we should leave it there.

Surprisingly, however, a July 2016 article in the New York Times describes panpsychism as moving “beyond the fringe;” consciousness might be built into matter after all, “perhaps as some kind of quantum mechanical effect.” Fortunately, the success of this project does not depend on solving the hard problem of consciousness. Rather, I want to suggest that we might better

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273 Ibid, 33.
understand the force and substance of Teilhard and Iqbal’s response to the challenge of scientific materialism if we can place their contributions within the broader study of consciousness.

**Sociality in Teilhard and Iqbal**

Human sociality, or in Teilhardian terms, the human tendency toward convergence is my second category for comparison. The capacity for consciousness marks the beginning of our current evolutionary stage and human sociality is the mechanism for entering the next. This is not, however, to say that consciousness necessarily precedes sociality on the individual or species scale. Instead, the principle for unity could be bound together with consciousness. According to Teilhard, consciousness reaches its full development “in communion with others.” It is not accidentally or ideally a social phenomenon; it is “essentially a social phenomenon.”

Teilhard ultimately believes this process is building up the body of Christ. Iqbal takes a different perspective; arguing it is in Islam that, “the socialization of spiritual illumination through associative prayer is a special point of interest.” In the *mihrab* and in the *hajj*, Islam encourages unity among the believers. For Iqbal this is the natural extension of *tawhid*, “From the unity of the all-inclusive Ego who creates and sustains all egos follows the essential unity of all mankind.” Islamic prayer is representative of the Islamic vision wherein the barriers separating different human groups are demolished. Speculatively, I would argue that both Teilhard and Iqbal are also wrestling problems inherent to certain forms of mysticism. First, the problem of the One and the many; the challenge to correctly understand a process of emanation and return. Second, the problem of annihilation (*fana*) in union. Both thinkers are quite

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278 Ibid., 75.
concerned with how individuality might be preserved in unity and the two categories of human consciousness and sociality above seem key to exploring their answers.

For these reasons, the study of mysticism is an important addition to this project. By mysticism, I mean “mystical consciousness” as outlined by Bernard McGinn and not transient moments of mystical experience.\(^{279}\) In his essay on the subject, McGinn describes mystical consciousness as “a state of loving attraction and mental awareness in the face of the divine mystery.”\(^{280}\) In *The Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Annemarie Schimmel defines mysticism as “consciousness of the One Reality” and “love of the Absolute.”\(^{281}\) This is not a fleeting infatuation; it is a transformative process by which the soul can withstand even the most arduous journey. This model recognizes both the affective (maʿrifā) and intellective (ʿaql) properties of mysticism. It also provides a better framework for considering the voluminous textual output of mysticism, called “mystical theology” in the Christian tradition. Operationalizing this category will require some scaffolding but I am convinced it is the best starting point for understanding and writing about Teilhard’s thought. Muhammad Iqbal is also deeply concerned with mysticism as a distinct facet of normal consciousness, he calls it “mystic consciousness,” even as he subjected Sufism to sharp critiques.\(^{282}\) It is certain that both authors are concerned with the possibility of union among people and with the divine. They are also both concerned with the


\(^{280}\) Ibid., 50.


possibility of experiential knowledge of God. I believe it viable to use the study of mysticism to inform this project on these grounds.\textsuperscript{283}

**A Note on Comparative Method**

Francis Clooney writes, “the comparative theologian needs to make choices in accord with her particular, idiosyncratic priorities, so that the process becomes clear, cost evident, and biases a matter of public record.”\textsuperscript{284} By asking for a declaration of “biases,” Clooney’s concern is more than just a matter of scope and logistics. The intellectual history of comparative theology includes traditional apologetics and the theologies of religions, which may be apologetics by another name. James Fredericks puts it succinctly, “Christian theologies of religions have not been sufficiently attentive to the hegemony of their discourse.”\textsuperscript{285} In *Faith among Faiths*, Fredericks states the same issue another way, “All theologies of religions, be they of the exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist variety, are theoretical approaches to religious diversity. They think of religious diversity as a theoretical problem to be solved.”\textsuperscript{286} Michelle Voss Roberts notes the “stringent critique” of comparative theology as the meeting place of trajectories where “Christian theology apparently holds the trump card.” She writes, “While this may be the unavoidable effect of situatedness of thought (everybody is somewhere), it also mirrors an uncomfortable legacy of Christian hegemony in academic studies of religion.”\textsuperscript{287}


characteristic response of a new, perhaps *the new*, comparative theology is to avoid generalizing and essentializing while creatively engaging religious diversity as an opportunity for mutual understanding and growth. In this way the new comparative theology can be an alternative to the theology of religions rather than its *sub rosa* hegemonic extension. Comparative theology, on this model, is an exercise in humility and vulnerability.

I begin this project conscious of having spent more time with Teilhard’s thought than Iqbal’s. Moreover, my education has been shaped by sacramental, Catholic, and Jesuit themes that match up neatly with much of Teilhard’s worldview. I am concerned about the temptation to lean more heavily on Teilhard’s work for this reason and plan to adjust my approach accordingly. In the research, planning, and writing of my core chapters, I intend to begin with Iqbal and fully develop any sections on Iqbal before moving on to work with Teilhard in Iqbal’s light. I want to ensure Iqbal’s thought is rendered clearly and accurately before moving into deep comparison. As an added difficulty, Teilhard’s worldview is enormous. Comparing two thinkers when one takes every idea to cosmic proportions can make it seem like less grandiose ideas are somehow being fit into the larger, paradigmatic system. This is not my intent. I want to demonstrate, by contrast, that the more grounded and realistic approach from Iqbal is superior at explaining the unity of consciousness within the individual human being and superior at addressing real-world challenges that are sometimes glossed over by Teilhard. It is also important to note that while Teilhard’s emphasis on *seeing* leads him to look at the world through an exceptionally wide lens, it will be demonstrated that Iqbal’s thought is similarly far-reaching while being more detail-oriented on important questions.
With respect to bias and situatedness, it is necessary to make an additional admission of my own. According to Clooney, “We need also to highlight the necessarily autobiographical nature of comparative theology: if the areas of study are chosen and limited, we make sense of this best through admitting the particularities of our own identities as the choosers choosing which religions to compare to with one another.”288 I am white. I am male; American, southern. I am uncomfortable writing about myself in this way because I feel adrift in my identities. There is a line in the television program Mad Men where the protagonist’s break from his lineage is noted. “He has no people! You can’t trust a man like that.”289 I sometimes feel this way about myself. I have no father. I have no family religious tradition. I was drawn in by the allure of Roman Catholicism and baptized as a college student. I wrestle with this still but I cannot claim to be a Catholic theologian in any authoritative sense. Hugh Nicholson writes that he sees the academy rather than a particular faith community as his primary “though not exclusive, audience and ‘constituency.’”290 I feel the same way, although I should add that I feel most comfortable in the classroom; teaching is the most important aspect of the university mission in my opinion. I should say also that while I cannot claim to be a “secular humanist” in a strident sense, my thinking has been deeply influenced by secularism and humanism. I engage this project as a post-enlightenment and postmodern author sensitive and sympathetic to the beauty, coherence, and value of a religiously and theologically informed worldview. To say that I think and write from a perspective, from this perspective, is to say also that I acknowledge that scholarship is a creative

act. For this reason, “a specification of purpose is therefore integral to both the practice and the assessment of comparison.” With respect to this project, the purpose and thesis is listed at the beginning of this chapter but there is a more fundamental purpose at the heart of it; an essential question clear to me now, “What does it mean to be human?” We will explore this question by engaging Teilhard and Iqbal on the topics of human consciousness and sociality.

A Note on Sex, Gender, and Inclusive Language

A commitment to inclusive language is an essential aspect of strong scholarship. This is, in part, a practice of hospitality or adab meant to honor and celebrate the diversity of human identity and experience. The careful use of language is also the hallmark of education and the effort to express truth with increasing precision. As a negative example we have no further to look than the 1959 translation of Teilhard’s *Le phénomène humain*. In a famously egregious error, the very title of the book equates *homme* with *humain* and the text becomes “The Phenomenon of Man” rather than “The Human Phenomenon.” In addition to departing from the source without cause, this mistake obscures the scope of Teilhard’s argument. As Sarah Appleton-Weber indicates when arguing the need for her 1999 translation, the error could cause us to miss the evolutionary nature of the human phenomenon as a “unique biological, collective, and global phenomenon, whose past, present and future is intimately bound up with the formation, life, and ultimate transformation of the Earth.”

I preference Appleton-Weber’s translation throughout this thesis with occasional references to the original French. It is generally

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291 Ibid., 196.
my preference to either avoid gender-exclusive language or use feminine pronouns. In direct quotations from other texts I have preserved the language as written.

**Chapter Outline**

**Chapter Two—Teilhard and Iqbal on Consciousness:** Explaining the importance of consciousness as a category in the thought of Teilhard and Iqbal. For both, it is a category pertaining to all existent matter and a marker of an evolutionary telos. As a scientist, however, Teilhard is concerned with the details of evolutionary stages prior to the advent of humanity and the implications for the future. Iqbal, by contrast, takes up the idea of evolution in a more poetic sense comparable to Teilhard in its emphasis on human direction but not in the use of scientific language to delineate successive stages. Teilhard calls this the axis of complexity-consciousness. Iqbal emphasizes the unity and stability of conscious states in the individual human person. This chapter will treat each thinker individually and then in comparison to reveal how their respective systems can build on each other. Tentatively, I propose that Teilhard offers a more robust explanation of how consciousness reveals the evolutionary purpose while Iqbal offers a more phenomenologically rich account of the relationship between consciousness and the sense of self. Through comparison, we can better understand a rather opaque issue, i.e. how it is that an individual consciousness might survive death.

**Chapter Three—Teilhard and Iqbal on Sociality:** Building on the previous chapters, this examination of “sociality” will proceed individually and then through comparison. For both Iqbal and Teilhard it will be argued that sociality is the key transformative mechanism of human consciousness, self-reflective consciousness. In Teilhard, the convergence of peoples will lead ultimately and inevitably to the formation of the noosphere and the body of Christ. Iqbal focuses
on the instruments of union within Islam: its universal ethics and unifying vision. From Iqbal we
get a clearer understanding of the particulars of union in the present day whereas Teilhard
focuses on the culmination of the evolutionary process in a distant, perhaps cosmically distant,
future. Oneness is present and still becoming. Consciousness is an expression of oneness in the
human ego, consciousness participates in oneness through social unity, and consciousness builds
up oneness as a participative force in the divine creativity. This chapter will feature two
important arguments: (1) that Teilhard and Iqbal both constructed their theories of consciousness
while mindful of the need to preserve individuality in social and divine union (2) that sociality,
like consciousness, is a sign (āyah) of a developmental telos representing the destiny of
humanity on a pattern of emanation and return.

Chapter Four—The Study of Mysticism: Here I will more fully explain how Teilhard and
Iqbal’s treatment of consciousness is connected to their respective interest and reformist
tendencies toward mysticism. Reflecting on consciousness, their beliefs and opinions concerning
the possibility and value of mystical states of consciousness will be examined. I will also argue
that the fundamental categories and concerns of their thought systems have clear analogues
within mystical tradition: emanation and return, union, and preservation of the self in union.

Chapter Five—Conclusion: Evaluating what has been learned in the progress of this
thesis, assessing the new possibilities for Muslim-Christian understanding on Teilhardian and
Iqbalian terms, and identifying future possibilities for research.
CHAPTER TWO: CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness is the central category of concern for both Muhammad Iqbal and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The holistic approach taken by both thinkers hinges on developing innovative theological anthropology and this task is inextricably linked with perhaps the most distinctly human trait, self-reflective consciousness. Owing more to inclination and their different professional backgrounds than points of religious difference, Iqbal and Teilhard develop individual emphases and conclusions in their respective considerations of consciousness. This chapter will recount their individual perspectives with additional context as necessary and then consider their thought in comparison. It will be shown that these two systems can build on each other to offer a more robust response to questions of critical importance to not only Iqbal and Teilhard but Islam and Christianity generally.

Consciousness in Iqbal

Our first goal is to define, insofar as possible, what Iqbal means by “consciousness” in the most basic terms. With this end in mind, it is best to turn to the lectures making up The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. It is here where Iqbal argues early on that “experience, as unfolding itself in time, presents three main levels—the level of matter, the level of life, and the level of mind and consciousness—the subject-matter of physics, biology, and psychology, respectively.” From this alone we see that Iqbal regards consciousness as a “level of experience” open to investigation. He goes on to posit, “Consciousness can be imagined as a deflection from life.” In other words, consciousness cannot be reduced to biology. Offering a further, more experiential definition, Iqbal continues, “It is a case of tension, a state of self-

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concentration, by means of which life manages to shut out all memories and associations which have no bearing on a present action.” In this way consciousness seems to be the level of experience by which the human being is able to take in phenomena with attendant filtering and focus. Since needs and circumstances may vary, Iqbal notes that consciousness “has no well-defined fringes; it shrinks and expands as the occasion demands.”

But this is only the beginning.

Of the three levels of experience, the study of consciousness carries the most potential for deepening our understanding of existence. Iqbal writes, “Now, my perception of things that confront me is superficial and external; but my perception of my own self is internal, intimate, and profound.” Iqbal does not begin from a place of radical doubt but, for him, the intimacy of consciousness proves a bulwark against skepticism and a sign of the proximity of consciousness to a greater degree of reality. He makes the dramatic claim, “. . . conscious experience is that privileged case of existence in which we are in absolute contact with Reality, and an analysis of this privileged case is likely to throw a flood of light on the ultimate meaning of existence.”

As we have seen, Iqbal thinks this is so because of the closeness of consciousness; it is reminiscent of the Qur’anic verse, “And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than his jugular vein.” But Iqbal is also committed to the importance of the Bergsonian idea of duration (la durée) and believes consciousness provides a “direct vision of duration.”

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295 Ibid., 33.
296 Ibid., 33.
297 Ibid., 37.
298 Ibid., 37.
299 Qur’an 50:16.
300 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 37.
Henri Bergson’s understanding of duration can be difficult to explain. It is first developed in his doctoral dissertation published as *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*). Here, in preparation for an analysis of conscious states, Bergson distinguishes between two types of multiplicity: quantitative and qualitative. With respect to quantitative multiplicity, he imagines a flock of fifty identical sheep. Counting these sheep in one’s mind can involve envisioning them side by side or one at a time. But even in the latter case, one must keep track of the preceding sheep to avoid losing count. Bergson’s point is that such quantitative multiplicity is necessarily spatial; it is the intuition of space that allows for the distinction between the sheep. In explaining qualitative multiplicity, Bergson turns to emotion and aesthetic. Feelings of joy, sorrow, and beauty are marked by varying degrees of intensity; this is a difference conceived of qualitatively rather than spatially. Separating spatial interpolations from temporal, conscious states exist in duration. To separate or delineate conscious states is to approach them externally and render them artificially. Bergson proffers, “Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.” The ego endures by uniting the past and present into an “organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.” The emphasis on unity is important for Iqbal’s Quranic insistence on the same. The emphasis on continuity is equally important for Teilhard’s understanding of evolution as purposeful process rather than a succession of disconnected events.

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302 Ibid., 100.
303 Ibid.
According to Bergson, conscious states do not hold still except through artifice. Citing
Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, Iqbal takes up the same point, “There is nothing static in my inner
life; all is a constant mobility, an unceasing flux of states, a perpetual flow in which there is no
halt or resting place. Constant change, however, is unthinkable without time. On the analogy of
all our inner experience, then, conscious existence means life in time.”304 This all follows on
Bergson but Iqbal introduces a new distinction; noting, “A keener insight into the nature of
conscious experience, however, reveals that the self in its inner life moves from the center
outwards.”305 Iqbal goes on to describe two sides of the self: the appreciative and the efficient.
The efficient self “enters into what we call the world of space.”306 Iqbal calls this the practical
self of our daily life insofar as it attempts to isolate and order things, states of consciousness
included. This is the systematizing self, busy with the work of quantitative multiplicity, i.e.
counting and comparing. It is the self which mixes time with space rather than acknowledging
duration. Iqbal writes, “The self here lives outside itself as it were, and, while retaining its unity
as a totality, discloses itself as nothing more than a series of specific and consequently numerable
states.”307 Considering that Iqbal values the intimacy of consciousness, a self living “outside
itself” is a more limited grounds for discovery. And while this efficient self maintains a “unity as
a totality,” it falls short of the “organic wholeness” described by Bergson.

In contrast to the efficient self, the appreciative self is deeper and more profound, in part,
because it reveals duration. On Iqbal’s reading of Bergson, “Existence in spacialized time is

305 Ibid., 38.
306 Ibid.
307 Ibid.
spurious existence.” But the appreciative self is hidden; indeed, *batin* may be an appropriate word. Iqbal writes, “With our absorption in the external order of things, necessitated by our present situation, it is extremely difficult to catch a glimpse of the appreciative self.” It is unclear what exactly Iqbal means by “our present situation” here. It could be that modernity is especially culpable in distracting humanity from awareness of the appreciative self or that the problem is deeply rooted in the nature of our physical existence in this life. It seems likely that both interpretations are true and that Iqbal is here indicating that certain ways of life are more apt to worsen an ongoing problem at both the individual and societal level. He writes, “In our constant pursuit after external things we weave a kind of veil round the appreciative self which thus becomes completely alien to us.” In this way Iqbal is arguing for a way to pierce this veil in search of a fuller vision of reality. This bears considerable similarity to Teilhard’s fundamental approach; he writes in the opening pages of his magnum opus, “*Seeing*. One could say the whole of life is this—if not ultimately, at least essentially.” Iqbal suggests awareness of the appreciative self is possible through introspection, “It is only in the moments of profound meditation, when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner center of experience.” I think it safe to say there is a strong mystical resonance here but we must use caution with the term since Iqbal’s approach to Islamic mysticism is shaped by his own, potentially counter-traditional, interpretations.

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308 Ibid.
309 *Batin* in the sense of a hidden or inner secret accessible to some. This is an important concept in Islamic mysticism. The Hidden or The Inner (*al-batin*) is also among the ninety-nine names of God found in the Qur’an (57:3). We will revisit this point.
311 Ibid.
In the appreciative self, Iqbal recognizes the organic wholeness described by Bergson. Iqbal writes, “In the life-process of this deeper ego the states of consciousness melt into each other.”\textsuperscript{314} Iqbal is at pains to stress the unity of conscious states within the ego and alludes to the germ as an example of continuity. In a given germ, the experiences of its ancestors do not persist quantitatively like Bergson’s sheep but in the coherent expression of the successor. A recent paper in \textit{Science} has demonstrated that environmental experience can be passed down for 14 generations in \textit{Caenorhabditis elegans}, a type of nematode.\textsuperscript{315} It is worth noting that “continuity” implies unity. Etymology is helpful on this point; “continuity” is derived from the Latin “contineō, continēre,” meaning “to hold together.” In Lucretius we find, “ut noscas referre eadem primordia rerum, cum quibus et quali positurā \textit{contineatur},” “And thus may’st know it matters with what others and in what structure the primordial germs are held together.”\textsuperscript{316} But it is important to remember that conscious states, experienced as unity by the appreciative self, are not just held together. They flow together. Iqbal writes, “There is no numerical distinctness of states in the totality of the ego, the multiplicity of whose elements is, unlike that of the efficient self, wholly qualitative. There is change and movement, but change and movement are indivisible; their elements interpenetrate and are wholly non-serial in character.”\textsuperscript{317} Iqbal’s challenge is to unravel some of the mystery of this phenomenon.

While it is possible to achieve some awareness of the unity within qualitative multiplicity through the examination of consciousness, pure duration itself is ineffable, “for language is

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{317} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 38–39.
shaped on the serial time of our daily efficient self.” Nevertheless, Iqbal follows this
determination with another important argument for the unitive nature of the self. Considering the
immense, “practically incalculable,” amount of perceptible sense data facing the individual at
any given moment, it is remarkable that human mental faculties are able to process the flood.
This is how succession becomes duration. Iqbal writes, “The appreciative self, then, is more or
less corrective of the efficient self, inasmuch as it synthesizes all the ‘heres’ and ‘nows’—the
small changes of space and time, indispensable to the efficient self—into the coherent wholeness
of personality.” This is critical to Iqbal’s thought for at least two reasons. First, he is able to
follow Bergson in protecting the free will of humanity through recourse to duration as opposed
to serial time. Serial time is a seeming chain of causality while duration bears within itself the
free creative movement of an original act—it is the singular now at the edge of an unfolding
future. Iqbal joins the notion to the Quranic idea of destiny (taqdir). He makes the bold claim,
“Destiny is time regarded as prior to the disclosure of its possibilities.” Second, through
analogy with consciousness, Iqbal is able to claim that the whole universe is a “movement”
rather than a “thing.” The universe “is not a thing but an act,” he writes; and this too follows
Bergson but we shall see that he and his mentor are about to come to a parting of ways.

While Bergson believes the universe is properly thought of as moving, he does not
contend that it moves with purpose. Iqbal does not offer an extended citation on this point but it
is clear in *Creative Evolution* that Bergson rejects “extreme teleology” as “radical finalism,” in

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318 Ibid., 39.
319 Ibid.
320 Quran 54:49. *Taqdir* can be alternatively translated as “measure” or “predestination,” it is a core component of
Islamic theology just as it is in Christian thought. Henri Bergson’s dissertation was a rejoinder to Kant on the issue
of free will.
which “things and beings merely realize a program previously arranged.”\footnote{Henri Bergson, \textit{Creative Evolution}, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: MacMillan and Co., 1922), 41.} Unlike Iqbal, he is unable to reconcile his emphasis on human freedom with teleological thinking. Philosophical thinking itself, in “the dynamic and perpetual upsurge of novelty,” as Bergson-scholars Jacob Hanne and Trevor Perri put it, may be as close to a sense of purpose as Bergson gets.\footnote{Hanne Jacobs and Trevor Perri, “Intuition and Freedom: Bergson, Husserl, and the Movement of Philosophy,” in \textit{Bergson and Phenomenology}, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 115.} Iqbal, therefore, characterizes Bergson’s vision of the \textit{élan vital} as “wholly arbitrary, undirected, chaotic, and unforeseeable in its behavior.”\footnote{Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 42.} This mistake comes from a misreading of our conscious experience. Iqbal says that Bergson regards consciousness as the past moving along with the present but he “ignores that the unity of consciousness has a forward looking aspect also.”\footnote{Ibid.} Iqbal goes on to point out that even our immediate perceptions are driven by a sense of purpose. The “operation of the past in the present is not the whole of consciousness;” purpose is an essential aspect of consciousness.\footnote{Ibid.}

Iqbal places great emphasis on the human sense of the future. He writes, “The element of purpose discloses a kind of forward look in consciousness. Purposes not only color our present states of consciousness, but also reveal its future direction.” “A state of attentive consciousness involves both memory and imagination as operating factors,” maintains Iqbal.\footnote{Ibid.} And he is here, once again, willing to draw an analogy between conscious experience and reality by arguing that nature itself is teleological since consciousness is imaginative, purposeful, given to a sense of what \textit{ought} to be. The central point is that Bergson is highly critical of teleology as “radical
“finality” in *Creative Evolution* and Iqbal wants to demonstrate that a sense of purpose need not be conflated with predestination. Iqbal is explicit, “A time-process cannot be conceived as a line already drawn. It is a line in the drawing—an actualization of open possibilities.” Moreover, Iqbal argues that his presentation of teleology is fundamentally Quranic insofar as the Qur’an speaks of a universe given to growth and change, but not of a necessarily predetermined nature in the particulars. The Qur’an says, “God adds to His creation what He wills” and “He will give it another birth.” For Iqbal, “nothing is more alien to the Qur’anic outlook than the idea that the universe is the temporal working out of a preconceived plan.” The Iqbalian analysis of consciousness leads from a simple acknowledgement of the human capacity for taking in phenomena to an argument for human free will and purpose in the universe that is both experientially valid and in-line with Qur’anic principles. In short, the investigation of consciousness, particularly as experienced by the appreciative self, is the gateway to knowledge of reality, and furthermore—Ultimate Reality—God.

The synthesizing capacity of the appreciative self allows it to exist in pure duration. According to Iqbal, “To exist in pure duration is to be a self, and to be a self is to be able to say ‘I am.’” Iqbal refers to a degree of “I-amness” or a degree of intuition of one’s “I-amness,” which seems to be the same thing since to be “I am,” is to know that this is so. This intuition of “I-amness” determines “the place of a thing in the scale of being.” God, therefore, is the supreme “I am” with limitless creative potential and an “I-amness” that is “independent, 

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328 Ibid., 44.
330 Qur’an 35:1 and 29:20.
331 Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 44.
332 Ibid., 45.
elemental, absolute.” 333 This notion corresponds with scripture. In the Qur’an, God says, “Indeed, I am Allah, there is no deity except me, so worship me and establish prayer for my remembrance.” 334 In Exodus: “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am. That is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am sent me to you.’” 335 With the knowledge of “pure duration” ascertained from the examination of conscious states in humanity, Iqbal is able to argue for change in God in His creative activity. Iqbal writes, “God’s life is self-revelation, not the pursuit of an ideal to be reached. The ‘not yet’ of man does mean pursuit and may mean failure; the ‘not yet’ of God means unfailing realization of the infinite creative possibilities of His being which retains its wholeness throughout the entire process.” 336 We experience and come to know the creative activity of God through the examination of nature, ourselves included. We “have a first-hand knowledge of the appreciative aspect of life from within” and “intuition reveals life as a centralizing ego.” 337 To be clear, Iqbal’s argument is that the unity of conscious states in the individual is a sign of the organic unity of life, thought, and purpose in Ultimate Reality. If it is my own appreciative self which holds together the multiplicity of conscious states I experience, then the near infinity of all existing instants must also be held in synthesis by a far-greater self, The Ultimate Self. 338

333 Ibid., 45.
334 Qur’an 20:14.
335 Exodus 3:14.
337 Ibid., 48–49.
338 Conceivably, this line of reasoning operates as an intriguing theistic proof predicated on the notion that “self” must exist prior to time. While an extended analysis of this idea is outside the scope of this project, Iqbal and Teilhard’s examination of consciousness as a response to scientific materialism will be discussed later in this chapter. Ultimately, it should be noted that Iqbal’s lecture series is entitled “The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” and, within Islam, the existence of God is testified to in the shahada; it is a given.
Iqbal goes on to draw some bold conclusions from this position: (1) only egos proceed from the Ultimate Ego (2) one’s consciousness of their own degree of egohood corresponds to their degree of reality. He writes, “I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed. The creative energy of the Ultimate Ego, in whom deed and thought are identical, functions as ego-unities.” For Iqbal, the entire material world is an expression of the unfolding of divine energy. If it appears static and immobile, this is a limitation of spatial reasoning; to assert immobility is to make a universal conclusion from a limited perspective. Iqbal writes, “Every atom of divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego.” A houseplant and I are united in that we are both expressions of divine energy, the creative activity of God. But we are separated by the degree to which we are able to feel our own egohood. Iqbal writes, “Only that is, strictly speaking, real which is directly conscious of its own reality.” To be clear, consciousness of one’s degree of reality is co-extensive with that reality. The human being is not merely conscious, she is self-conscious; the human ego “is self-centered and possesses a private circuit of individuality.” Possessing a higher degree of reality, the human being “occupies a genuine place in the heart of Divine creative energy . . . he alone is capable of consciously participating in the creative life of his Maker.” This same basis for Iqbal’s philosophy of action and personal development is expressed in *Secrets of the Self (Asrar-i Khudi)*. Iqbal’s first book of poetry, *Secrets of the Self*

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340 Ibid., 57.
341 Ibid., 58.
342 Ibid., 58.
343 Ibid., 58.
demonstrates that the foundation of the philosophy developed in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* was conceived as early as 1915.

In an explanatory letter preceding the English translation of *Secrets of the Self*, Iqbal defines *khudi*, “. . . Ego (Khudí) in which the individual becomes a self-contained exclusive center. Physically as well as spiritually man is a self-contained center, but he is not yet a complete individual. The greater his distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the completest person.” 344 To be self-conscious and self-contained is to have individuality and personality. These are traits to be developed through action, imagination, and a sense of purpose; the facets of consciousness championed by Iqbal. He writes, “Personality is a state of tension and can continue only if that state is maintained. If the state of tension is not maintained, relaxation will ensue. Since personality, or the state of tension, is the most valuable achievement of man, he should see that he does not revert to a state of relaxation.” 345 When we began this chapter, we saw that Iqbal also referred to “tension” in his basic definition of consciousness. For Iqbal, consciousness is “a case of tension, a state of self-concentration, by means of which life manages to shut out all memories and associations which have no bearing on a present action.” 346 As successive states of tension, consciousness and egohood exist on a conceptual line that comes to fruition in the human being. This is a continuum that begins in and leads toward God. In the early verses of *The Secrets of the Self*, Iqbal takes inspiration from the possibilities for human flourishing inherent to this worldview:

Tho’ I am but a mote, the radiant sun
is mine:

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345 Ibid, xxi.
Within my bosom are a hundred dawns.\textsuperscript{347}

He also expounds his belief concerning the universality of ego:

\textquote{Tis the nature of the Self to manifest
Itself:
In every atom slumbers the might of
The Self.}\textsuperscript{348}

Underscores the importance of purpose in human lives:

\textquote{Life is preserved by purpose:
Because of the goal its caravan-bell
tinkles.}\textsuperscript{349}

And, in a clever spin on Rumi, connects desire and curiosity to discovery and intellect, essentially linking the pursuit of God with the pursuit of knowledge and scientific progress:

\textquote{Away from the reed-bed, the reed
Became happy:
The music was released from its
Prison.
Why does the mind strive after new
Discoveries and scale the heavens?
Knowest thou what works this miracle?\textquote{Tis desire that enriches Life,
And the intellect is a child of its
womb.}\textsuperscript{350}

Iqbal is often described as a proponent of philosophical idealism.\textsuperscript{351} His privileging of consciousness in his reconstruction of religious thought is natural in a system where mind takes precedence over time and matter. But to say such a thing is to put the cart before the horse and it

\textsuperscript{348} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{349} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{351} Sajjad Rizvi, “Between Hegel and Rumi: Iqbal’s Contrapuntal Encounters with the Islamic Philosophical Traditions,” in Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 118.
is best to hew closely to Iqbal’s own line of reasoning in cataloging some of the most notable aspects of his view of consciousness. First, he acknowledges the experiential intimacy of consciousness. The examination of consciousness carries a special revelatory potential because it is closer to us than the external world. According to Iqbal, the careful examination of conscious states presents us with direct knowledge of duration, as opposed to the artificiality of serial time, and purpose. Consciousness is a reflection of the divine, an extension of the divine. And in its imaginative and forward-looking capacities, consciousness does not just bear the imprint of divinity but acts as a leading edge of creative activity, which is to say, divine activity. It must not be overlooked that Iqbal refers to consciousness as a state of tension just as he refers to personality. This idea of tension is remarkably similar to references to involution and energy found in Teilhard. Imagine a tightly-coiled spring ready to unleash its energy upon the world—tension is potential. As a marriage of Bergson and any number of other thinkers in Iqbal’s wide knowledge with Quranic concepts, particularly destiny (taqdir) and unity (tawhid), this complex philosophy is innovative and successful by any measure. This said, I want to draw special attention to a core characteristic of the Iqbalian approach to consciousness that can be lost in the midst of all the rest: its tendency toward unity.

Unity is a central concern for Iqbal. He writes, “The Qur’an in its simple, forceful manner emphasizes the individuality and uniqueness of man, and has, I think, a definite view of his destiny as a unity of life.”352 Used in this way, “unity of life,” is an unusual phrasing like his use of “ego unities” earlier. On the most basic level, it is likely that Iqbal is referring to the holding together of matter, life, and mind in the human being. The notion of ego unities or the tawhid of

352 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 76.
ego requires a deeper look. We have already seen that Iqbal’s theological anthropology grants a greater degree of reality to the human being on account of consciousness and self-consciousness; humanity has a special relationship with the divine. Iqbal cites the Qur’an on the same point: the human being is chosen of God, meant to be the representative of God on earth, and is the trustee of a free personality.\textsuperscript{353} It seems to be that part of this special relationship, and part of possessing a higher degree of reality, is the tendency toward unity. For this reason Iqbal says, “it is surprising to see that the unity of human consciousness which constitutes the center of human personality never really became a point of interest in the history of Muslim thought.”\textsuperscript{354} Iqbal’s position is that this failure is, in part, the result of the original vision of the Qur’an becoming overrun with dualistic Zoroastrian philosophy. Iqbal lays out his judgment on such thinking in his dissertation, “Although the moral fervor of Zoroaster gave a spiritual tone to his theory of the origin of things, yet the net result of this period of Persian speculation is nothing more than a materialistic dualism. The principle of Unity as a philosophical ground of all that exists, is but dimly perceived at this stage of intellectual evolution in Persia.”\textsuperscript{355} He acknowledges that Sufism has a long introspective tendency toward the investigation of conscious states, sometimes referred to as Sufi psychology, but he also believes Islamic mysticism made a major error in the denigration of the self. For this reason, past thinkers have missed the relationship between ego and \textit{tawhid}. “The nature of the ego,” according to Iqbal, “is wholly aspiration after a unity more inclusive, more effective, more balanced, and unique.” The ego bears a unique kind of unity; a unity of “what we call mental states” that “exist as phases of a complex whole, called mind.”\textsuperscript{356}

\textsuperscript{353} Qur’an 20:122, 6:165, and 33:72.
\textsuperscript{354} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 77.
\textsuperscript{355} Muhammad Iqbal, \textit{The Development of Metaphysics in Persia} (London: Luzac and Company, 1908), 17.
\textsuperscript{356} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 79.
On this view, a correct understanding of consciousness and conscious states must acknowledge their *tawhid*.

Commenting on William James’ *Principles of Psychology*, Iqbal stresses the stability of the ego and the unity of conscious experience. He describes the Jamesian position as one which considers consciousness a “stream of thought—a conscious flow of changes with felt continuity.” The ego, on this model, emerges from pulses of thought passed on one to the other in succession. Iqbal does not believe this stands up to introspection. He writes, “Consciousness is something single, presupposed in all mental life, and not bits of consciousness, mutually reporting to one another.” James’ view is unacceptable because it does not attribute any “permanent element in experience.” “There is no continuity of being between the passing thoughts,” argues Iqbal. This is not to say that the ego is static; remember that the human being is a divine action. “My real personality is not a thing; it is an act,” says Iqbal. He continues, “My experience is only a series of acts, mutually referring to one another, and held together by the unity of a directive purpose.” He then argues, “You cannot perceive me like a thing in space, or a set of experiences in temporal order; you must interpret, understand, and appreciate me in my judgments, in my will-attitudes, aims, and aspirations.” And then, he cites the Quranic creation of humanity in *Surah Al-Mu’minun*: the human is formed as a new creation of clay, a drop of semen, bones, and flesh. This new creation, of “yet another make” as Iqbal puts it, “develops on the basis of a physical organism.” Iqbal calls the structure of the human, “that colony of sub-egos through which a profounder Ego constantly acts on me, and thus permits me

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357 Ibid., 81.
358 Ibid., 82–83.
359 Ibid., 83.
to build up a systematic unity of experience.”

We learn that Iqbal will not countenance any psychological perspective that is not sufficiently appreciative of the stability and continuity of consciousness and ego. He further outlines a sense of unity within the personality on the basis of its directive purpose, the proper (i.e. holistic) perception of others, and the capacity for building up a systematic unity of experience. The insistence on unity among conscious states could also be described as an insistence on the strength and endurance of consciousness itself. Later in this chapter, we shall see the importance of this line of reasoning when Iqbal confronts death.

**Extraordinary Forms of Consciousness in Iqbal**

Iqbal examines at least two extraordinary forms of consciousness in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*: mystical and prophetic. First it should be said that Iqbal takes mystical consciousness seriously. He was a critic of certain trends in Islamic mysticism but this is a reformist critique and in no way means that he discarded mystical insight entirely. He is willing to entertain the Sufi belief that knowledge (*ma’rifa*) can enter through the heart (*qalb*), “The total-Reality, which enters our awareness and appears on interpretation as an empirical fact, has other ways of invading our consciousness and offers further opportunities of interpretation.”

He considers this mystical experience, also called a “non-rational mode of consciousness,” as valid as any other experience but does not privilege it above intellect, as some Sufis might, either. He does indicate that mystical experience is potentially open to scientific study but notes the lack of an effective method at his time of writing. Presumably, he would be very much in favor of the empirical examination of mystical states of consciousness using

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360 Ibid., 83.
361 Ibid., 13.
362 *Ma’rifa* is sometimes regarded as superior to *ilm* on account of its immediacy and its source. “You have your knowledge from a dead man who has it from a dead man and we have ours from the living God,” says the mystic.
magnetic resonance imaging and other technologies as long as the conclusions were not reductive. Iqbal outlines five characteristics of mystical experience:

1. **Immediacy.** Iqbal points out that all experience is immediate and that immediate knowledge of God simply means that we can know God as we do other things.

2. **Unanalyzable wholeness.** Contra William James, Iqbal insists that mystical consciousness does not break with normal consciousness. But it does “bring us into contact with the total passage of Reality in which all the diverse stimuli merge into one another and form a single unanalyzable unity in which the ordinary distinction of subject and object do not exist.”

3. **Intimate association with Unique Other Self.** As experienced, this is obviously so. The Other Self transcends, encompasses and momentarily suppresses one’s private personality. This is not merely subjective, i.e. imagined. Iqbal notes that passivity, one of the traits of mystical experience as outlined by James, is not enough to prove the matter. He cites the philosophical problem of other minds as evidence that everyday encounters with other conscious entities create their own bouts of skepticism and response.

4. **Ineffability.** Like James, Iqbal maintains that mystic states cannot be communicated since they are essentially feelings rather than thoughts. But feelings do have a cognitive element and it is the nature of feeling to seek expression in thought. This is why mystical consciousness can be both ineffable and the source of an extraordinary breadth of discourse.

5. **Mysticism does not break with serial time.** Mystical consciousness provides a sense of the artificiality of serial time but, as James said, the individual mystical experience is transient.

Ultimately, and we find this in Teilhard as well, the gnosis or ma 'rifā of mystical consciousness leads the recipient toward many of the same conclusions reached through the analysis of more ordinary conscious states or consciousness as such.

While mystical consciousness is transient, it can confer a sense of authority as a lasting effect. In the case of prophets, however, the effect is more pronounced, “fraught with infinite

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365 Ibid., 14–19.
The mystic wishes to remain in the unitary state and her return from mystical consciousness does not change the world. By contrast, “The prophet’s return is creative.” Iqbal writes, “For the mystic the repose of ‘unitary experience’ is something final; for the prophet it is the awakening, within him, of world-shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world.” Iqbal later describes the prophetic situation as one where the unitary experience has overflowed its boundaries; it is as if prophets are such deep reservoirs of experiential tawhid that they cannot help but transform the society around them. This is rather similar to the thinking of Iranian scholar Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945) in his Expansion of Prophetic Experience, “The difference between prophets and other people who undergo similar experiences is that they do not remain confined within this personal experience. They do not content themselves with it… And this new person builds a new world and a new people.” Iqbal also describes prophethood in evolutionary terms, comparing revelation (wahy) to the development of new organs in an animal or new growth patterns in a plant. He and Teilhard have much in common when Iqbal describes the prophet’s personality as a region where “the finite center of life sinks into his own infinite depths only to spring up again, with fresh vigor, to destroy the old, and to disclose the new directions of life.” This is very much like the pattern of centering and involution typical of Teilhard’s description of evolutionary breakthroughs. Imagine the tightly-coiled spring described above or a partially-enclosed crater filled with the primordial goop from which new life will emerge.

366 Ibid., 18.
367 Ibid., 99.
368 Ibid., 99.
370 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 100.
From all of this it seems as if we could envision a category of “prophetic consciousness” encompassing the experience and thought patterns of all prophets. Iqbal does indeed use the term “prophetic consciousness” in a more precise fashion to refer to a “manifestation of psychic energy” during a stage of human history when we needed “ready-made judgments, choices, and ways of action.”

With the growth of more sophisticated reasoning and critical thinking skills, this prophetic consciousness was no longer needed. In other words, the increase of intellective ways of knowing has reduced the uppermost reaches, or at least the practical scope, attainable by non-rational ways of knowing. This is necessary for human growth. Iqbal writes, “This involves the keen perception that life cannot forever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources.”

The coming of Islam marks the last manifestation of prophetic consciousness in Muhammad, the seal of the prophets (Khatam an-Nabiyyin) and, on Iqbal’s model, it marks the full adulthood of humanity as well.

Thinking back to the defining traits of consciousness according to Iqbal, we will remember his emphasis on: unity (tawhid) and purpose associated with destiny (taqdir). Since he regards mystical consciousness as normal though non-rational and prophetic consciousness as an extension of mystical consciousness, it is not surprising that they too are resonant with unity and purpose. I think it clear that mystical consciousness is more closely associated with unity in itself while the prophetic consciousness carries that same unity over into a dynamic sense of purpose. The finality of prophethood notwithstanding, Iqbal’s model is at great pains to show that typical conscious states tend toward unity while manifesting a renewing sense of purpose as long as

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371 Ibid., 100.
372 Ibid., 101.
tension is maintained. To put it more simply, the consciousness of everyday people in their everyday lives carries forth something of both mysticism and prophethood.

**Consciousness in Teilhard de Chardin**

Consciousness, correctly understood, is of supreme importance in the Teilhardian paradigm. He is insistent that it not be waved away as scientists might be inclined to do, “The apparent restriction of the phenomenon of consciousness to higher forms of life has long served science as a pretext for eliminating it from its constructions of the universe. To dismiss it, thought has been classed as a bizarre exception, an aberrant function, an epiphenomenon.”

Teilhard, by contrast, chooses to consider consciousness holistically and, like Bergson and Iqbal, in terms of duration. On this subject, Teilhard writes, “Today the notion of duration has covered the whole of horizon spanned by the mind of man: physics, sociology, philosophy, religion—all the branches of knowledge are now impregnated by this subtle essence.” Rather than the accidental development of an evolutionary offshoot, consciousness is thus connected to the entire history and structure of the cosmos. He imagines himself saying, “‘Consciousness is completely evident only in man,’ . . . ‘therefore it is an isolated instance of no interest to science.’”

He responds, “‘Evidence of consciousness appears in the human,’ we must begin again, correcting ourselves, ‘therefore half-seen in this single flash of light, it has cosmic extension and as such takes on an aura of indefinite spatial and temporal prolongations.’” To understand this, first of all, is to think holistically since Teilhardian thought, for better or worse, stands in strong

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opposition to the tendency toward narrow specialization in the natural sciences and academic disciplines more generally.

Teilhardian thought is synthetic and holistic. As he puts it, “The history of consciousness and its place in the world remains incomprehensible to anyone who has not seen beforehand that by the unassailable integrity of it as a whole, the cosmos in which we humans find ourselves engaged constitutes a system, a totum, and a quantum.”376 While aspects of the universe can be taken and considered in isolation, this is an artificial action. He writes, “The farther and deeper we penetrate into matter with our increasingly powerful methods, the more dumbfounded we are by the interconnection of its parts.”377 And, for Teilhard, this system must form a unity, a single totum, because it is only in the whole that the order of the universe become apparent. Different scales or successive layers of the universe, the molecular versus the galactic for instance, do not demonstrate a clear copying of themes and processes from one to other. To envision the order of things you must draw a circle encompassing all possible things. As Teilhard puts it, “The mesh of the universe is the universe itself . . . woven in a single piece according to a process that is one and the same, but that never repeats itself from point to point, the stuff of the universe fits only one description: structurally it forms a whole.”378 Because the universe is unified and systematic, the potential sphere of action for a given atom is co-extensive with the whole. Teilhard writes, “. . . the radius of action of each cosmic element must then be prolonged to the outermost limits of the world.” And, “The atom is no longer the microscopic and closed world we might perhaps

376 Ibid., 14.
377 Ibid.
378 Ibid., 15.
have imagined. It is the infinitesimal center of the world itself.” The universe is quantum with respect to its energy and dynamism—visible in movement, through duration.

The concept of duration is central to Teilhard in that the cosmic dimensions of his thought are extended horizontally or three-dimensionally across all of space and extended vertically or four-dimensionally through all of time. Accordingly, he describes space-time in this way,

to our opened eyes every element of things prolongs itself behind us (and tends to continue on ahead) as far as the eye can see. So that the whole immensity of space is no more than the slice “at time t” of a trunk whose roots plunge down into the abyss of the unfathomable past, and whose branches rise somewhere ahead in a future that, at first sight, seems boundless. To obtain the most correct, vivid, and revelatory manner of seeing, for Teilhard, is often a matter of scale. It is only with respect to duration that the point becomes a line, that the roots and branches are visible. This is a perspective set on seeking out origins and reflecting on future potentialities. Having argued the importance of duration, Teilhard’s next step is a consideration of consciousness with regard to the far reaches of the evolutionary spectrum. He posits, “In a coherent perspective of the world, life inevitably presupposes a prelife before it, as far back as the eye can see.” It is for this reason, by virtue of duration, that human consciousness cannot be waved away as an aberration or epiphenomenon within the biological order of things. Consciousness, on the broadest definition, predates the advent of humanity, existing in extremely simple material compounds.

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379 Ibid., 16.
380 Ibid., 17.
381 Ibid., 25.
As we did with Iqbal, it will be helpful at this point to establish a sense of what Teilhard means by “consciousness” in the most basic terms. In an early footnote to *The Human Phenomenon*, Teilhard gives us a helpful insight, “Here, as elsewhere in this book, the term ‘consciousness, is taken in its broadest sense to designate every kind of psyche, from the most rudimentary forms of interior perception conceivable to the human phenomenon of reflective consciousness.”  

“Human reflective consciousness” is clear enough but what does he mean by the “rudimentary forms of interior perception?” It is Teilhard’s position that an unusual phenomenon is really just the leading edge or suddenly visible manifestation of related phenomena diffused throughout time and space. Therefore, it follows from the recognition of human self-consciousness that we might be able to trace a related thread of consciousness backward from its appearance. Teilhard describes his method as an effort “to discover the universal underlying the exceptional.” In the case of consciousness, Teilhard is led to discover what he calls the interior or “within of things.”

Pairing the insights of paleontology and evolutionary science with philosophy, Teilhard is less inclined to employ introspective analysis than Iqbal. Nevertheless, an early and foundational point of Teilhard’s approach relies on an inward look. He writes, “Indisputably, deep within ourselves, through a rent or a tear, an ‘interior’ appears at the heart of beings.” He earlier calls the “interior” of the human being “the object of direct intuition and the stuff of all knowledge.” Following on the line of reasoning described in the preceding paragraph, he continues, “This is enough to establish the existence of this interior in some degree or other

382 Ibid., n1.
383 Ibid., 24.
384 Ibid.
385 Ibid., 23.
everywhere forever in nature.\textsuperscript{386} His position is that all existing things within the universe have both an exterior and an interior, a without and a within. One of the difficulties of reading Teilhard is his penchant for neologisms and the creative deployment of terminology, scientific and theological, in new ways. Accordingly, he says that “inside, consciousness, and spontaneity” are “three expressions of one and the same thing.”\textsuperscript{387} Later in The Human Phenomenon, Teilhard indicates that the “inside” or “inside of the Earth” is meant to “refer to the ‘psychic’ face of the portion of the cosmic stuff encircled by the narrow radius of the juvenile Earth in the beginning.”\textsuperscript{388} The point to stress is that Teilhard considers consciousness a universal element of the universe. He is quite clear about this in a subsequent essay, “At every size, cosmic particles… in relation to themselves they are psychic centers—and at the same time they are infinitesimal psychic centers of the universe. In other words, consciousness is a universal molecular property.”\textsuperscript{389} Consciousness did not just burst forth in humans like Pallas Athena without a pre-life. Teilhard, instead, describes its development in process and duration, Consciousness increases and grows deeper throughout the series of cosmic units, in proportion with the organized complexity of those units. While it is completely imperceptible to our observational methods below an atomic complexity of the order of $10^5$ (the virus), it can be plainly detected when we reach that of the cell ($10^{10}$); but it enter into its major development only in the brains of large mammals ($10^{20}$), in other words when we have atomic groupings astronomic in order.\textsuperscript{390}

Or, looking at the phenomenon from the other direction, Teilhard writes, “Refracted back in evolution, consciousness spreads out qualitatively behind us in a spectrum of variable shades

\textsuperscript{386} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{387} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{388} Ibid., 36. Elsewhere in Teilhard’s writing he briefly considers the development of consciousness on other planets and even the merging of two noospheres, cf. The Human Phenomenon, 205.
\textsuperscript{390} Ibid., 101-102.
whose lower terms are lost in darkness.” Notice here the use of “qualitative” to indicate a matter of degree in the manner of Bergson as opposed to a clear and discernible 1-1 measurement between the amount of atoms and the degree of consciousness. Having established consciousness as a developmental quality, the next steps are to identify an energy and law to explain the process.

To produce further explanation of this trajectory, Teilhard posits two types of energy corresponding to the within and without of things. Tangential energy links an element with “all elements of the same order in the universe as itself (that is, of the same complexity and same ‘centricity’).” Tangential energy is energy as understood by science, meaning that it is subject to the laws of thermodynamics. Teilhard’s innovation is to clarify the ambiguous category of spiritual energy by introducing radial energy, “attracting the element in the direction of an ever more complex and centered state, toward what is ahead.” Of course, to be attracted forwards is also to be drawn towards. For illustration, let us consider Teilhard’s description of earth in its early stages, “Over kilometers of thickness, in the water, the air, and the deposits of mud, ultramicroscopic grains of protein densely cover the surface of the earth… the primordial dust of consciousness.” Through synthesis, and over great stretches of time, this primordial dust became bound together at increasing levels of complexity. While the intricate details of the leap from pre-life to life remain mysterious, Teilhard focuses on the sheer numbers of molecules

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391 Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, 27.
392 Ibid., 30.
393 Ibid.
394 Ibid., 37.
brought in close contact within an enclosed surface. These are conditions allowing for the molecules to turn inward, an essential process since “the growth of the inside can only take place thanks to a double, conjugated enfolding, the enfolding of the molecule on itself and the enfolding of the planet on itself.”\textsuperscript{396} The concept of involution is important to remember since Teilhard believes it operates at every stage of evolution, including the kind of interaction and convergence relevant to human sociality.\textsuperscript{397}

We can think of radial energy as an attractive force drawing the evolutionary process toward greater complexity and the constituent elements of this process toward each other. Approaching the concept in this way reveals its true nature within the Teilhardian system. Radial energy is the active force in a law of attraction; radial energy is love, radical love, radically conceived and operating at every evolutionary stage. Teilhard writes, “Taken in its full biological reality, love (namely, the affinity of one being for another) is not unique to the human being. It represents a general property of all life, and as such it embraces all the varieties and degrees of every form successively taken by organized matter.”\textsuperscript{398} Consider the chemical bond, the operating force building up material and biological complexity. This chemical bond, in each and every occurrence, is an expression of love according to Teilhard. In terms of duration, reflecting on this principle backward and forward through time, these bonds make up our own human capacity for knowing and loving. The evolutionary advent of the human consciousness allows the universe to know itself. And, in Teilhard’s words, “If some internal propensity to unite did not exist, even in the molecule, in probably some incredibly rudimentary yet already nascent

\textsuperscript{396} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 38.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., n1.
\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 188.
state, it would be physically impossible for love to appear higher up, in ourselves, in the hominized state.”399 On this view, the very same attractive force holding existence together is that which draws human beings together across every boundary.

Teilhard views the emergence of thought, of consciousness, as one of several breakthrough moments in cosmic history: there is geogenesis, biogenesis, and then, psychogenesis. As indicated above, there is a mystery around such moments in terms of pure scientific phenomena but they all share common attributes in Teilhardian terms. The process of complexification, best understood as a process of involution and ramification, is moved forward by the law of attraction, itself fueled by radial energy. With the human phenomenon, this process has reached a new stage and taken on a new character, “When instinct, in a living being, saw itself in the mirror of itself for the first time, the whole world took a step.”400 Teilhard also uses the word *hominisation* to describe this transition and, “the progressive phyletic spiritualization in human civilization of all the forces contained in animality.”401 As with the preceding transitions, psychogenesis is both an end and a new beginning, as there is yet another evolutionary stage in the making—*noogenesis*, the deployment of the *noosphere*. This is the next step for thinking beings, the goal consciousness is moving toward. Just as with the preceding stages, it too is governed by the law of attraction and fueled by radial energy. But now humans are self-aware and the drawing together of the noosphere carries social implications to be explored in the next chapter.

Having just reviewed the successive evolutionary stages of geogenesis, biogenesis, and psychogenesis, we can now think of these developments as spheres of increasing size. First, geogenesis forms the core and initial surface of the earth. Biogenesis clothes this rocky sphere with an additional layer of life in all its abundance. With psychogenesis and noogenesis comes another “membrane” in “the majestic assemblage of telluric sheets.” Teilhard describes this as the “thinking layer,” consciousness spread like a fire until “it has covered the whole planet with incandescence.” In other words, “over and beyond the biosphere there is a noosphere.”

To describe the image of the noosphere spreading across the earth, Teilhard coins the term *planetization*. In this sense, therefore, it is appropriate to think of these stages as concentric spheres like the Aristotelian cosmological models of old. This provides a helpful understanding of the total transformative effect at each stage of evolution conceived in Teilhardian terms. Teilhard describes his work as the search for a “qualitative law of development capable of explaining from sphere to sphere first the invisibility, then the appearance, and then the gradual dominance of the inside in relation to the outside of things.”

Emerging through the evolutionary stages is a line or *axis of complexity-consciousness*. Teilhard will also refer to this as the *law of complexity-consciousness* and we can think of this in conjunction with the *law of attraction* described above.

Concerning complexity-consciousness, Teilhard explains, “This law reveals itself once the universe is conceived of as passing from state A, characterized by a very large number of very simple elements (that is, with a very impoverished inside), to State B, defined by a smaller

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402 Ibid., 123-124.
403 Ibid., 27.
number of very complex groupings (that is, having a richer inside).”

From this we can ascertain two important themes in common between Iqbal and Teilhard: emphases on unity and tension. Owing to the law of attraction, the “stuff” of the universe has a tendency to unite in the formation of a deeper within. The “complex groupings” described by Teilhard are the result of increasing levels of pressure or tension. He states this directly, “Observed along its axis of complexity, as I said, the universe, as a whole and in each of its points, is in a continual tension of organic enfolding on itself and therefore of interiorization.”

Compression is evident in the building blocks of life being forced together in the crater of a meteor strike or some other enclosed space. Interiorization is evident even in the cell where we find “the stuff of the universe reappearing again with all its characteristics—but this time raised to a subsequent level of complexity and, as a result, at the same time (if the hypothesis guiding us throughout these pages is valid) to a higher degree of interiority, that is, of consciousness.”

But the most striking example of interiorization and involution is the, “tendency to cerebration,” and the human brain.

The brain is of special interest to Teilhard because he is especially interested in consciousness. He writes, “A preferred mechanism for the play of consciousness certainly does exist in living organisms, and to become aware of it all we need to do is look inside ourselves; it is the nervous system.”

Although animals possess an interiority in proportion to their brains as well, only the human line has been totally successful in reaching the stage of reflection among

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404 Ibid., 28.
405 Ibid., 217.
406 Ibid., 49.
408 Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, 93.
“the innumerable modalities of consciousness life has tried in the animal world.” Referring to complexity-consciousness he writes, “It is in his brain that the two foci attain their obvious maximum complexity, in that organ where thousands of millions of cells are grouped in such a way as to constitute a transmitting and receiving and coordinating center of which we can form only a very imperfect idea. Can nature show us, outside the human brain, a quantity of organic matter contained in a smaller volume? Hardly!” Structurally, the folds of the human brain provide an example of Teilhard’s thinking on compression and involution. An article in the Harvard Gazette explains, “Why the brain is folded can be rationalized easily from an evolutionary perspective: Folded brains likely evolved to fit a large cortex into a small volume with the benefit of reducing neuronal wiring length and improving cognitive function.”

Cerebralisation, to borrow a term from Teilhard, favors the concentration of brain matter. A recent study using a 3-D gel model of a developing brain reveals that, “The number, size, shape, and position of neuronal cells present during brain growth all lead to the expansion of the gray matter, known as the cortex, relative to the underlying white matter. This puts the cortex under compression, leading in turn to a mechanical instability that causes it to crease locally.”

Complexity under compression leads to self-reflective consciousness. Teilhard describes “reflection” as a sudden change of state in consciousness. The human is not just a reasoning animal but a reflective animal with “consciousness raised to the power of two” because she

409 Ibid., 112n1.
knows that she knows.\textsuperscript{413} The “human paradox” is that reflection appeared without a massive change in the constituent elements, “it is disturbing for us to observe how little ‘anthropos’ differs anatomically from the other anthropoids.” Often a visual thinker, Teilhard provides two examples to help in resolving the paradox. First, he describes a pot of water under constant heat that produces a “tumultuous expansion of freed and vaporized molecules.” Second, he envisions a cone and asks us to consider how we might move section-by-section toward the top when, suddenly, the surface will vanish to leave a point.\textsuperscript{414} The cone is a favorite image for Teilhard and, I believe, it can be fruitfully combined with his use of the ellipsis in one of his later works. He writes,

\begin{quote}
This can all be represented geometrically in the form of an ellipse of which one focus is complexity and the other consciousness. Without going into the question of the metaphysical relation between these two foci, I may say that it is just as though being were progressively propagated between them. The most general experience of evolution may be described as the appearance of consciousness as a function of its degree of complexity.\textsuperscript{415}
\end{quote}

The geometrically inclined will recognize that an ellipse can be thought of as a conic section tilted upward diagonally from base to point. Thus, Teilhard’s system can be thought of as an ellipse of complexity-consciousness moving upward through the cone to greater degrees of interiorization and centricity. And at the point, “What was still only a centered surface became a center. Through an infinitesimal ‘tangential’ increase, the ‘radial’ turned around and, so to speak, leaped infinitely ahead.”\textsuperscript{416} This leap forward is an expression of being or reality. Teilhard refers

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[2]{Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 113.}
\footnotetext[3]{Teilhard de Chardin, “The Place of Technology in a General Biology of Mankind,” 156–57.}
\footnotetext[4]{Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 113.}
\end{footnotes}
to the “coefficient of centro-complexity (or, which comes to the same thing, of consciousness) . . . the true absolute measure of being in the beings that surround us.” \(^{417}\)

This brings Teilhard to some additional concepts of central concern to Iqbal as well: personality and ego. The description of human consciousness as self-reflective center should not mask its dynamism, we are not dealing with an “immutably fixed focal point, but the vortex, deepening as it sucks up the fluid at the core of which it was born.” The individual has the capacity to become more individualized, more real. Teilhard writes, “The ‘I’ which only subsists in becoming more and more itself, in the degree to which it makes everything else itself. The person in and through personalization.” \(^{418}\) In *The Divine Milieu*, Teilhard places great emphasis on the importance of work and the “sacred duty of research.” \(^{419}\) He considers it a Christian responsibility to show that “the incarnate God did not come to diminish in us the glorious responsibility and splendid ambition that is ours: of fashioning our own self.” “Plus et ego,” he exhorts. Asking his readers to follow the call of Saint Paul, Teilhard encourages engagement with the world. Perhaps he has in mind “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” or “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” \(^{420}\) Teilhard’s premise is that “in action I adhere myself to the creative power of God; I coincide with it; I become not only its instrument but its living extension.” \(^{421}\) Of God, he writes, “There is a sense in which he is at the tip of my pen, my spade, my brush, my needle—of my heart and of my thought.” The power of “divine


\(^{420}\) Ephesians 6:10 and Philippians 4:13.

attraction,” elsewhere called “radial energy,” “sur-animates.\(^{422}\) Teilhard is exceedingly critical of Christian spiritual tendencies that have neglected to appreciate matter and the material world because they have fundamentally failed to acknowledge the relationship between the within and the without. In response, he offers a core thesis, “Any increase that I can bring upon myself or upon things is translated into some increase in my power to love and some progress in Christ’s blessed hold upon the universe.”\(^{423}\) This really is the key to understanding Teilhard. Consciousness has not met its terminus in human self-reflection, it will continue to evolve. The axis of complexity-consciousness that he seeks to identify and defend on purely scientific terms, among the gentiles as it were, is in his mind building toward the body of Christ.

**Extraordinary Forms of Consciousness in Teilhard**

Teilhard examines at least two extraordinary forms of consciousness: mystical and global (noospheric). In the recognition of the laws of attraction and complexity-consciousness, Teilhard has established his phenomenological basis for a telos in the evolution of the universe. He identifies a universe moving toward increasing depth of the within, increasing depth of consciousness. This is the rational argument for a principle Teilhard had come to know previously through non-rational means.\(^{424}\) Or, on his own terms, he is at pains in *The Human Phenomenon* to pair his experience of radial energy with the tangential. In *The Heart of Matter*, he writes, “. . . there gradually grew in me, as a presence much more than an abstract notion, the consciousness of a deep-running, ontological, total Current which embraced the whole Universe in which I moved: and this consciousness continued to grow until it filled the whole horizon of

\(^{422}\) Ibid., 28-29.
\(^{423}\) Ibid., 27.
\(^{424}\) See pages 11 and 12 in Chapter One for a description of Teilhard’s early mystical experiences.
my inner being.” His use of “presence” is deliberate since Teilhard is committed to the idea that the total current of the universe is an extension of supreme personality, i.e. God.

Early detractors of Teilhard accused him of denying the existence of a personal God. These attacks were numerous or vociferous enough to prompt Henri de Lubac to begin a “defensio fidei” of Teilhard by answering such objections. It is notable that this defense begins just after Teilhard’s thoughts on his final Jesuit retreat are quoted on the previous page, “This retreat will, I hope, have brought me closer to Him, who draws ever closer.” De Lubac is right that those denying Teilhard’s devotion to a personal God are “refusing the evidence of countless absolutely explicit and clear passages available to everyone.” Teilhard, in fact, remarks on a modern tendency to depersonalize all things on account of minute analysis and the extent of the sidereal, the “twin infinities” of Pascal’s Pensées. As explained with reference to the “law of attraction,” Teilhard believes love is a general property of all life, a “real internal propensity to unite.” But love “dies on contact with the impersonal and anonymous.” Teilhard, therefore, asserts the existence of what he calls the “Omega Point,” supremely attractive and supremely present. Omega is the “conscious pole of the world, we need to do more than say that it emerges from the rise of consciousness: we must add that it has simultaneously already emerged.” And, because evolution only makes sense to Teilhard if it has some lasting purpose, this Omega must be proximate to the universe in love while able to draw all things toward an

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427 Ibid., 89.
428 Pensées, L199/S230.
429 Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, 188.
430 Ibid., 192.
escape from time and space. On the final page of his diary, written three days before his death, Teilhard cites 1 Corinthians 15:26-28, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death . . . that God may be all in all.” The Omega Point is Alpha and Omega—the living God.

Teilhard describes the “mystical sense” as “essentially a feeling for, a presentiment of, the total and final unity of the world, beyond its present sensibly, apprehended multiplicity: it is a cosmic sense of oneness.” He believes this basic definition holds true for Christians, Sufis, and Hindus but marks a stark distinction between two mystical roads as carefully documented by Ursula King. Teilhard disapproves of a mysticism of relaxation that leads toward identification with the “common ground—to an ineffable of de-differentiation and de-personalization.” This is the mysticism he calls the “incurable weakness” of the “eastern (or Hindu) quarter.” Teilhard believes certain mystical currents in the Christian tradition represent a mysticism of love and tension in support of “ultra-personalizing, ultra-determining, and ultra-differentiating unification of the elements within a common focus.” This is the broad-stroke outline of his view of mysticism as system but it does not offer insight, academic or personal, on what he thinks of mystical consciousness. Writing of consciousness in The Human Phenomenon he uses fire imagery; “phyletic lineages grow warm with consciousness,” they glow red in mammals.

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431 Ibid., 193.
432 Teilhard de Chardin, The Heart of Matter, 104; these verses, particularly the last, appear in Teilhard’s oeuvre passim.
435 In another essay he mentions “Vedantists, the Taoists, the Sufis, or the Christians;” Teilhard de Chardin, “Centrology,” 101.
436 King, Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World.
Human consciousness is a “point of incandescence,” and a flame burst forth.\textsuperscript{440} In \textit{The Heart of Matter} he uses similar language to describe his developing and pre-theological understanding of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a child, “There was no longer a patch of crimson in the center of Jesus, but a glowing core of fire, whose splendor embraced every contour—first those of the God-Man—and then those of all things that lay within his ambience.”\textsuperscript{441} Immediate and non-rational awareness of Omega as radial energy throughout the universe or in the person of Jesus; two experiences that are ultimately unified in the transubstantiation of the universe. This is often an experience of fire or fiery energy for Teilhard and similar descriptions appear throughout one of his most mystical texts, \textit{The Mass on the World}. He writes,

Blazing Spirit, Fire, personal, supersubstantial, the consummation of a union so immeasurably more lovely and more desirable than that destructive fusion of which all the pantheists dream: be pleased yet once again to come down and breathe a soul into the newly formed, fragile film of matter with which this day the world is to be freshly clothed.\textsuperscript{442}

To be seized by this fire is a new kind of consciousness according to Teilhard. In the final pages of \textit{The Human Phenomenon} he describes a “qualitative value, which, as in every case of biological progress, expresses itself in the appearance of a specifically new state of consciousness. And here I am thinking of Christian love.”\textsuperscript{443}

Instrumental in the development of consciousness from the beginning of the universe, Teilhard believes love continues to drive its progress. He identifies a three-fold property “each consciousness possesses: (1) of partially centering \textit{everything} around itself; (2) of always being

\textsuperscript{440} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 105–6.
\textsuperscript{441} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Heart of Matter}, 44.
\textsuperscript{443} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 212.
able to center further on itself; and (3) by this very supercentration, of being led to join with all the other centers surrounding it.\(^{444}\) This association among centers is part of what makes the future development of consciousness inevitable for Teilhard. He images a progress through the established stages of geogenesis, biogenesis, and psychogenesis toward an unknown future stage—noogenesis, the deployment of the planetized noosphere. This is partially a social phenomenon to be discussed more fully in the following chapter but it is also the advent of a new form of global consciousness. While it has been rightly argued that the Teilhardian noosphere is predictive of the internet, it ought not to be thought of as identical with the internet.\(^{445}\) It is not only a function or a mechanism but an entire self-aware organism; the noosphere has eyes and purpose. What this phenomenon will look like, what it might feel like remains obscure. It is grist for science fact, science fiction, and the ground in between. Teilhard is, however, insistent that individual consciousness, individual egos, will be preserved in the formation of the noosphere, what he calls union by differentiation. Biblically astute readers may already have detected where Teilhard is going. He writes, “If the world is convergent and if Christ occupies the center of it, then the Christogenesis found in Saint Paul and Saint John is no more nor less than both the expected and unhoped for prolongation of the noogenesis in which cosmogenesis culminates for our experience.”\(^{446}\) Consider: “In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with (toward) God, and the Logos was God. He was God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”\(^{447}\) Also: “He is before all things and in him

\(^{444}\) Ibid., 184.


\(^{446}\) Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, 213.

\(^{447}\) John 1:1-3; The translation of Greek πρὸς as “toward” carries interesting Teilhardian or evolutionary connotations.
all things hold together” and “He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.” For Teilhard, the development of love consciousness encouraging global consciousness is the building up of the body of Christ—a Christ consciousness yet to be experienced in its *pleroma*.

**Iqbal and Teilhard on Consciousness: A Critical Comparison**

Acknowledging the distinctive human capacity of self-reflection, both Iqbal and Teilhard make consciousness central to their respective systems. What is more surprising is that both also consider consciousness in some way a constituent part of all existing things in the universe. This *panpsychism* has a long history in the philosophy of consciousness and its importance for properly contextualizing our thinkers is explored below. For Iqbal and Teilhard, consciousness is also an extension of the divine. For Iqbal, consciousness refers to the array of egos flowing from the Ultimate Ego and, for Teilhard, consciousness and spirit are identical. But Teilhard also thinks of divinity as the body of Christ—an important separation from Iqbal’s perspective. As Christopher Mooney, SJ, describes Teilhard’s thought, “The Body-Person of Christ thus becomes the Pole of unity toward which all converges, the Milieu within which this convergence takes place, and the physical Center holding in existence all the radii of creation.” In both perspectives, the outcome elevates the life and progress of the human being to a new level. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, this reclamation of human progress manifests as a certain degree of optimism about scientific progress properly conceived. Since Teilhard himself was a scientist, his work is replete with scientific terminology and reflections concerning the value of scientific research. Of science and religion, Teilhard says, “The same life animates

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448 Colossians 1:17 and Ephesians 4:10.
But in Iqbal as well we find a similar sentiment, “The truth is that all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of Nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer.” Both thinkers were establishing a new kind of mysticism, a new kind of spirituality, for a changing age; this is a point we will take up at length in Chapter Four.

Both Teilhard and Iqbal share an intellectual inheritance from Henri Bergson. Teilhard described his first reading of *Creative Evolution* as placing fuel on the fire already consuming his heart at just the right moment. Iqbal visited Bergson in Paris and shared with him the hadith, “Do not curse Time, for Time is God.” Duration, Bergson’s signature concept, is instrumental for both thinkers. Duration, in fact, is the key to connecting the thought of Iqbal and Teilhard around the theme of evolution. An evolutionary scientist, Teilhard has a different approach and priorities than Iqbal. He is much more apt to cast his gaze backward through cosmic history and the delineation of evolutionary stages in his thought reflects this. Teilhard provides a richer description of the past than Iqbal. He traces the cosmic history of consciousness and applies a lens which purports to reveal the purpose of the universe in a piece of quartz or a dish of bacteria. Iqbal is neither a scientist nor an evolutionary thinker on these terms and does not claim to be. I think it is quite unfair when Damian Howard criticizes Iqbal for failing to write more on science, “Iqbal fails seriously to engage with the biology which he otherwise seems so intent on embracing, falling back instead on metaphysics.”

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present than the past and he works to uncover divine principles in the analysis of human experience and self-reflection. What they share is a passion for the future at the individual and species level, to be explored further in the following chapter. And what they share also is the sense of duration and the importance of placing the human person in space-time, not mathematically but psychologically.\textsuperscript{455} Teilhard calls this “biological space-time” and insists that modern mind must come to terms with duration and our participatory role in evolution. He borrows from Julian Huxley in saying we are “nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself.”\textsuperscript{456} Iqbal similarly stresses the discovery of hope in evolution and the potential for the correct understanding of consciousness to illuminate, “the essentially Islamic idea of continuous creation which means a growing universe.”\textsuperscript{457}

Unity is a second shared concern between Iqbal and Teilhard of the greatest significance to their thought. As discussed above, Iqbal is deeply committed to \textit{tawhid}, perhaps the most fundamental concept in Islamic orthodoxy. Teilhard, in imagining the successive spheres of evolution, is also enamored with the tendency toward convergence and unity: his laws of attraction and complexity-consciousness. In his autobiography he describes an early realization, “The oneness, or \textit{Unicity}, of man stretched like a veil over the confused multitude of living beings: this astounding singleness in cohesion was in itself sufficient to catch and fascinate my passion for the Cosmic-apprehended-in-its-extreme-forms.”\textsuperscript{458} Later he will refer to

\textsuperscript{455} Space-time in the sense of something we participate in, something we are moving through. Imagine that you had thought of yourself as moving through two-dimensional space on a flat plane and then suddenly became aware that you are moving in three dimensions. Discovering the plane of your movement is, in fact, layered like a cube would be revolutionary. The discovery of space-time operates the same way if we think of it as a fourth dimension rather than a constant phenomenon somehow imposed from the outside.

\textsuperscript{456} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 154.

\textsuperscript{457} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 97 and 110.

\textsuperscript{458} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Heart of Matter}, 32.
concentration in a higher unity—the incommunicable Beauty of Christ. On this point Iqbal, of course, would not agree and the next chapter will reveal more separation as each thinker believes their own religious tradition the vanguard of social unification. But the importance of unity remains a substantial common ground even to the point of a shared vexation over reproduction. Writing of God, Iqbal posits,

\[ \ldots \text{it is clear that the perfect individual, closed off as an ego, peerless and unique, cannot be conceived as harboring its own enemy at home. It must be conceived as superior to the antagonistic tendency of reproduction. This characteristic of the perfect ego is one of the most essential elements in the Qur’anic conception of God; and the Qur’an mentions it over and over again, not so much with a view to attack the current Christian conception as to accentuate its own view of a perfect individual.} \]

It is intriguing that Iqbal is at pains to point out that the Qur’an is engaging in its own good-faith argument rather than polemic here. It is also intriguing that Teilhard has his own anxieties over the relationship between reproduction and the “within.” He asks, “Since a center of consciousness is essentially turned in, and closed in, on itself, how can we conceive the passage and communication of a ‘within’ from mother-cell to daughter-cell?” He ultimately resorts to theorizing two types of ego: a nuclear portion and a peripheral ego capable of budding and separating. He concludes this line of thinking with, “It is true, of course, that in the human grain of thought, ‘reflection’ as yet affects only the nuclear portion of the being—and not the peripheral portion: the latter remains divisible, and still, accordingly, capable of reproduction (gametes).” It is revealing that Teilhard emphasizes unity to such a degree as to worry over reproduction. Each of these topics, panpsychism and unity, require further explanation.

\[ 459 \text{ Ibid., 64.} \]
\[ 460 \text{ Iqbal,} \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,} \textit{51.} \]
\[ 461 \text{ Teilhard de Chardin, “Centrology,” 108.} \]
\[ 462 \text{ Ibid., 109.} \]
What is Panpsychism?

The *Oxford Companion to the Mind* includes “panpsychism” in its entry for “animism.” Animism is described as the “primitive” belief that all things in the world are “imbued with some kind of spiritual or psychological presence; this may imply that things are ‘ensouled’ or ‘animated’ by a universal ‘world soul’, or by individual spirits of various kinds.” Panpsychism is distinguished from this by describing it as a “philosophical doctrine” holding that “there is some spark or germ of consciousness present in all things.” There is perhaps more than a hint of disapproval here, even as the author refers to Thomas Nagel’s “recent attempt to take panpsychism seriously.”

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church* is similarly dismissive, calling panpsychism “The 19th-cent. doctrine that everything in the universe is endowed with a measure of consciousness. It is little favoured by Christian theologians.”

Susan Blackmore describes panpsychism as “the view that mind is fundamental to the universe, and that all matter has associated mental aspects or properties, however primitive.” In his excellent overview of Henri Bergson’s thought, G. William Barnard writes, “Most forms of panpsychism hold that all forms of matter possess something that resembles consciousness. However, many versions argue that this underlying consciousness can manifest itself in a wide variety of ways, some of which, paradoxically, are subconscious in nature.”

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From the descriptions and definitions above, there are three important points to emphasize. First, there is a notable difference between attributing consciousness and proto-consciousness to all existing things. The question of whether or not a cactus thinks and feels does not necessarily follow from panpsychism. We would be wise, I think, to mark a distinction between high and low panpsychism. High panpsychism is something like animism in that it attributes a degree of conscious awareness to all existing things. Low panpsychism, by contrast, argues for rudimentary bits of consciousness existing in all things while recognizing that conscious awareness only exists at higher degrees of complexity. For their part, Iqbal and Teilhard are careful to distinguish human consciousness from other forms. At the same time, acknowledging mind as fundamental to the universe invigorates Iqbal and Teilhard’s thought and carries important theological implications. Whereas materialist philosophy might dismiss panpsychism outright, theology stands to gain by giving it serious consideration. Third, because panpsychism finds itself at odds with a materialist paradigm, it is seldom taken seriously in philosophical circles. Barnard believes it would take a Kuhnian paradigm shift to transform panpsychism into a more viable option in the eyes of faculty, administrators, and editors.467

Panpsychism has a long and illustrious history in the philosophy of mind up to the early 20th century and it does provide a potential answer to the hard problem of consciousness, i.e. the problem of providing an account of how phenomenal consciousness arises from the physical constructs of the brain.468 Such an answer, speculative and potentially metaphysical, is unlikely to satisfy modern materialists; it is best understood as a counter to that way of seeing the world.

468 For an excellent intellectual history of panpsychism in the west see: David Skrbina, Panpsychism in the West (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).
Given the ascendancy of scientific materialism, it might seem safe to consider panpsychism permanently outmoded. We might agree that the “nineteenth century was the heyday of panpsychism” and go further still by deciding we should leave it there.\(^{469}\) Surprisingly, however, a July 2016 article in the New York Times describes panpsychism as moving “beyond the fringe;” consciousness might be built into matter after all, “perhaps as some kind of quantum mechanical effect.”\(^{470}\) Philosopher Robert Merrihew Adams distinguishes between functional and intrinsic properties of phenomena. He cites his ninth grade science teacher on this point, “We don’t know what electricity is, but we know what it does.” Should we drill down to electrons, we are left in the same position: explanation by function. Our inability to discover the absolutely intrinsic character of an electrical charge is an epistemological question rather than a metaphysical one. He writes, “It is not uncontroversial, but it certainly seems to me there is something implausible about supposing that a thing in itself has nothing to it over and above its relations with other things, or that its present actual state has nothing to it over and above its causal relation to other possible states.”\(^{471}\) Like Teilhard, Adams thinks it possible there is a within to things.

**Bergson, Teilhard and Iqbal as Panpsychists**

Panpsychism in Teilhard and Iqbal is part of their inheritance from Henri Bergson who himself rejected materialism as a satisfactory explanation for consciousness. Bergson offers a helpful illustration on this point,

That there is a close connection between a state of consciousness and the brain we do not dispute. But there is also a close connection between a coat and the nail on which it

\(^{469}\) Seager and Allen-Hermanson, “Panpsychism.”
\(^{470}\) Johnson, “Consciousness: The Mind Messing With the Mind.”
hangs, for, if the nail is pulled out, the coat falls to the ground. Shall we say, then, that the shape of the nail gives us the shape of the coat, or in any way corresponds to it? No more are we entitled to conclude, because the physical fact is hung onto a cerebral state, that there is any parallelism between the two series psychical and physiological.472

Barnard calls Bergson’s understanding of the external world “radically different” from common sense and classical physics.473 This covers two of Bergson’s claims. In Barnard’s words, the first claim is that the universe “consists entirely of dynamic patterns of energy, vortices of vibrations that radiate outward, contacting and affecting other complexly patterned vortices of energy.”474 With due diligence about what we mean by the terms “matter” and “energy,” this is no longer controversial among quantum physicists. Bergson’s second, and more troublesome, claim concerns the nature of matter. In his introduction to Matter and Memory he writes, “Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of ‘images.’ And by ‘image’ we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing - an existence placed halfway between the ‘thing’ and the ‘representation.’”475 This develops into a full embrace of panpsychism as Bergson argues for a latent consciousness at the heart of the aforementioned energy, which is to say, at the heart of all things. This latent consciousness has the property of resonating with all other consciousness of the same type. Individual human consciousness, by contrast, is distinguished by its ability to focus itself upon the external world and draw in latent consciousness. The individual absorbs latent consciousness into duration and enhances her ability to act freely and creatively thereby.476 In this way Bergsonian panpsychism

474 Ibid., 123–24.
475 Ibid., 12–24.
476 Ibid., 248–49.
is foundational for both Iqbal and Teilhard’s individual understanding of how selfhood is
developed and actualized in relationship with the surrounding world.

Owing to explicit statements in their writings, it ought to be non-controversial to
associate both Iqbal and Teilhard with panpsychism. Other scholars have made such claims but it
has not previously received the level of attention given by this project in service to our focus on
consciousness. Writing in a 1966 edition of Iqbal Review, Robert Whittemore is explicit, “As in
Whitehead, so also in Iqbal, philosophy of nature becomes a philosophy of organism, becomes
panpsychic evolution in which nature is to be understood as a living, ever-growing organism
whose growth has no final external limits.”\(^{477}\) Whittemore attributes Iqbal’s tendency toward
panpsychism to his reading of Rumi in a footnote. Iqbal does indeed cite a relevant passage from
Rumi, “Low in the earth, I lived in realms of ore and stone . . . In a new birth, I dived and flew,
And crept and ran, And all the secret of my essence drew within a form that brought them all to
view – And lo, a Man!”\(^{478}\) Writing ten years later, M. M. Sharif associates Iqbal’s panpsychism
with the ideas of philosopher and Cambridge Apostle James Ward.\(^{479}\) Seemingly following on
Sharif, Mohammed Maruf repeats the assertion concerning Ward in a 1983 article for Religious
Studies.\(^{480}\) In a 2006 book, John Cooper also notes Iqbal’s embrace of “a kind of
panpsychism.”\(^{481}\) In his recently-released A History of the Concept of God: A Process Approach,
Daniel Dombrowski provides a contrary or, at least, mediated opinion, “Although classifying

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\(^{478}\) Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 147.
\(^{479}\) M. M. Sharif, “Iqbal’s Conception of God,” in About Iqbal and His Thought, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Institute of Islamic
Culture, 1976); James Ward also twice delivered the Gifford Lectures in 1896 and 1907-1909.
\(^{481}\) John W. Cooper, Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present (Michigan: Baker
Academic, 2006), 230.
Iqbal as a panpsychist or panexperientialist would be inaccurate, we can legitimately say that he
gestured in the direction of this position.”482

Several of these authors cite the ubiquity of ego in Iqbal’s *The Reconstruction of
Religious Thought in Islam* with this line, “I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and
I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed.” Iqbal clarifies the point soon
afterward, “Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego. But
there are degrees in the expression of egohood.”483 Consciousness is fundamental in Iqbal’s
thought. Of the atom, he writes, “Regarded as a phase of Divine energy, it is essentially spiritual.
The *Nafs* is the pure act; the body is only the act become visible and hence measurable.”484 This
is a further development of Iqbal’s earlier claim that consciousness is a purely spiritual principle
and not a substance.485 This said, he underscores the close relationship between body and soul in
a subsequent lecture. The body is “accumulated action or habit of the soul,” it is a “permanent
element of consciousness.” Matter, therefore, is “a colony of egos of a low order out of which
emerges the ego of a higher order, when their association and interaction reach a certain degree
of coordination.”486 Matter, according to Iqbal, is spirit embodied; it is spirit in space-time
reference.487 “There is no such thing as a profane world,” writes Iqbal. “Matter exists for the self-
realization of spirit” in the individual and in the community.488 Panpsychism is integral to Iqbal’s
thought. He does not just gesture toward panpsychism; he embraces panpsychism in creative

York Press, 2016), 175.
484 Ibid.
485 Ibid., 33.
486 Ibid., 84.
487 Ibid., 122 and 259.
488 Ibid., 122-123.
combination with his theological focus on *tawhid*. Surprisingly, panpsychism also feeds into Iqbal’s approach to sociality. Matter does not just exist for the organization and realization of individuals but for communities as well. It is an error, therefore, to suggest Iqbal is ambivalent about panpsychism or that he merely adopts panpsychism from Bergson without further reflection or development.

It might seem obvious to associate Teilhard with panpsychism. He is strongly influenced by Bergson and makes numerous claims for the ubiquity of consciousness in his writing. But the word “panpsychism” does not appear in Ursula King’s *Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions* or *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin*. In her defense, the word “panpsychism” does not appear in the Teilhardian corpus or *The Teilhard Lexicon* either. In a review of *The Human Phenomenon* written soon after its 1959 release in English, anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell complicates matters. He acknowledges the centrality of consciousness in Teilhard’s thought with the disclaimer that he uses the term “in an elusive and ambiguous way.” Hallowell writes, “in its most tenuous meaning ‘consciousness’ is coextensive with all material things, but not in the sense of panpsychism.” Since Hallowell is quite knowledgeable concerning Teilhard’s central theses, I suspect the issue here is a definition of panpsychism where all things must have some degree of self-reflective consciousness rather than proto-consciousness. In his relatively recent and comprehensive *Panpsychism in the West*, David Skrbina applies the label without reservation, “There was perhaps no more visionary and exuberant panpsychist than Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.” Caltech neuroscientist Christof Koch

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490 Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West*, 182.
includes Teilhard in a list of influential panpsychists.\textsuperscript{491} In a 2015 entry for “Panpsychism” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Teilhard is mentioned in a footnote as a “twentieth century panpsychist of some influence” who sought “to avoid the discontinuity of emergentism.”\textsuperscript{492}

Panpsychism is linked to Teilhard’s concept of the “within” to things and is, therefore, essential to his overall thought system. Consciousness has a cosmic extension according to Teilhard. Early in \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, he describes consciousness in the broadest possible sense to include “every kind of psyche, from the most rudimentary forms of interior perception conceivable to the human phenomenon of reflective consciousness.” He goes on to cite J. B. S. Haldane as a biologist who believes we will one day find rudimentary forms of life and thought in inert matter.\textsuperscript{493} Teilhard’s thinking on this point is quite similar to Iqbal’s reference to “ego-unities.” For Teilhard, this is expressed in his understanding of centeredness, centricity, or centration. With respect to the latter, Teilhard often has recourse to verbs as an indication of movement and development. As with Iqbal, individual human beings have a capacity for self-concentration and individuation. Teilhard also applies theology to this perspective in his development of the Omega Point as the center of centers. He writes, “The universe completing itself in a synthesis of centers, in perfect conformity with the laws of union... Christian dogma culminates in this final vision—exactly and so clearly the Omega Point that I probably would never have dared to consider or form the rational hypothesis of it.”\textsuperscript{494} For Teilhard, panpsychism

\textsuperscript{494} Ibid., 211.
is an integral part of an overall vision that is sociological, mystical, and universal in every possible sense. His understanding of “interiorization,” “centration,” and the law of complexity-consciousness are all predicated upon his belief that psyche exists to some degree in all things. Like Iqbal, he creatively reinterprets panpsychism through a theological lens to find God in all things. Again, as with Iqbal, his understanding of panpsychism feeds into a further development of consciousness in conjunction with society. Teilhard, of course, departs from Iqbal by taking this to the furthest possible extent in his prediction of the noosphere. As panpsychists, Iqbal and Teilhard are not interested in solving the hard problem of consciousness on scientific, philosophical, or any other terms. Instead, they take panpsychism as a given and build on it while theorizing a relationship with God and a future for humanity.

The Unity of Consciousness

In addition to panpsychism, Iqbal and Teilhard stake out a position emphasizing the unity of consciousness. Iqbal is especially insistent on this point; “consciousness is something single, presupposed in all mental life.” This is not, however, an essentialist or absolutist position. Iqbal, we have seen, acknowledges a Bergsonian distinction between the efficient and appreciative selves. He also refers to experience as a series of acts but these are “held together by the unity of a directive purpose.” Iqbal explains that the Arabic language has two words for the creative activity of God. _Khalq_ refers to the creation of the material world. _Amr_ refers to divine command or direction. He writes, “My whole reality lies in my directive attitude. You cannot perceive me like a thing in space, or a set of experiences in temporal order; you must interpret,

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495 Iqbal, _The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam_, 81.
496 Iqbal, 82–83; Iqbal cites Qur’an 7:54 where both _khalq_ and _amr_ appear, cf. Qur’an 36:82 and 17:85, ” And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the soul. Say, 'The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little.’”
understand, and appreciate me in my judgements, in my will-attitudes, aims, and aspirations.”

Iqbal and Teilhard both seem to seat despair and lassitude among the highest ranks in the hierarchy of sins. Whatever colonies of sub-egos there may be, a “systematic unity of experience” is produced by the human share in the creative action of God.\footnote{497 Iqbal goes on to raise suspicions about Cartesian mind-body dualism by suggesting the problem is a Manichaean inheritance. Here again, this suggestion is an extension of Iqbal’s commitments to panpsychism and \emph{tawhid}.}

Like panpsychism, questions concerning the unity of consciousness are part of an old debate in philosophy. The topic receives notable consideration in the \emph{Critique of Pure Reason} where Kant recognizes our manifold representations would repeat themselves in vain without belonging in any way to the generative act without the “unity only consciousness can obtain.”\footnote{498 Kant does not fully articulate what he means by the “unity of consciousness” but Andrew Brook ventures the following definition,}

\begin{quote}
The unity of consciousness = df (i) a single act of consciousness, which (ii) makes one consciousness of a number of representations and/or objects of representation in such a way that to be conscious of any of them is also to be conscious of others of them and of at least some of them as a group.\footnote{499 For Kant, unified consciousness enables synthesizing acts. In the same article, Brook canvasses the extent to which Kant’s ideas had influenced cognitive science up to his time of writing—2004. He concludes that there has been a resurgence of philosophical interest in consciousness}
\end{quote}

\footnote{497 \textit{Ibid.}, 83.}
beginning in the 1980s but cognitive science has failed to fully explore Kant’s ideas concerning
cognition and consciousness itself.

Consciousness certainly feels unified. I have no phenomenological awareness of my
present conscious state operating in halves or quarters. My memory, such as it is, provides me
some sense of a unified identity operating across time. As Tim Bayne and David Chalmers put it,
conscious experiences “seem to be unified, by being aspects of a single encompassing state of
consciousness.”500 On the other hand, Freudian psychoanalytic theory suggests a variety of
preconscious states related in some way to the ongoing struggle within the tripartite psyche:
superego, ego, and id. More familiarly, my brain seems to enjoy casting thoughts unbidden into
my consciousness.501 Studies of brain bisections have also uncovered the possibility of two
centers of consciousness operating within a single person. Michael Gazzaniga observes that a
disconnected hemisphere can control both arms but it possesses more capability with the
contralateral hand. Both arms can still work in coordination, however, and a patient’s expertise at
building model cars is cited.502 Split-brain patients still feel as if they have a unified
consciousness, which is to say they do not feel any different at all. Gazzaniga suggests the
feeling of integration and unity may be an extension of the left hemisphere’s interpretive
functions.503 In a summary of Gazzaniga’s 2009 Gifford Lecture, the role of the interpreter is
clarified and contrasted with theories favoring the unity of consciousness,

The interpreter constructs the sense that there is a “me” arising out of the ongoing
neuronal chatter in the brain and making all of life’s moment-to-moment decisions. Our
compelling sense of being a unified self armed with volition, deployable attention and

501 Before I fall asleep at night, my mind is a theater for my most embarrassing moments.
502 Michael S. Gazzaniga, “Cerebral Specialization and Interhemispheric Communication. Does the Corpus Callosum
Enable the Human Condition?,” *Brain* 123, no. 7 (2000): 1298.
503 Ibid., 1319.
self-control is the handiwork of the interpreter, for it brings coherence to a brain that is actually a vastly parallel and distributed system.

This view stands in contrast to much neuroscientific theorizing or existential musing about our unified, coherent nature. In most models of brain and cognitive mechanism, one can identify, as Marvin Minsky once said, “the box that makes all the decisions.”

In *The Emptied Christ of Philippians*, John P. Kennan likens Gazzaniga’s insights concerning the illusory nature of a united self with comparable beliefs in Mahāyāna Buddhism and the Christian theological concept of kenosis—the self-emptying of Christ.

This way of thinking is unappealing to both Teilhard and Iqbal since the building up of one’s unique selfhood is such an important part of their respective paradigms. Arguing against the phenomenological unity of consciousness generates an enormous burden of proof at any rate. Andrew Brook and Paul Raymont put this neatly,

Indeed, those who hold that the extent to which consciousness is unified has been overstated owe us an account of what has been overstated. When theorists claim that some conscious states are not in unified consciousness, we should ask: Not unified with what? One plausible answer would be: The unified conscious mind.

In their rejoinder to split-brain studies, Bayne and Chalmers differentiate between access field unity and phenomenal field unity. They write, “A mental state is *access-conscious* when a subject has a certain sort of access to the content of the state” and “A mental state is *phenomenally conscious* when there is something it is like to be in that state. When a state is phenomenally conscious, being in that state involves some sort of subjective experience.”

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Their argument is that there may be a breakdown of access unity while phenomenal unity is maintained in the split-brain subject. There is one locus of phenomenal consciousness—one subject. This rejoinder is part of a larger argument for Bayne and Chalmers; they hold the position that consciousness must be unified. “Much of the reason for accepting the truth of the unity thesis comes from the fact that its denial seems to be inconceivable, and perhaps incoherent,” they write.508 They advance the possibility of a more holistic view where we shift our focus from what it is like to have a conscious experience toward a consideration of what it is to be a conscious subject at all. They suggest,

It is not obvious that this sort of conceptual claim on its own yields a substantive unity thesis. But one might naturally tie this analysis to a corresponding view of the metaphysics of consciousness. In nature, it may be that the most basic sort of conscious state is the total phenomenal state, or the phenomenal field, or even the phenomenal world.509

Strikingly, this position seems to be a speculative invocation of panpsychism. In contextualizing and conceiving a future for Iqbal and Teilhard, perhaps what we need is a theory allowing for both panpsychism and the unity of consciousness—the same possibility suggested by Bayne and Chalmers. This possibility will be further explored in Chapter Five: Conclusion.

Two Questions

Comparative theology is often at its most revelatory when tackling difficult questions shared in common among religious traditions. In The Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue, Catherine Cornille says there is “little doubt that common external challenges may bring members of different religions to a new sense of interconnection and an enhanced sense of

508 Ibid., 38.
509 Ibid.
solidarity in commitment to a common cause.”\textsuperscript{510} Cornille is primarily concerned with social and political challenges like world peace, looming environmental disaster, and the alleviation of human suffering. Secularism also appears on her list, however, and she contends that religions might “collaborate in the face of secular materialism” on a “defense of a life that aims beyond the visible and tangible world.”\textsuperscript{511} Religion is not just one thing. If Teilhard and Iqbal are united in anything, it is in the common task of articulating their respective religious traditions in a way that can appeal to the twentieth century. As we close this chapter, I want to reflect on two questions of importance for the way these two thinkers shaped their discourse on consciousness: (1) How to respond to the challenge of scientific materialism and (2) What happens to our individuality when we die?

**The Challenge of Scientific Materialism**

Both Teilhard and Iqbal are critical of scientific materialism, a worldview they see as a reductionist mistake owing to overzealous conclusions drawn from narrow investigations. For Teilhard, scientific analysis pursues a unity of homogeneity by breaking down matter to its smallest elements. Of science he writes, “Its method of enquiry and its conclusions are governed by the principle that the secret of things lies in their elements, so that in order to understand the world all we have to do is to arrive at the most simple of the terms from which it has emerged.”\textsuperscript{512} In *The Human Phenomenon* he argues that some scientists believe they can deduce a universal materialism through pulverizing instruments and microscopic analysis. Their essential mistake, according to Teilhard, “. . . they overlooked the essential difference between a

\textsuperscript{511} Cornille, 99.  
natural whole and the elements into which it is analyzed." Teilhard writes, "True, by construction, any organism can always and necessarily be taken apart into well-ordered pieces. But it does not follow at all from this circumstance that the adding of these pieces together would in itself be automatic or that some specifically new value might not emerge from the sum of them."513 In explaining the distinction between the efficient and artificial self, Iqbal describes the efficient self as pulverizing time into a "series of nows."514 Of science he writes, "... we must not forget that what is called science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality—fragments of a total experience which do not seem to fit together."515 He invokes a powerful metaphor to reinforce the point, "the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh."516 Perhaps the most profoundly interesting conversation to imagine between Teilhard and Iqbal would involve the building of a mutual and holistic approach to scientific materialism. The phenomenon of consciousness would be at the heart of their answer because, from their perspective, it can only be fully understood on the cosmic scale. It is in consciousness that both Iqbal and Teilhard depart from Bergson in attributing a telos or sense of purpose to the universe. On this point we can end with a citation from the anthropologist Jane Goodall who marks a stark dichotomy in worldview:

There are really only two ways, it seems to me, in which we can think about our existence here on Earth. We either agree with Macbeth that life is nothing more than a 'tale told by an idiot,' a purposeless emergence of life-forms including the clever, greedy, selfish, and unfortunate species that we call homo sapiens - the 'evolutionary goof.' Or we believe that, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put it, 'There is something afoot in the

515 Ibid., 33.
516 Ibid., 33–34.
universe, something that looks like gestation and birth.' In other words, a plan, a purpose to it all.\textsuperscript{517}

**The Challenge of Death**

Teilhard and Iqbal’s concern for consciousness extends beyond death. Is this all theater, they wonder, or is the individual consciousness somehow preserved beyond the destruction of the material form? Committed to their respective faith traditions, both acknowledge the inevitability of death and the promise of a resurrection. “For the living know they shall die” and “Every soul shall taste death.” But “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” and there will be a resurrection, even of “bones and crumbled particles.”\textsuperscript{518} In his defense of Teilhard’s theology, Henri de Lubac said the whole of his work could be seen as a meditation on death. In an essay written in the last year of his life, Teilhard describes the “materialist dead end” in failing to overcome the “death barrier,” the “paralyzing poison of death.”\textsuperscript{519} Teilhard argues that we can only maintain our “zest for living” if we can know that we are not prisoners in the universe, “that there is a way out, that there is air, and light, and love, somewhere beyond the reach of all death.”\textsuperscript{520} In *The Human Phenomenon* he writes that we are confronted with the “sickness of the dead end” and “the anguish of feeling shut in;” asking, “Is the game worth it?”\textsuperscript{521} His conclusion in all places is that evolution is irreversible, that thought must not have a confine. The individual character of the human being makes her an irreplaceable component of the cosmic purpose.\textsuperscript{522}

\textsuperscript{518} Ecclesiastes 9:5, Qur’an 3:185, 1 Corinthians 15:26, and Qur’an 17:49.
\textsuperscript{521} Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, 160–61.
\textsuperscript{522} Teilhard de Chardin, “Centrology,” 108.
The individual consciousness is converging in the noosphere and moving toward the Omega Point established as necessarily transcendent; it is emancipated from space and time as are we.

Sharing Teilhard’s concerns, Iqbal’s own sense of purpose in the universe cannot countenance futility. He writes, “It is highly improbable that a being whose evolution has taken millions of years should be thrown away as a thing of no use.” And, “The most depressing error of materialism is the supposition that finite consciousness exhausts its object.” In his verse he condemns poets who champion death, writing in contrast,

If thou wouldst pass away, become free
of Self;
If thou wouldst live, become full of Self!

The sentiment is comparable to Teilhard’s own insistence on the importance of a zest for living. It is also a rejoinder to mystical systems which denigrate selfhood in favor of annihilation (fana). On this point he offers his own interpretation of Al-Hallaj’s famous declaration, “I am the Truth!” Iqbal explains, “The true interpretation of his experience, therefore, is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality.” There is a departure from Teilhard in Iqbal’s introspective focus on the unity of individual consciousness. While Teilhard presents a larger scheme in his explanation of why consciousness must survive death, Iqbal offers a more robust explanation of how a unified individuality bears up. Iqbal believes the individual ego can be fortified against the shock of “physical dissolution” by its self-possession.

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524 Ibid., 95.
He writes, “Life offers a scope for ego-activity, and death is the first test of the synthetic activity of the ego.” The barzakh is a new struggle for the ego by which it becomes accustomed to new forms of consciousness and a new awareness of time. Some will suffer dissolution in this state but others will struggle until they win the resurrection. Since Iqbal describes consciousness as a state of tension, it might make sense to think of this fortification of the ego as the buildup of tensile strength. Iqbal describes this as the “consummation of a life-process within the ego.”

For Iqbal, finitude is an idol to be abandoned,

‘And verily towards thy God is the limit,’ says the Qur’an. This verse embodies one of the deepest thoughts in the Qur’an; for it definitely suggests that the ultimate limit is to be sought not in the direction of the stars, but in an infinite cosmic life and spirituality.

While Teilhard writes of the divinization of both “activities” and “passivities” in The Divine Milieu, Iqbal focuses almost entirely on the former as an extension of the creative activity of God. This is not just “zest for life” in Iqbal, it is the very substance of life after death. This concept will be discussed further when we assess the relationship between Iqbal and mysticism in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

We have already seen how Teilhard’s understanding of the future development of consciousness in the noosphere speaks directly to the unity of all humanity as grains of thought, i.e. it speaks to sociality. In Iqbal the connection may seem opaque and Damian Howard has written, “Given this distinctly individualistic anthropology, Iqbal finds it hard to be interested in society.” But this is the same Iqbal who was the intellectual father of Pakistan! And it is the

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527 Ibid., 95.
528 Ibid., 96.
529 Ibid., 105.
530 Howard, Being Human in Islam, 64.
same Iqbal who reflects on the nature of prophetic consciousness and the spirit of Muslim culture. In the next chapter we will examine sociality, a further extension of the key theme of union in both Iqbal and Teilhard and the grounds for some of their most significant disagreements over religious creed.
CHAPTER THREE: SOCIALITY

Introduction

Building on the previous chapters, this examination of “sociality” will proceed individually and then through comparison. For both Iqbal and Teilhard it will be argued that sociality is the key transformative mechanism of human consciousness, self-reflective consciousness. In Teilhard, the convergence of peoples will lead ultimately and inevitably to the formation of the noosphere and the body of Christ. Iqbal focuses on the instruments of union within Islam: its universal ethics and unifying vision. From Iqbal we get a clearer understanding of the particulars of union in the present day whereas Teilhard focuses on the culmination of the evolutionary process in a distant, perhaps cosmically distant, future. Oneness is present and still becoming. Consciousness is an expression of oneness in the human ego and consciousness enables the growth of oneness through a reciprocal relationship with society. This chapter will feature two important arguments: (1) that Teilhard and Iqbal both constructed their theories of consciousness while mindful of the need to preserve individuality in social and divine union (2) that sociality, like consciousness, is a sign (āyah) of evolutionary telos representing the destiny of humanity on a pattern of emanation and return.

Sociality in Iqbal

It will be helpful at the outset to investigate how Iqbal thinks and writes about society as such. Fortunately, we have been provided with significant insight through his sociological study of the Muslim community, delivered as a lecture in 1911. Here Iqbal reaches a similar conclusion to Teilhard in asserting that the whole is more than the sum of its parts; “Society has
a distinct life of its own, irrespective of the life of its component units taken individually.” He reinforces the same point later in the lecture with slightly different language, “It is, therefore, clear that society has a life-stream of its own. The idea that it is merely the sum of its existing individuals is essentially wrong.” But this, of course, is not necessarily good news. A society can turn its constituents into little more than cogs in a machine to be used and ground away. Iqbal explains, “The interests of society as a whole are fundamentally different and even antagonistic to the interests of the individual whose activity is nothing more than an unconscious performance of a particular function which social economy has allotted to him.” Iqbal, generally, is more realistic about the ills of human social life than Teilhard for at least two reasons. First, Teilhard often sets events on a cosmic scale and individual social ills become naught but blips from that vantage point. Moreover, Iqbal has first-hand experience with the evils of colonialism that demands a response while Teilhard is seldom disposed to reflect on the topic at length.

In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal offers an innovative interpretation of the fall, i.e. the events leading up to the expulsion of the first humans from the Garden of Eden (*Jannah*). He begins by explaining how the Qur’an uses legends to reveal moral and philosophical truths appropriate for the advancing spirit of humanity and, therefore, bypasses questions of historicity. Iqbal believes the fall indicates human evolution from mere instinct to the “conscious possession of a free self.” In an effort to preserve herself as self, the individual

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532 Ibid., 120.
533 Ibid., 119.
535 Ibid., 67-68.
human seeks out knowledge, self-multiplication, and power. The temptation to taste the fruit of the tree is a temptation to occult knowledge—easy knowledge. But humanity is not designed to develop knowledge in this way and the expulsion from the garden is the result of a kind of felix culpa thrusting humanity into a harsh environment where knowledge can be acquired gradually. According to Iqbal, Satan meant to rob humanity of the “joy of perpetual growth and expansion” gained, in part, through the acquisition of experiential and scientific knowledge.\footnote{Ibid., 69.} Iqbal also associates the eating of the fruit with sex differentiation and the multiplication of humanity. This answers anxieties over death and the total extinction of the species but it brings about a clash among the multitudes of developing individualities. God has entrusted humanity with free will so that we can choose goodness. Goodness is not forced, it is “the self’s free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing cooperation of free egos.”\footnote{Ibid., 68.} Teilhard thinks along similar lines. Evolution is still in process and humanity must choose whether to work in support of greater becoming by working in support of each other. In Siôn Cowell’s words, “the corollary of complexity-consciousness is consciousness responsibility.”\footnote{Siôn Cowell, “The British Teilhard Association,” The Cosmo Mystic (article), accessed November 17, 2017, http://www.teilhard.org.uk/teilhard-de-chardin/cosmo-mystic/.} While Iqbal writes quite a lot about individuality, it is important to remember that goodness and the development of one’s potential is not something accomplished alone. The shift from instinct to self-reflective consciousness launched a process whereby individual consciousness can be deepened and expanded through association with other people in a kind of reciprocal relationship.

Iqbal, in fact, is closer to Teilhard than one might expect in thinking of society as a kind of collective consciousness. This perspective does not resemble the full extent of the noosphere
nor carry its implications, but Iqbal does seem to go well beyond metaphor in his conclusions. He asserts, “Society has or rather tends to have a consciousness, a will, and an intellect of its own, though the stream of its mentality has no other channel through which to follow than individual minds.”\textsuperscript{539} This idea, he believes, is alluded to by a variety of common expressions: public opinion, national genius, or “what the Germans happily phrase zeitgeist.” Iqbal is likely partial to “zeitgeist” since it pairs two concepts of special importance in his thought—time and spirit. Like individual conscious states, the strains of consciousness within a society tend toward unity, “The crowd, the mass meeting, the corporation, the sect, and finally the deliberative assembly are the various means by which the body-social organizes itself in order to secure the unity of self-consciousness.”\textsuperscript{540} Iqbal further argues a separation between the pre-conscious and conscious within the social mind, “In the case of the collective mind too, many feelings, states and ideas remain below the threshold of social sensibility, only a portion of the universal mental life crossing the border, and getting into the clear daylight of social consciousness.” Probably more phenomenological than Freudian, his primary point is that there is an economy of ideas allowing a society to focus in on a limited number of concerns at a time. While this can lead to conflict, he believes that deliberation can foster unity with religion acting as a centripetal force. As we saw in the previous chapter, prophetic revelation historically emerged when it was needed, when society had run off the rails. The main purpose of religion is to “build up a coherent social whole for the gradual elevation of life.”\textsuperscript{541}

\textsuperscript{539} Iqbal, “The Muslim Community: A Sociological Study,” 119.
\textsuperscript{540} Ibid., 119–20.
\textsuperscript{541} Ibid., 124.
The Islamic principle of *tawhid* is essential to Muhammad Iqbal’s understanding of sociality. He describes the rise of the first Muslim society as the rise of a world culture distinguished by finding “the foundation of world-unity in the principle of *tawhid*.” This is the universal spirit of Islam while “Islam, as a polity, is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind.”

In the context of a 7th-century Arabia previously caught up in the wars between Sassanid Persia and Byzantium, the spread of Islam brought with it a unifying principle greater than kingship. Iqbal writes, “It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man’s loyalty to his own ideal nature.” In terms of principles, this is the transition from the corruptible to the incorruptible; from the division sown by fallible sovereigns to the unity of the Sovereign God.

In the words of the Qur’an, “So exalted is Allah, the Sovereign, the Truth; there is no deity except Him, Lord of the Noble Throne.” For Iqbal, *tawhid* enables true human development and the annihilation of all barriers between peoples.

This exposition on a unifying force in human society bears some similarity to the approach of Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) who, in *The Muqadimmah*, develops a cyclic philosophy of history by which human civilization, as found in cities, is continually renewed by the vitality of outlying tribes. According to Ibn Khaldun, the hard lives of tribal peoples, especially the

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543 Ibid., 117.
544 1 Corinthians 15:53. This passage always brings to my mind the final words of Charles I who announced that he would go from a corruptible to an incorruptible Crown.
545 Qur’an 23:116.
Bedouin who dwell in harsh desert conditions, is a source of strength and bravery.\textsuperscript{546} Humans, like animals, possess a savage power in the wild that is lessened when they are domesticated by the soft luxuries of city life. The Bedouin are, in fact, closer to being good as a result of a natural state “remote from the evil habits that have been impressed upon the souls of sedentary people.”\textsuperscript{547} The survival of Bedouin tribes amid desert dangers depends upon \textit{asabiyah} — group feeling. These tribes possess the powerful group feeling of common descent that God placed into human hearts for “mutual support and aid.”\textsuperscript{548} The people of the cities may have high walls or paid mercenaries for protection but they cannot fight with the ferocity of tribal peoples driven by the height of \textit{asabiyah}. This \textit{asabiyah} leads inevitably to royal authority since human nature needs a leader to act as a “restraining influence.”\textsuperscript{549} Unless obstacles present themselves, strong \textit{asabiyah} under the guidance of royal authority is naturally driven to conquer peoples with weaker group feeling. The vigor of the tribe will inevitably topple the meek and sedentary rulers of the city. Akbar Ahmed writes, “There is a moral imperative in his interpretation of ‘\textit{asabiyya}’ as the organizing principle of society. Muslims see human beings as having been created to implement the vision of God on earth through their behavior and organization of society.”\textsuperscript{550} This is a pattern of both moral and political renewal set by God into the nature of humanity. The city will be renewed whether or not it wishes the renewal. This perspective is comparable to Jean Jacques Rousseau and any number of other thinkers who have excoriated the corrupting
influence of society, particularly cities. Taken to a pessimistic extreme, Iqbal cannot share in Ibn Khaldun’s conclusions. But I think it is also possible read *The Muqadimmah* optimistically; not a doomsaying amidst the despair of dark days during the calamitous 14th century but rather a message of perennial hope for a new tomorrow. Ibn Khaldun is a predecessor to Iqbal in both optimism and reflection on social forces and Iqbal acknowledges the influence when borrowing the term *assibiyah*. On Iqbal’s terms, what is *assibiyah*? It is “Nothing but the principle of individuation working in the case of a group.” And Islam is instrumental for group solidarity; it provides a sense of purpose and transforms the community “into a corporate individual, giving it a definite purpose and ideal of its own.”

On Iqbal’s view, Islam quickly emerged as a superior principle for human unity, superseding both tribe and nation state. “As an emotional system of unification it recognizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood-relationship as a basis for human unity,” he writes. To limit the tendency toward unity only to one’s blood relatives is to overemphasize material circumstance; it is a form of “earth-rootedness” keeping the human being from achieving her potential. This is a two-fold error. First, it presents as one fetter among many which prevent both individual and society from evolving. It is also a failure to recognize that the material is spiritual as well; it is spirit-matter, as both Teilhard and Iqbal would affirm, and this carries important implications for sociality. Iqbal writes, “The search for a purely psycho-logical foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that all human life is

551 I borrow this term from the historian Barbara Tuchman’s *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Knopf, 1978).
553 Ibid., 126.
spiritual in its origin.” The principle must be larger than the practical characteristics of the nation state. According to Javid, his son, “Iqbal rejected territorial nationalism as a basis of human unity even when he was a student in Europe.” In Iqbal’s essay on “Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal,” he is quite clear, “The membership of Islam as a community is not determined by birth, locality or naturalization; it consists in the identity of belief.” Islam, then, is a kind of “imagined community” based on prophetic revelation and the principle of human unity. In Iqbal’s words, “It was Islam and Islam alone which, for the first time, gave the message to mankind that religion was neither national and racial, nor individual and private, but purely human that its purpose was to unite and organize mankind despite all its natural distinctions.” But this ideal, while necessary, demands some expression in the physical world; it cannot be entirely unmoored. Iqbal perceives a kind of balance in Islam, “Inasmuch as the average man demands a material center of nationality, the Muslim looks for it in the holy town of Mecca, so that the basis of Muslim nationality combines the real and the ideal, the concrete and the abstract.” This notion of balance in Islam, especially as it pertains to sociality, is a recurring theme in Iqbal.

He believes a society must strike the right balance between permanence and change. He asserts, “It must possess eternal principles to regulate its collective life, for the eternal gives us a

555 Ibid., 117.
558 Iqbal, Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal, 303.
foothold in the world of perpetual change.” These principles are preserved and passed on through tradition and education. In his New Year’s address of 1938, he makes it clear that one of the great crimes of imperialism was to establish control and sow division by eradicating traditions and values, “After subjugating and establishing their dominion over weaker peoples, they have robbed them of their religions, their morals, of their cultural traditions and their literatures.” The importance of the transmission of values and ideas is not unlike the emphasis Iqbal places on the unity of conscious states in the individual person. He writes, “The object of education is to secure this orderly transmission and thus to give a unity of self-consciousness of personal identity to the social mind. It is a deliberate effort to bring about an organic relation between the individual and the body-politics to which he belongs.” If we can think of such a thing as a “social mind,” tradition and education act as a stabilizing force to maintain its sense of identity and purpose. This is vital for Iqbal with respect to the future of society along a longitudinal axis stretching beyond the present horizon. He writes, “Society is much more than its existing individuals; it is in its nature infinite; it includes within its contents the innumerable unborn generations which, though they ever lie beyond the limits of immediate social vision, must be considered as the most important portion of a living community.” This acknowledged, the importance of keeping a people anchored in tradition is still just one side of an equilibrium with dynamism and change remaining essential aspects of Iqbal’s worldview.

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563 Ibid., 120.
Iqbal associates the proper understanding of Islam closely with dynamism, “As a cultural movement Islam rejects the old static view of the universe, and reaches a dynamic view.”\textsuperscript{564} On this point he cites Qur’an 29:69, “To those who exert themselves, We show Our path.”\textsuperscript{565} For this reason, he is strongly opposed to immobilist tendencies in Islam and Islamicate societies; the two chief culprits being excessively rigid practices in Islamic law and an excess of otherworldliness in Islamic mysticism. With respect to sharia, Iqbal’s thought is sometimes classified as “liberal Islam.” Charles Kurzman’s primer on that topic includes an excerpt from Iqbal, and he claims in the introduction that “Iqbal works in all three modes of liberal Islam”: the interpreted sharia, the silent sharia, and the liberal sharia. These modes of Islam mean, respectively, that sharia cannot claim finality because it is interpreted, the Qur’an left room for interpretation, and the essence of Islam is change.\textsuperscript{566} While this is all valid, it is misleading to label Iqbal a proponent of “liberal Islam” without considerable reflection and emendation. Here it is worth noting the opinion of Muhammad Mumtaz Ali who explains in an article for \textit{Iqbal Review} that Iqbal “rightly deserves a place in the tradition of Islamic Revivalism that is the most important tradition of Islam that stands for the revival of Islam and Islamic civilization.”\textsuperscript{567} And Kurzman certainly makes an important point by arguing against conflating liberal Islam with secularism since secular ideologies proved rivals and bled off many would-be adherents to a more flexible Islam.\textsuperscript{568} Still, whether it is liberalism or revival, Iqbal’s thought embraces both the importance of tradition and the importance of change for the future of Islam.

\textsuperscript{564} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 116.
\textsuperscript{565} Ibid., 117–18.
\textsuperscript{568} Kurzman, \textit{Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook}, 11.
The Islamic principles of *ijtihad* and *ijma* receive considerable attention in Iqbal as potential mechanisms for social development and unification. Iqbal writes, “Islam, by means of its well-conceived institutions, has succeeded to a very great extent in creating something like a collective will and conscience in this heterogeneous mass.”  

Often translated as “independent legal reasoning” employed by a jurist to form rulings in new situations, *ijtihad* shares a trilateral root with *jihad* and literally means “exerting oneself.” Conventional wisdom among orientalists for most of the 20th century held that the door or gate of *ijtihad* closed by the end of the 3rd/9th century and Muslim jurists were limited to *taqlid*, “the unquestioning acceptance of the doctrines of established schools and authorities.” This conclusion has been challenged by numerous scholars since that time. In his 1984 article, “Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?,” Wael B. Hallaq presents a well-supported argument for the diminished but undoubtedly continued existence of *ijtihad* beyond the 3rd/9th century and throughout Islamic legal history. In a recent study of Shaykh al-Azhār Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī (1198/1733 – 1276/1860), Aaron Spevack makes it clear that the shaykh “did not break any molds, nor did he call for reformation and change.” He did, however, exercise his autonomy to challenge the tradition from within by writing commentaries on his predecessors which moved beyond mere *taqlid* in the sense of mere copying or imitation. Spevack theorizes, “… it may be that al-Bājūrī saw these commentaries as a platform from which to express his opinions, perhaps in a way that teaching did not allow, or in a way that

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teaching alone would not preserve.”\textsuperscript{573} The point is that one can no longer simply think the gates of \textit{ijtihad} irreversibly closed with Islamic thought on a steady decline from that time. This is evidence that arguments for the decline of Islamic thought after the “closing of the gates of \textit{ijtihad}” in the 3\textsuperscript{rd}/9th century are grossly overstated.

For Iqbal, the forbidding of \textit{ijtihad} is a regressive tendency at work within Islam in opposition to the dynamism at the very heart of the Qur’an. He is clear when asserting that the gates were never meant to close, “Did the founders of our schools ever claim finality for their reasonings and interpretations? Never.”\textsuperscript{574} The very idea is a moral failing on the civilizational scale, he asserts, “The closing of the door of \textit{Ijtihad} is pure fiction suggested partly by the crystallization of legal thought in Islam, and partly by that intellectual laziness which, especially in the period of spiritual decay, turns greater thinkers into idols.”\textsuperscript{575} On this basis, he is quite comfortable with the prospect of new and independent legal reasoning. He writes, “The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to reinterpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life is, in my opinion, perfectly justified.”\textsuperscript{576} On Iqbal’s view, Islamic law is meant to unite and preserve society so that it may grow without losing itself. In terms of protection, this accords well with traditional understanding concerning the universal principles of \textit{sharia}. That the law is to support the “protection of life, mind, religion, private property and offspring.”\textsuperscript{577} But, for Iqbal, law also acts as a support to development, like the scaffolding of a vine. He must have thought it bitterly

\textsuperscript{573} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{574} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 135.
\textsuperscript{575} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{576} Ibid., 135.
ironic that an overly rigid adherence to *sharia* fostered what he perceived to be societal stagnation.

Along with *ijtihad*, Iqbal places great emphasis on the concept of *ijma* within the Islamic tradition. Counted among the sources of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), *ijma* is the consensus of the Islamic community (*umma*) on a particular legal issue. The significance of this idea is reinforced by a well-known hadith, “My community will never agree upon an error.”

Clearly, there is a great deal of potential here for legal change. Iqbal opines that *ijma* is “perhaps the most important legal notion in Islam.” In practice, however, *ijma* has been limited. Restriction of *ijma* to a particular group of individuals (e.g. scholars or the first companions of the prophet) or expansion to the entire *umma* both present difficulties if the goal is achieving a practical method for reaching a widely-acceptable consensus. Iqbal would like the principle of *ijma* expanded as a foundation for new approaches to social organization and decision making in the Islamic world. In a nod toward positive influences from the West, he writes, “It is, however, extremely satisfactory to note that the pressure of new world-forces and the political experience of European nations are impressing on the mind of modern Islam the value and possibilities of the idea of *Ijmāʾ*.”

In other words, the ideal government for Iqbal is a Muslim democracy acknowledging its traditional and spiritual basis, willing to make use of reasoned deliberation, and respectful toward the consensus of the community. He exhorts, “Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve,

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580 Ibid., 138.
out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.”

While he is willing to look to Europe as both a positive and negative example of democracy in practice, Iqbal believes the separation between church and state a fatal flaw. He calls the Reformation “essentially a political movement, and the net result of it in Europe was a gradual displacement of the universal ethics of Christianity by a system of national ethics.” Such a system cannot be successful because it grew from and relies on a false separation. He writes, “Suffice it to say that this ancient mistake arose out of the bifurcation of the unity of man into two distinct and separate realities which somehow have a point of contact, but which are in essence opposed to each other.” He seems to be indicating that the European model leads to disunity because it fails to acknowledge the essential unity within the individual human. This is comparable to Teilhard in the sense that social unity is an extension of the internal unity of the person. Moreover, the logic of unity predominates both of their thought systems from top to bottom, bottom to top. What they also share is an expanding sense of space-time as the new frame of reference for humanity. Iqbal writes, “The truth, however, is that matter is spirit in space-time reference. The unity called man is body when you look at it as acting in regard to what we call the external world; it is mind or soul when you look at it as acting in regard to the ultimate aim and ideal of such acting.” To understand Teilhard, it is necessary to understand what he means by the within of a given material phenomenon. To understand Iqbal, it is essential.

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581 Ibid., 142.
582 Ibid., 129.
583 Ibid., 122.
584 Ibid., 122.
to unravel his maxim, “All that is secular is, therefore, sacred in the roots of its being.” For Iqbal, Islam is the best system for the inspiration and right ordering of the world along this line of thinking.

Iqbal’s critique of Europe is essentially a critique of a European failure to organize and run its states with a mind to ultimate principles. Greed and idolatry (i.e. nationalism and imperialism) have corrupted the high ideals of democracy. Iqbal expresses this critique forcefully, “The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life, and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole function is to exploit the poor in the interest of the rich. Believe me, Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man’s ethical advancement.” It is not that the spiritual and ethical principles of Christianity are wholly inadequate; the problem is the lack of a practical system for making them a living part of society. Of Christianity, Iqbal writes, “By setting up an ideal of other-worldliness it no doubt did succeed in spiritualizing life, but its individualism could see no spiritual value in the complexity of human social relations.” Islam, by contrast, is better able to organize peoples by acknowledging the relationship between the secular and spiritual before organizing society accordingly. At a base level, the far-reaching implications of a better social order for the future of humanity are obvious but remember also that Iqbal considers social cohesion a new mechanism for thought and expression. “Islam,” he argues, “by means of its well-conceived institutions, has succeeded to a very great extent in creating something like a collective will and

585 Ibid., 123.
586 Ibid., 142.
587 Ibid., 132.
conscience in this heterogeneous mass.” Islam fosters a kind of consciousness within a society that is capable of ethical action and spiritual development.

This is the “spiritual democracy” Iqbal champions and within this atmosphere the individual becomes part of a larger, purposeful consciousness while enjoying the ability to become more fully individuated. In an essay on “Muslim Democracy,” he explains this point, “The democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity, it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a center of latent power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character.” Hope for a greater unity among peoples is a persistent theme in Iqbal’s writing. In November of 2000 the cultural minister of Iran hosted a conference on “Islamic Unity in View of Allama Iqbal” with participants asserting, “The theme of Islam is unity and Iqbal worked for that” and “Iqbal preached for unity and love of human kind.” Ultimately, Iqbal believes individuals are more fully themselves when united with one another. This is not without difficulty. In a 1931 letter to Francis Younghusband, adventurer and founder of the World Congress of Faiths, Iqbal flatly states, “Democracy means rows. If anybody thinks that approach to democracy means sailing into a kind of lotus land, he cannot have read a word of history. The truth is exactly the opposite.” In this, I think we see a fundamental optimism tempered by the inevitable pragmatism of a serving politician who had witnessed the slow churning of deliberative bodies from the inside.

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588 Ibid., 133.
The emphasis on unity and spiritual development in Iqbal’s understanding of sociality gives it a mystical dimension as well. This will be more fully explored in Chapter Four but we ought to take some time here to consider how his poetry provides an insight into Iqbal’s understanding of sociality from a different vantage point than his essays. Published in 1918, his Mysteries of Selflessness (Rumuz-e-Bekhudi) was a companion piece to The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-e-Khudi) discussed in Chapter Two. Following a poem on the individual with a piece focused on the ideal community makes it clear that an intimate link between personal development and the formation of an ideal community is essential to Iqbal’s thought. The prelude to Mysteries of Selflessness contains these telling lines,

The link that binds the individual
To the Society a mercy is;
His truest self in the community
Alone achieves fulfilment. Wherefore be
So far as in thee lies in close rapport
With thy Society, and lustre bring
To the wide intercourse of free-born men. 592

The individual and community have a reciprocal relationship. The individuality and identity of the single person is not only preserved, it contributes to the formation of a greater and more unified whole. The diversity of the community finds expression within and through the individual. In Iqbal’s words,

The individual a mirror holds
To the community, and they to him;
He is a jewel threaded on their cord,
A Star in their constellation shines;
And the Society is organized
As by comprising many such as he.
When in the Congregation he is list
’Tis like a drop which, seeking to expand,

Becomes an ocean. It is strong and rich
In ancient ways, a mirror to the Past
As to the Future, and the link between
What is to come, and what has gone before,
As is Eternity. The joy of growth
Swells in his heart from the community,
That watches and controls his every deed;
To them he owes his body and his soul,
Alike his outward and his hidden parts.
His thoughts are vocal on the People’s
tongue,
And on the pathway that his forbears laid
He learns to run. His immaturity
Is warmed to ripeness by their friendship’s
flame,
Till he becomes one with the Commonwealth.
His singleness in multiplicity
Is firm and stable, and itself supplies
A unity to their innumerate swarm. 593

The potential development of community was greatly enhanced when educated and inspired by

the knowledge of tawhid brought by the Prophet,

Through him the unsubstantial atom glows
Radiant with life, the meanest merchandise
Takes on new worth. Out of his single breath
Two hundred bodies quicken; with one glass
He livens an assembly. His bright glance
Slays, but forthwith his single uttered word
Bestows new life, that so Duality
Expiring, Unity may come to birth. 594

Islam frees the Muslim community from previous space-time barriers,

Our Essence is not bound to any Place;
The vigor of our wine is not contained
In any bowl, Chinese and Indian
Alike the sherd that constitutes our jar,
Turkish and Syrian alike the claw
Forming our body; neither is our heart
Of India, or Syria, or Rum,

593 Ibid., 33–34.
594 Ibid., 35.
Nor any fatherland do we profess
Except Islam . . .

The individual has for his span
Sixty or seventy years, a century
Is for the nation as single breath.
The individual is kept alive
By the concomitance of soul and flesh,
The nation lives by guarding ancient laws;
Death comes upon the individual
When dries life’s river and the nation dies
When it forsakes the purpose of its life.
Though the community must pass away
Like any individual when Fate,
Issues the fiat none may disobey,
Islam’s Community is divine
Undying marvel, having origin
In that great compact.\textsuperscript{595} Yea, Thou art our Lord.\textsuperscript{596}

Iqbal’s understanding of sociality is critical to the overall structure of his thought. As with Teilhard, sociality is transformative for Iqbal. The individuals comprising a society tend toward a unity best formed by the instruments of democracy. Under ideal conditions, a collective mind or social consciousness can emerge to better focus and direct the progress of a society toward future development. The Islamic principle of \textit{tawhid} can inspire this process so that sociality remains focused on higher ideals while acknowledging the inseparable link between the spiritual and material, secular and sacred. This is spiritual democracy. Critically, Islam removes prior barriers to human expansion by appealing across boundaries of tribe and nation with the promise of a divine and therefore eternal community. Iqbal is also concerned with the relation between the individual and society. Spiritual democracy does not stamp humanity into identical machine parts; it preserves and encourages individuality. And, just as individual consciousness is

\textsuperscript{595} Qur’an 7:172.
\textsuperscript{596} Ibid., “Mysteries of Selflessness,” 40–44.
preserved in death, the unity of the individual is “firm and stable” in the cosmopolitan multitude. This is the basis for a reciprocal relationship between individual and society; the individual buoyed by society, the social consciousness finding expression in the individual. In this process, humanity is brought closer to God through the practice of *tawhid* and development in accordance with the dynamism of the Qur’an.

**Sociality in Teilhard de Chardin**

Teilhard approaches sociality from several angles. At times his analysis of sociality is meant to address the modern psyche. He considers the correct reading of sociality a response to existential angst since it can weave the individual human life into a larger tapestry. In other places, he is more concerned with the mechanism of sociality as an evolutionary force building toward greater unity among peoples. In all cases, Teilhard is committed to the promise and hope of sociality—that humanity has a brighter future ahead. At its most fundamental level, Teilhardian sociality is an extension of the law of attraction. He believes people will be drawn together as one, just as infinitesimal particles once formed into the first geologic and biologic structures. In a sense, sociology is an extension of biology from this perspective. Or, more accurately, biology and sociology are joined together seamlessly as one, when the proper scope is adopted. He makes this clear in *The Human Phenomenon*, “No matter how hominized the events have become, in this rationalized form human history truly prolongs in its own way and to its own degree the organic movements of life. Through the phenomena of social ramification that it relates, it is still natural history.”

Once again, the emphasis on seeing in Teilhard’s writing is an invitation to take the widest and most holistic perspective possible. Evolution is essential to

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597 Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, 144.
this purpose; Teilhard asserts, “Evolution is a general condition, which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must submit to and satisfy from now on in order to be conceivable and true. Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that every line must follow.” The centrality of evolution is part of the modern human condition.

Confronting the vastness of space and time is a major turning point in the intellectual history of humanity. Teilhard remarks on this shift with reference to Galileo and Buffon. Concerning space, Teilhard remarks, “It was actually only through the break with ancient geocentrism (in Galileo’s time) that the heavens were freed for the boundless expansion we now have come to see in them. The Earth has become a simple grain of sidereal dust. Immensity has become a possibility and, symmetrically, as a result, the infinitesimal has sprung up.” Of time, he writes, “After the walls of space had been shaken by the Renaissance, from Buffon on it was the floor of time that started to shift (and the ceiling as a result!).” But having recognized the fact, what are we to do with it? The seeming insignificance of humanity on this cosmic scale can be disarming or depressing. In one essay, Teilhard refers to “the abyss of time that lies ahead.” Commenting on a card game, the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre’s Nausea says, “I think they do it to pass the time, nothing more. But time is too large, it can’t be filled up. Everything you plunge into it is stretched and disintegrates.”

598 Ibid, 152.
599 Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon; natural historian, precursor to Darwin, and acquaintance of Teilhard’s ancestor Voltaire.
600 Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, 151.
601 Teilhard de Chardin, 151.
In the previous chapter we introduced Teilhard’s understanding of tangential and radial energy. Tangential energy corresponds with exteriority and is a category encompassing the various types of energy measured by physical science. Radial energy corresponds with interiority and the attraction of a given element to greater complexity and centricity. These energies are linked by function of arrangement. A particle with a sufficient amount of tangential energy can augment its centricity and radial energy by bonding with neighboring particles. This process of developing centricity is particularly noticeable in the brain and nervous system, i.e. by degree of cerebralization. We know this from our own experience of self-reflective consciousness but also through analysis of other creatures. Ants and bees operate with a certain degree of consciousness but their interiority is “fused” with their exteriority in way that limits them to predictable instinct. This is not so with a “furry quadruped.” Teilhard says cats and dogs have “exuberance for life” and “curiosity.” Mammalian instinct is “flexible, individually and socially.”

Moving on to primates we find the “phylum of pure and direct cerebralization” and, therefore, the phylum corresponding exactly with the “principal orthogenesis of life itself.” The birth of self-reflective thought in *homo sapiens* is not the end of the journey of consciousness. It is, instead, another stage allowing for even greater centricity and evolution ahead. The social flexibility observable in dogs is further developed in the human to allow for increasingly complex arrangements of the tangential and a corresponding deepening of the radial. Sociality is like a fiber moving through us, reaching back into the distant past and forward into the future. Our attraction to other people is, at its heart, an expression of radial energy. Iqbal writes of the free association of individualities. Teilhard describes humanity as a mass of sequins

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605 Ibid., 105.
reflecting light at each other through our varied social entanglements. Ultimately this produces a “collective current of reflection” and the further evolutionary extension of humanity. The human being carries trillions of cells within herself. She is the prolongation of processes and instincts developed over millennia. For Teilhard, human sociality represents the hominization and spiritualization of a vast panoply in relationship with and responsive to radial energy. This inheritance is a great responsibility for humanity and our further development is the work of ages. He writes, “The human species progresses only in slowly elaborating from age to age the essence and totality of a universe deposited within us.”

Teilhard insists we not think of ourselves as adrift or dissolved in time but rather as moving through time, part of a greater whole. This is comparable to the individual soldier among the great waves Teilhard witnessed emerging from the trenches. Yet we are not part of just one dreadful moment; ours is the whole of cosmic history. Writing during his final years in New York, Teilhard refers to human socialization as human evolution and “human Evolution cannot be properly understood unless we regard it as a genuine and direct prolongation and intensification of natural Evolution. Human evolution is not a sub-effect, but a super-effect of natural Evolution.” Moreover, the advent of self-aware consciousness empowers us to be aware of our lot; we are an evolutionary force aware of itself. Referring again to Galileo in “Some Reflections on Progress,” Teilhard writes, “In terms of our modern neoanthropocentricity, Man, both diminished and enlarged, becomes the head (terrestrial) of a Universe that is in the process of psychic transformation—Man, the last-formed, most complex and most conscious of

606 Ibid., 122.
And so, generally speaking, Teilhard’s understanding of sociality is colored by his characteristic optimism. He writes of the importance of our new axial period, that we have the sense of being at a “turning point of history,” that we are justified in having a strong “impression of transformation.” This transformation is progress toward Point Omega.

Like Iqbal, Teilhard focuses on the inheritance of tradition through culture and education as a sign of human progress. This is meant to give humanity a sense of its continuing evolution when confronted with the void of space. It is meant to provide further evidence for Teilhard’s argument that, “The social phenomenon is not the attenuation, but the culmination of the biological phenomenon.” Once more, to be aware of time is not just to be overawed at its disintegrative tendency but also to bear duration in mind; Teilhard refers to “heredity” and an “unalterable ‘quantum’ that we have received once and for all from the past.” He writes, “How could we have any question about this, when right before our eyes we see the energies being stored up irreversibly in the highest forms of life accessible to our experience through all the channels of ‘tradition,’ I mean in the collective memory and intelligence of the human biota?” Teilhard’s notion of “irreversibility” was discussed in the previous chapter; he believes irreversibility to be an essential trait of the Omega Point. For Teilhard, the long progress of evolution must be for some purpose and will not be snuffed out in totum—existence is not absurd. In this model, the individual is regarded as part of a greater whole with an opportunity to establish a lasting legacy, “The more the living being emerges from the anonymous masses by its

610 Ibid., 155.
611 Ibid., 157.
612 Ibid.
own radiation of consciousness, the larger becomes the share of its activity that can be transmitted and preserved through education and imitation.” While the full scope of Teilhard’s noosphere is difficult to grasp, we can get a sense of its architecture in the accumulation of knowledge and culture.

Society is the noosphere in gestational form and individual contributions are passed forward through the mechanism of “social heredity;” individual contributions matter. Teilhard’s answer to listlessness and despair is similar to the oft-quoted lines from Whitman, “That you are here—that life exists and identity, That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.” In an essay on education, Teilhard writes, “. . . we see heredity pass through education beyond the individual to enter into its collective phase and become social.” It is not that we are more intelligent than our ancestors; our vantage point, instead, gives us a different way of seeing. “It is undeniable that, thanks to their accumulated efforts, we have a better understanding than they could possess of the dimensions, the demands, personalities and hopes; above all the profound unity of the world within and around us.” Our vantage point is global vision, what Ewert Cousins calls a “global consciousness,” the defining characteristic of our Second Axial Period. Cousins writes, “With this new dimension of consciousness, each person will be aware of belonging primarily to the entire globe—not merely to an ethnic group, tribe, or nation, but directly to the whole.” In an early stage, the noosphere seems to function as a kind of generalized human consciousness—a “planetized” consciousness, to use another Teilhardian

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613 Ibid.
616 Ibid., 23.
Teilhard encourages educators “... to extend and ensure in collective mankind a consciousness which may already have reached its limit in the individual.”\textsuperscript{618} Teachers have the responsibility to encourage unanimity among human beings.\textsuperscript{619} In all of this, Teilhard’s thoughts on education and collective consciousness are quite similar to Iqbal, but a point of divergence approaches. Teilhard continues, “It is through education, by the progressive spread of common viewpoints and attitudes, that the slow convergence of minds and hearts is proceeding, without which there seems to be no outlet ahead of us for the impulse of Life.”\textsuperscript{620} This outlet, in addition to being irreversible, must also be personal. The noosphere is forming itself into the body of Christ and Teilhard instructs Christian educators to teach their students “that all human enrichment is but dross except inasmuch as it becomes the most precious and incorruptible of all things by adding itself to an immortal center of love.”\textsuperscript{621}

Sociality, on Teilhard’s terms, is driven and directed by several forces. As mentioned above, sociality itself is a natural inclination toward unity fueled by radial energy—love as an attractive force. In its physical manifestations, society is an expression of tangential energy, its deepening \textit{within} is formed by an increasing external complexity. Concerning external forces, Teilhard emphasizes multiplicity and compression. In one essay he refers to a “vast and specific process of \textit{physico-psychical convergency} ... an irresistibly tightening vortex of unification.”\textsuperscript{622} Simply put, the increasing human population will force individuals to come together in a transformative fashion with an ultimately positive outcome. In 1789, Thomas Robert Malthus

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\textsuperscript{619} A significant portion of my teacher training at the Harvard Graduate School of Education focused on this theme in the form of anti-bias pedagogy.
\textsuperscript{620} Teilhard de Chardin, “Social Heredity and Progress,” 126.
\textsuperscript{621} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{622} Teilhard de Chardin, “On the Biological Meaning of Human Socialization,” 4425.
\end{flushright}
predicted population growth would one-day outstrip agricultural production—an event ominously called the Malthusian catastrophe. Teilhardian optimism is far removed from such thinking. For Teilhard, globalization is the path to the noosphere in its physical, intellectual, economic, and social manifestations. He describes this new condition as the forces of collectivization providing for “the increasing impossibility of being or acting or thinking alone—in short, the rise, in every form, of the Other around us.”623 In one of his most evocative images he describes humanity as the living skin of the earth, “As the Earth grows older, so does its living skin contract, and ever more rapidly. The last day of Man will coincide for Mankind with the maximum of its tightening and in-folding upon itself.”624 This is an inevitable process and a notable example of Teilhard thinking likening a geologist, i.e. in terms of great and irresistible pressures expressing their force over the course of millennia. In his essay on “A Great Event Foreshadowed,” he pronounces, “The Earth could more easily evade the pressures which cause it to contract upon itself, the stars more readily escape from the spatial curve which holds them on their headlong courses, than we men can resist the cosmic forces of a converging universe!”625

Multiplication and compression are external factors creating ideal conditions for the building up of the within. As Teilhard puts it, “Megasynthesis is in the tangential. And, therefore, by this very fact, a leap forward of radial energies, along the principal axis of evolution. Still more complexity: and therefore even more consciousness.”626 This is not unlike the design of the human brain; it reaches the limits of the skull and then folds in upon itself to achieve a greater

623 Ibid., 126.
624 Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, 172.
complexity. Teilhard refers to enfold ing or “a psychic enfolding of the earth upon itself” deepening the within, expanding human consciousness. The people of earth are like the brain reaching the limits of the skull. In this case the limit is the shape of the earth itself. Teilhard calls the “roundness of the earth” one of the most fundamental traits of cosmic structure. If the social evolution of humanity seems slow, it is because the species had not reached the spatial limit and critical mass necessary for the inward turn. According to Teilhard it is during the Neolithic period when we first see “these waves flow back on themselves.” With a sense of inevitability, he comments, “With all available space taken, the occupants had no choice but to squeeze close together.” Under such circumstances, different human groups may embrace isolationism and try to separate themselves from encroaching others in order to preserve their individuality for as long as possible. Teilhard’s position is that seeking individuality through avoidance is exactly the wrong approach. For this reason, he has an interesting view of population pressure as a reciprocal exercise. Pressure increases the development of individual elements, individual human beings in this case, and this development further increases pressure, “each additional degree of tightening only has the effect of exalting the expansion of each element a little more.” This requires further explanation.

“Union differentiates” is among the most important Teilhardian maxims and is perhaps among the least understood since the sheer magnitude of his claims about the noosphere can sometimes obscure the intricacies of its formation. Teilhard is committed to the idea that

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628 Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, 169.
629 Ibid.
630 Ibid., 170.
individuals are preserved in union just as individual consciousness is preserved in death. First, it is important to note that Teilhard distinguishes between types of union. This point is made clear in “The Grand Option,” where Teilhard writes, “In every practical sphere true union (that is to say, synthesis) does not confound; it differentiates.” Not just any union differentiates, “true union” differentiates. Imagine thousands of workers stamping out metal components on a vast and particularly oppressive assembly line. These workers have formed into a kind of union but their own individuality has been diminished in favor of their material function—like the cogs and gears they produce, the workers have become standardized parts. On the Teilhardian view, this union is defective because it is impersonal. In a field where personalization is valued and encouraged, the outcome changes dramatically. Teilhard asserts, “Operating in such a field, the tendency of union to bring about differentiation, far from giving birth to a mere mechanism, must have the effect of increasing the variety of choice and the wealth of spontaneity.”

Union in our assembly line example is entirely a matter of tangential forces: the workers are brought together by some combination of a need for wages and the imposition of threat or force from the bosses. True union, by contrast, is encouraged by the attractive force of radial energy. True union is love, both in its inspiration and in its generative capacity. It is valuable to quote Teilhard at length here,

It is through love and within love that we must look for the deepening of our deepest self, in the life-giving coming together of humankind. Love is the free and imaginative outpouring of the spirit over all unexplored paths. It links those who love in bonds that unite but do not confound, causing them to discover in their mutual contact an exaltation capable, incomparably more than any arrogance of solitude, of arousing in the heart of their being all that they possess of uniqueness and creative power.

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632 Teilhard de Chardin, 45.
633 Teilhard de Chardin, 46.
With respect to the “deepening of our deepest self,” Teilhard is arguing that we only become most fully ourselves in true union. We can only come to know our “self” in the face of the “other,” “The power of reflection cannot cause one to know himself exhaustively, it is only when opposed to others that we can discover our “depth and wholeness.” Reflection is essential for inner development and reflection is “essentially a social phenomenon.”

In a Supper Conference for the Wenner-Gren Foundation, Teilhard describes this process as the continuous increase of consciousness. Speaking in English, he refers to a “social whirlpool” wherein each individual “becomes automatically more centered and reflected.” This leads to “new and almost indefinite possibilities for inner life.” Teilhard observes that the population of the European middle ages had a sense of purpose but modern humanity has gone adrift. If science can help humanity to gain a purpose through the knowledge of its continuing evolution, seemingly impossible “unitary transformations . . . become possible and easy.” He imagines a world brought together by a sense of the future and the importance of our individual contributions for progress. He imagines a world where sympathy and charity bring people together with full appreciation for their respective individualities, the incommunicable uniqueness of each human person. While this can be coherently explained in terms of evolutionary science or the extension of anthropology into the future, the conceptual heart of Teilhard’s thought is his belief in the abiding power of love.

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636 Ibid., 4248.
In “Life and the Planets,” Teilhard refers to human socialization as a third stage of evolutionary development, behind the formation of proteins up to the cell and then cellular complexes up to the human being. The third stage, the forming of an “organicosocial supercomplex,” “can only occur in the case of reflective, personalized elements.”\(^\text{637}\) Personalization makes union possible because it is the unique personhood of individuals which produces mutually attractive force. The resulting “superpersonalization” relies on a center-to-center, person-to-person bond. In “Some Reflections on Progress,” Teilhard exhorts, “It is not a tête-à-tête or a corps-à-corps that we need; it is a heart-to-heart.” He explains, “. . . the meeting, center to center, of human units, such as can only be realized in a universal, mutual love.”\(^\text{638}\) Love makes no sense in solipsism. The individual must endure because individual personalities form the very substance of the unifying bond. Teilhard is arguing for a unity of complexity and progress in opposition to a unity of homogeneity. In a Teilhardian synthesis, all centers must hold because all centers have something irreplaceable to offer. Socialization in this model must always trend toward greater progress, greater unity, and greater love. But, so far, we are long on ideals and short on specifics. What of the noosphere? What will it look like?

The details and implications of the noosphere vary across Teilhard’s writing. The noosphere seems to draw all things to itself and part of its fascination is in its capacity to offer a vision amenable to a variety of stakeholders. At its most basic level, the noosphere is synonymous with human socialization and globalization as fact. Speaking to colleagues at the Annual Meeting of the American Theological Library Association, Amy Limpitlaw describes Teilhard as a kind of prophet of globalization and supports the claim with a lengthy

More than just an acknowledgement of closer ties among people, the noosphere is transformative. It is helpful to remember Teilhard’s vision of the entire world as Eucharist. Thomas King has described Teilhard’s worldview as a particularly Ignatian vision, noting that Magellan first circumnavigated the globe in the same year Ignatius of Loyola experienced spiritual awakening. “Soon Ignatius had a recurring vision of a luminous golden globe,” writes King. On one level, this transformative vision is a move toward global consciousness, what Ewert Cousins calls the Second Axial Period. Speaking at a symposium on Teilhard held at UNESCO, Cousins describes the United Nations as “the concrete symbol of and the pragmatic agency for developing the global consciousness that Teilhard described.” This has not gone unnoticed. When the American Teilhard Association asked for a small meeting space at the United Nations for its fiftieth anniversary, Secretary-General Kofi Annan is said to have replied, “They may not have a small room—they will have the main chamber.” This global consciousness is more than just a worldview, however, it is ongoing transformation—body and soul.

The noosphere can be read as science, science fiction, and mystical body. Celine Lafontaine, a professor of sociology at the Université de Montréal, describes Teilhard as a prophet of cyberspace and claims the spirit of his thought has been reborn in cyberspace

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proponents like Philippe Quéau and Pierre Lévy.\textsuperscript{643} Lafontaine goes beyond describing Teilhard as a predictor of the Internet and associates his theological vision with the promise of cyberspace, “More than just a tool, the net is seen to grant the power to regulate most of the evils that overwhelm humanity. Nothing less than a spiritual unification of minds is promised to us.”\textsuperscript{644} In addition to cyberspace, the noosphere is associated with scientific and technological transhumanism, even in Teilhard’s own writing. In \textit{The Human Phenomenon} he asks, “With our knowledge of hormones, are we not on the verge of taking into our own hands the development of our bodies—and of the brain itself? With the study of genes, are we not soon going to control the mechanism of organic heredity?”\textsuperscript{645} Pausing on this excerpt, it is possible to imagine the Teilhardian superconsciousness as a vast computer empowering genetically-enhanced cybernetics on a global scale. This notion is comparable to the “singularity,” an eschatological vision of a self-directed and rapidly accelerating artificial intelligence. It is no accident that such theories often adopt religious language. Their scope demands some consideration of what it means to be human.\textsuperscript{646} Those who run headlong with Teilhard the techno-futurist must not ignore his insistence on identifying a purpose for humanity. Just after speculating on genetic enhancement, he asks, “. . . in grouping elements into the unity of an organized whole, how to give each and every one of them their final value?”\textsuperscript{647} “Our intellectual challenge is to see these two claims—the scientific and the theological—as mutually illuminating and inspiring,” writes

\textsuperscript{644} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{645} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 177.
\textsuperscript{647} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Human Phenomenon}, 177.
Ronald Cole-Turner. On the subject of transhumanism, Ilia Delio stresses Teilhard’s insistence on “theogenesis” rather than the rise of a new species of “techno sapiens.” Teilhard imagines the noosphere emerging out of human unity to form the body of Christ. This cannot be a technological wonder in search of a purpose because it brings its purpose with its development—to build up Omega with distinct human individualities held in loving union.

This is an idealistic vision. In terms of human sociality, it is utopian. Decisively optimistic, Teilhard encourages his readers to embrace “a great hope held in common.” “It is finally the utopians, not the ‘realists,’ who make scientific sense,” he declares. If this seems unlikely, given the state of things, Teilhard has recourse to cosmic time. The acceptance of slowness in deep time is part of seeing, “Has it not taken half a million, perhaps even a million, years for life to pass from the prehominids to the modern human; and shall we now despair because less than two centuries after the same modern human has glimpsed an even higher state above, humans are still in the process of struggling with themselves to be free!” But this seems little comfort to those who are suffering now. Justice delayed is justice denied. And what is the justice of Teilhard’s final vision? It may be that the noosphere will bring together all the distinctiveness of humanity on equal footing, but this is not borne out by history. In response to

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651 Ibid., 62.
653 This maxim is attributed to a “distinguished jurist of yesterday” in Martin Luther King’s Letter from Birmingham Jail.
the horrors of war or the evils of imperialism, Teilhard would have us remember that “in the most brutal conquest, suppression is always accompanied by some kind of assimilation.”

This is cold comfort in any context but it is especially inadequate in the context of genocide. David Grumett has indicated that Teilhard had some awareness of massacres in Armenia but it is unclear if he ever confronted the full ramifications of one group of people purposively eliminating another on the scale of millions. Grumett writes, “It is correct that Teilhard does not reflect on the implications of the Holocaust for future political society, being more concerned with the implications for theology of the clash between fascism and communism, as were most other Christian theologians of his generation and the following one.”

Granted, the Teilhardian vision is strongly opposed to fascism, prejudice and violence. But hope in the fullness of the noosphere cannot help but be damaged when large swaths of the human population are ignored, oppressed, or murdered; not to mention the prospect of total human annihilation, to be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Turning aside from bloodshed, the noospheric vision does not offer a full accounting of cultural appropriation and imperialism. Teilhard describes peaceful cultural invasion. But is it so peaceful? In describing synthesis, he writes, “Mutual permeability of psyche combines with a remarkable and significant interfertilization. Under this double influence veritable biological combinations are formed and fixed, mixing and associating ethnic traditions together at the same time as cerebral genes.” In this case the clinical ring of scientific language sanitizes facts on the ground. Assimilative imperialism is not a unity in love and it is not a meeting of

656 Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon*, 144.
individualities on equal footing. Much is lost when one culture runs roughshod over another. In more formal terms, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak directs our attention to the clearest example of “epistemic violence” in “the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other . . . the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Suvject-vity.” To compare Teilhard with Muhammad Iqbal is to reveal a much more sober and realistic assessment of imperialism and its victims in the thought of the latter. Iqbal’s perspective provides some much-needed shading to Teilhard’s broad strokes.

Failure to closely examine the contemporary scene was part of Teilhard’s character. He had a knack for assessing the mood of the modern age but he could not process the details. In an unpublished memoir, Teilhard’s close friend Lucile Swann describes his eyes, “looking so far into the infinite that the immediate surroundings were unable to touch him.” But I do not think this is the death knell of Teilhardian thought with respect to justice. His broad, top-down perspective on sociality can be turned toward social justice. Consider his reflection, “We are like soldiers who fall during the assault which leads to peace.” It is certain he stands opposed to the sinfulness of those who oppose progress, specifically those who would arrest the progress of true union in love among all humanity. To gather a spirit of social justice from Teilhard’s spirit of the earth is possible. To hold the energy of the emerging noosphere in tension with the entropy of our present moment is a challenge similar to that of all optimists: to maintain a vision of a New Jerusalem amidst a fractured world.

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658 Lucile Swan, “Lucile Swan Memoir,” 12, Lukas Teilhard Collection Box 2, Folder 18, Booth Family Center for Special Collections.
659 Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 52.
Iqbal and Teilhard on Sociality: A Critical Comparison

Transformative unity is a major theme held in common between Teilhard and Iqbal. They both possess a strong belief in the divine warrant for human unification. In tracing the evolutionary history of humanity, Teilhard is able to perceive a process by which all things in heaven and on earth are brought into unity in Christ. The most fundamental concept in Iqbal’s thought is the most fundamental concept in Islam—tawhid, the unity of God. With the Qur’an, Iqbal also acknowledges the primordial unity of humans created by God in submission to God. These principles form the basis of a world-unity for Iqbal and he too finds a developmental strand in the history of human society moving toward greater unity. Iqbal writes, “Islam is a unity in which there is no distinction, and this unity is secured by making men believe in the two simple propositions—the unity of God and the mission of the Prophet—propositions which are certainly of a supernatural character but which, based as they are on the general religious experience of mankind, are intensely true to the average human nature.” What is startling, and perhaps best detectable through the Teilhardian lens, is Iqbal’s willingness to write of social unity as a kind of new consciousness or collective will. Iqbal’s notion of social unity is not quite noospheric but it is something more than representative democracy. In practical terms, both Teilhard and Iqbal acknowledge the important role for education in preserving and encouraging this social unity. Iqbal views education as an instrument of permanence, a balancing force to the dynamism of society. He is concerned that a unified social consciousness might tear itself apart by moving in all directions at once without maintaining the thread of consistency provided by

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660 Ephesians 1:10.
661 Qur’an 4:1 and Qur’an 7:172.
tradition and values. This is suggestive of a concern Iqbal has for individual conscious states as well. Unlike Teilhard, he focuses in on the fluidity of individual conscious states and there too he insists on the role of memory in building up a centralizing ego. In preserving the unity of society, education and tradition function as a kind of social memory. Teilhard, by contrast, is less concerned with the balance of tradition and progress. His anxiety is that the vastness of cosmic time and space might leave humanity purposeless and unmoored. To gain an evolutionary sense on Teilhardian terms is to see that education is building the universe. The human journey is the same journey of the first conjoined particles. Our history is not dissolved in cosmic time—it stretches throughout. These perspectives fit neatly together: Teilhard’s concern for the cosmos and Iqbal’s concern for the lived experience of conscious states on the individual and social level. These are both perspectives born from a shared concern for unity.

Concerning society, Iqbal is more attentive than Teilhard to facts on the ground and in the present moment. While he is able to perceive a kind of human drama playing out from the beginning of the universe, the perspective of cosmic time seems to prevent Teilhard from taking a more nuanced look at imperialism. This is obviously attributable to biography and situatedness as well. The ills of imperialism did not present to Teilhard because he did not suffer them. As a politician in a time of colonial transition and upheaval, Iqbal is much more reflective about the challenges of unity in the immediate term. In a New Year’s Address given on the eve of World War II, and near the end of his life, Iqbal warns his listeners that the “tyranny of imperialism struts abroad” under the guise of many masks.663 He describes imperialism as a leech sucking the blood of the people and annihilating those same cultural traditions which preserve their sense of

663 Iqbal, “New Year Message, Broadcast from the Lahore Station of All-India Radio on 1st January, 1938,” 298.
self, their very consciousness, as noted above. Iqbal laments, “It is as if the day of doom had come upon the earth, in which each looks after the safety of his own skin, and in which no voice of human sympathy or fellowship is audible.” Iqbal’s core critique of Europe and European Christianity is its bifurcation of the human being, and human society, into secular and sacred. Imperialism is an expression of a hunger for money and power without any moderating spiritual or ethical force to stop the advance. In different terms, Teilhard advanced similar critiques of his own society: the failure to acknowledge the within of things, the failure to act with a sense of hope in progress, the failure to achieve true union in love rather than a false unity through coercion. In simple terms: Teilhard critiques Iqbal’s society for immobility and, with nuance, Iqbal joins the critique. Iqbal critiques Teilhard’s society for materialistic greed and, with nuance, Teilhard joins the critique. Acting as a lens for Teilhard, Iqbal’s grounded realism leads us to important unanswered questions. How can the cause of true union advance if the subaltern cannot speak? The entirety of Teilhard’s vision for humanity rests on answering this question and others like it.

Christian and Muslim, Teilhard and Iqbal diverge when forecasting the ideal religious perspective for the future. Founded on the principle of unity, Iqbal is certain Islam offers the surest hope for human unification. He stresses its egalitarian message and claims no other religion has matched its universality. He joins a long tradition of Islamic thinkers in noting the balance achieved by Islam in creating a world-embracing vision with the guidance of spiritual values. He extends this idea of balance on his own terms to encompass Islam’s role in creating a dynamic society with a sense of tradition. The fundamental rituals of Islam preserve and attest

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664 Ibid., 299.
the drive toward unity. Consider the rows of believers gathered to pray in the same direction all across the world or the pilgrims of the hajj, gathered in the hundreds of thousands to perform tawaf. If the goal is collective consciousness, then Islam is the best way there—according to Iqbal. Teilhard believes no other religion than Christianity can fully resonate with the divine course of evolution. He predicts the union of souls in a single organism, the body of Christ. He reads the resonance between the Christian message and his understanding of the evolutionary process as a sign of their shared truth. Teilhard also stresses the structural unity of the Roman Catholic Church in its centralized organization. He writes that if Christianity is to be the religion of tomorrow, “it is only through the organized and living axis of its Roman Catholicism that it can hope to match and assimilate the great modern currents of humanitarianism. To be catholic is the only way of being fully and completely Christian.”

Ironically, the same hierarchical power of Rome that stymied his message is the only body capable of the global reach and central organization necessary to see that message through. He calls Rome the “Christic pole of the earth,” where the “ascending axis of hominization is to be found.” Both Iqbal and Teilhard see an important role for democracy enlivened by religion in the unification of humanity and, in their respective traditions, they find the ideal instruments of union. But this disagreement over the appropriate mechanism leaves open questions concerning the nature of union itself.

Of particular interest is Teilhard and Iqbal’s insistence on the preservation of the individual amidst union. This position is markedly similar to their shared insistence on the preservation of individual consciousness after death. Both thinkers believe social union brings

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666 Teilhard de Chardin, Christianity and Evolution, 168.
out the fullness of the individual. Union is transformative for the one and for the many, who come together as one, to become one. Iqbal, once again, stresses the strength of the individual who persists in a mutually beneficial relationship with the community as a whole. Because of Islam, this is a social order with the power to endure for all time and the same goes for the individual who embodies such a community. In Teilhard we find the interesting juxtaposition of two seemingly irreconcilable concepts: the personal-universal, the universal-personal. His position is that it is our center, our personhood, bringing us into union with others. Since this personalized being is what makes us fully human, it cannot help but be carried forward by the evolutionary process of union. The best of us will endure in a new synthesis: a super-conscious and super-personal synthesis.

Two Questions

As in the previous chapter, we will use challenging questions to demonstrate how disparate religious perspectives can find common ground in response to fundamental, even existential, human problems. With respect to the examination of human sociality, we will look at: (1) How can we respond to the challenge of racism (2) How can we respond to the threat of extinction?

The Challenge of Racism

Teilhard and Iqbal both abhorred racist ideologies at a time when such philosophies were among the leading contenders for the dominant creed on the world stage. At the time of Iqbal’s death, Hitler had successfully achieved the Anschluss of Austria and the United States was still nearly thirty years from passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Teilhard would live to see the fall of Nazism but he died well before African-Americans received equal and non-discriminatory
access to schools, restaurants and other public accommodations. Even New York City, where Teilhard lived in his final years, remained a hostile and discriminatory environment in spite of its civil rights ordinances. While the situation may not be as dire as in the early 20th century, racist ideologies persist in both blatant and insidious forms. From the American perspective, Black Lives Matter has encouraged increased recognition of racial inequality in the justice system. Donald Trump campaigned successfully with the use of prejudicial and othering language: mocking accents, derogatory insinuations. In K-12 schools, the Southern Poverty Law Center has compiled survey data with 8 in 10 educators reporting heightened anxiety among marginalized students following the 2016 presidential election. The same organization has reported a dramatic uptick in the number of hate groups operating in the United States in 2017. The challenge of racism persists. There is an opportunity and a need for religious traditions to forge a common response.

Iqbal considers racism antithetical to the unifying spirit of Islam. He repeatedly calls it out by name to demonstrate the egalitarian message of the prophet. He writes, “The political ideal of Islam consists in the creation of a people born of a free fusion of all races and nationalities.” In his New Year’s Address of 1938 he insists that liberty will never exist until

racism is wiped out and humanity comes to see itself as the family of God. Famously, the farewell sermon of the prophet reminds believers, “Your Lord is one, and your father is one: all of you are from Adam and Adam is from the ground. The noblest of you in Allah’s sight is the most pious: Arab has no merit over non-Arab except by piety.” To Iqbal, racism is a form of *shirk*; it rejects the unity of God in rejecting the unity of humanity. Racism also turns its back on the distinctive merit of Islam. Iqbal maintains it was Islam that first offered a worldview going beyond racial distinctions to embrace the fullness of humanity. He believes in the fusion of all races and nationalities because Islam, as a spiritual principle, is and must be greater than any such divisive ideology. The great failing of European Christianity is not in its vision, since it too announced a vision of equality but in its failure to live out its principles. According to Iqbal, the Roman Empire had a chance of advancing the cause of human unification but the opportunity had long passed by the time of European nation states and European nationalism.

As a paleontologist, Teilhard rejects racism as contrary to biology and the scientific study of human origins. Throughout his thought, he maintains that human destiny must encompass the whole of the species. He is quite clear on this topic, “The human being can have no hope of an evolutionary future except in association with all the rest.” And yet, in his essay “A Great Event Foreshadowed,” Teilhard is still able to casually remark that while forward-thinking, progressive individuals (*homo progressivus*) appear across the “social scale,” they are more numerous among “white people.” Teilhard seems willfully ignorant of power relationships in

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673 Iqbal, “New Year Message, Broadcast from the Lahore Station of All-India Radio on 1st January, 1938,” 299–300.
674 Iqbal, *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, 303.
human sociality and his cosmic vision often blinded him to the everyday realities of marginalized individuals and societies. Casual, colonialist privilege is an identifiable thread running throughout the Teilhardian corpus. It is both disappointing and inexcusable.

In her dissertation, Amy Limpitlaw asserts that Teilhard “openly espoused a kind of racism” because his understanding of unity values the whole over its parts.⁶⁷⁸ In other words, human beings cannot be equal because they are making unequal contributions to the developing noosphere. Limpitlaw notes this is not a separatist or exclusive racism but it is still a hierarchy with certain racial and ethnic groups ranking above others. She offers numerous citations to support her argument, including the colonialist paternalism found in his early letters from Cairo. To these I would add his reference to a greater quantity of progressive individuals appearing among “white people” cited above and a jarring line in one of his wartime letters. Immediately after envisioning the positive effects of different cultures being brought together by the war he writes, “With some Africans, no doubt, the fusion is distasteful, but even so it may well bear fruit.”⁶⁷⁹ For all of his futurism, Teilhard was very much a product of his time and seemed incapable of seeing the impact of power relationships that figures so prominently in Iqbal’s writing. It may be possible to carry Teilhard’s thought forward on this point and read his work as anti-racist but it must be remembered that such a project is engaged with reading Teilhard against himself.

In “A Great Event Foreshadowed,” the loaded sentiment about progressive “white people” is quickly followed by the claim that no racial, social, or religious barrier will prevent

⁶⁷⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, The Making of a Mind: Letters from a Soldier Priest, 125.
those with a sense of the future from connecting. He describes the temptation toward racism as arrogance on the grand scale, a form of “collective egoism.” This egoism works against progress by walling off the unique contributions from whichever groups are designated inferior. This is self-defeating. Teilhard writes, “The way out for the world, the gates of the future, the entry into the superhuman, will not open ahead to some privileged few, or to a single people, elect among all peoples. They will yield only to the thrust of all together.” This theme inspired Catholic author Flannery O’Connor, who used a Teilhardian maxim to title her story and book: *Everything That Rises Must Converge.* In this collection, the story “Revelation” contains a poignant vision of the afterlife experienced by the racist and elitist Ruby Turpin,

> A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were tumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They, alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces even their virtues were being burned away.

Teilhard was myopic concerning the evils of imperialism directly in front of him but I think he would have found the passage above in line with his overall vision. True, there are no lab coats on O’Connor’s bridge to heaven but, for all of his privileging of research scientists, Teilhard insists the final destiny of humanity will be all in all.

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680 Ibid.
682 Ibid., 173.
More work needs to be done on the subject of elitist, ethnocentric, imperialist, and racist elements in Teilhardian thought. Additional theological, literary, and historical interrogation of his formal writings and relevant published and unpublished letters is needed. As explained above, I do not believe it is right to dismiss Teilhard and Teilhardian thought as hopelessly racist out of hand, even though comparison with Iqbal casts additional light on biased and privileged tendencies that cannot be ignored. To mention one additional avenue for research, Teilhard developed a friendship with the famous civil rights activist John LaFarge, SJ. Teilhard credits LaFarge with securing his residence in New York during his final years and saw him as a protector from his most ardent critics.\footnote{Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{Letters from a Traveller}, 320; Sack, “Teilhard in America: The 1960s, The Counterculture, and Vatican II,” 64–65.} LaFarge outlived Teilhard by eight years and contributed to the first anthology on Teilhardian thought written in English.\footnote{Winifred McCulloch, \textit{A Short History of the American Teilhard Association} (Pennsylvania: ANIMA Publications, 1979), 5.} He also inquired with Rome about Teilhard’s status and received a censor’s report in response.\footnote{A photocopy of the report is available in Special Collections at Georgetown; “‘Phenomenon of Man,' Censor’s Report On,” LaFarge, John, SJ Papers, Rome Correspondence, Collection Box 11, Folder 3, Booth Family Center for Special Collections.} A future comparative study of Teilhard and LaFarge’s writing supplemented by archival research on their friendship would be a helpful step forward.

Iqbal and Teilhard both consider the racist political ideologies of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century antithetical to their religions, antithetical to their worldviews, and antithetical to any hope for the future of humanity. This is not a tacit rejection of racism; it can be openly anti-racist. Teilhard and Iqbal write quite a lot about unity and sociality but the actual work of bringing their vision(s) to fruition requires consideration of next steps, a plan for tomorrow. In Teilhard’s case, the
challenge of racism is a challenge to numerous statements in his correspondence and essays. It is potentially a challenge to his thought system as a whole if we accept the idea that it is inherently and unavoidably hierarchical along racial and ethnic lines. But the challenge of racism is also an opportunity for those who believe in the future to come together across religious barriers to articulate a response and this line of thinking seems to be encouraged by the majority of Teilhard’s writing. “To those who exert themselves, We reveal Our path,” reads a favorite Qur’anic verse of Iqbal’s.687 “In action I adhere to the creative power of God,” writes Teilhard.688

Sociality is never static. It is building, it is becoming. To build the future is to share in the work of communicating a better understanding of humanity as one.

The Threat of Extinction

Future social progress is dependent on the belief that the human species will endure. Neither thinker lived long enough to confront the full threat of climate change but the topic has quickly become unavoidable. The most recent report on the subject from the United Nations and World Health Organization describes substantial worldwide risks to natural and human systems.689 Scientists predict negative impacts on food security, the availability of clean water, the availability of secure shelter, the transmission period of vector-borne diseases, the incidence of natural disasters, and the prevalence of extreme high temperatures. The World Health Organization estimates unmitigated climate change will cause an additional 250,000 deaths per

687 Qur’an 29:69.
year starting as early as 2030. Without intervention, the prospects become increasingly bleak. While promoting her book *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* at Wake Forest University, Elizabeth Johnson advised those who discuss Teilhard and ecology to mention at least one animal and plant by name. Treatments of Teilhard can tend toward anthropocentrism and abstraction, neither approach really seeks to learn from the environment or engage ecological problems. Teilhard himself did not offer extended reflections on ecology but his thought has informed such efforts, particularly in the work of Thomas Berry. With respect to dire portents concerning climate change, it should be remembered Teilhard ultimately believed in the inevitability of human survival as a bulwark against absurdity. At the present moment, however, his promise of a cosmic future seems difficult to embrace.

Iqbal is aware of the potential for cultures to vanish. The Qur’an itself makes reference to ruined cities and scattered peoples and Iqbal’s own family had been driven from the Kashmir region by British imperialism. Iqbal believes Islam can prove a bulwark against cultural extinction while acknowledging, “Extinction is as abhorrent to a race as to an individual.” While knowledgeable and deeply reflective on the ills of imperialism, Iqbal did not live long enough to witness the destructive potential of atomic warfare. He was, however, acutely aware of the scientific potential for developing increasingly effective means of death and destruction. Composed shortly after World War I, Iqbal’s poem “The Wisdom of the West” imagines a

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691 This story was related to me by Michelle Voss Roberts at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity.
693 Qur’an 22:45 and 46:24-25.
recently-deceased Iranian complaining to God about the angel of Death’s inefficiency when compared to Europeans, “Your angel of Death is supposed to be a specialist, and yet he has no expertise.” Of the West he writes,

Death is all its philosophies’ life-breath  
It is what all its sciences devise.  
Its submarines are crocodiles,  
With all their predatory wiles.  
Its bombers rain destruction from the skies.  
Its gases so obscure the sky  
They blind the sun’s world-seeing eye.  

Take note of the first line in this passage. Iqbal here identifies a fundamental problem in western philosophy as a root cause of the propensity for violence. Farzin Vahdat explains, “What lies behind the West’s violence, according to Iqbal, is the predatory nature of its brand of subjectivity.” This subjectivity is the “perverted ego” of Europe seeking to enrich itself at the expense of the poor. It is the false dichotomy of matter and spirit and the worship of the former at the expense of prior ideals. “Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of man’s ethical advancement,” asserts Iqbal. Combined with his acknowledgement of the destructive power of modern science, it is safe to say Iqbal was prescient of future existential threats even if he harbored optimism about the Islamic contribution to a brighter and more holistic future.

Teilhard published an essay on the atom bomb in 1946. Therein he maintains, “The atomic age is not the age of destruction but of union in research.” His position is that the Manhattan Project represents the potential of human minds converging with a single purpose as a

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kind of proto-noosphere. As with the battle lines of World War I, Teilhard chooses to focus on unity over violence and death. Concerning the hydrogen bomb, Teilhard is more guarded in his conclusions when writing to his friend Francis Russo six years later. In this unpublished letter, he laments that it is war and not peace bringing human minds together,

Vous aurez tout su (ce qu’on sait) par la presse, concernant la bombe a hydrogène. J’admire la patiente ténacité des physiciens qui ne se lascent pas de travailler silencieusement. Et je m’incline (avec regret) devant cette évidence que la guerre est encore plus puissante que la paix pour forcer l’homme a penser . . .

Faith in the future is pervasive in Teilhard but it seems even he had moments of doubt. This is to his credit. It demonstrates a realism concerning the present moment which brings his thought a step closer to Iqbal’s.

For both Teilhard and Iqbal, an essential aspect of their worldviews is an insistence on the preservation of society in this world just as they insist on the preservation of individuality in death. Answering the threat of imperialism, Iqbal stresses the capacity for Islam to act as the principle for a kind of Muslim League of Nations. To his mind, the establishment of an eternal society is part of the promise of Islam. While he did not confront the possibility of species-level extinction, I suspect he would not dismiss the possibility all together. The potential for such a calamity further demonstrates the need for humanity to regain its spiritual dimension and sense of purpose. Teilhard associates the course of evolutionary history with radial energy and radial energy with God. As the apex of evolutionary progress, humanity cannot be snuffed out. At the end of Candide, Teilhard’s ancestor dismisses excessive optimism with the injunction to tend one’s own garden. The same idea appears in a letter, “Life is bristling with thorns, and I know no

698 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Letter to Francois Russo, SJ,” November 21, 1952, Ellen and Mary Lukas Collection, Georgetown University Library Booth Family Center for Special Collections. Permission for my use of this passage was received directly from the family of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and it cannot be reproduced elsewhere.
other remedy than to cultivate one’s own garden.”699 This has always struck me as a practical and melioristic maxim rather than one of dejection and isolation. If Iqbal and Teilhard stand together against any spiritual inclination—it is quietism. If they stand for any spiritual activity—it is progress. In both thinkers, the work of building up the earth and fostering human unity is ongoing. Part of this work must be the preservation of an earth to build, a humanity to unite.

Conclusion

For Teilhard and Iqbal, human sociality is the future of consciousness. Each thinker has his own preferred vocabulary and points of emphasis but they agree that the unity of the individual human tends toward a still greater union with others. Our capacity and propensity to develop as individuals and come together in society is what makes us what we are. These same capacities give us a sense of the future and a drive toward progress. In conjunction with religious belief, these capacities are the source of transcendent hope for both Teilhard and Iqbal. This amounts to a new mysticism to be explored in the next chapter.

Mysticism is a crucial category for understanding the concerns and worldviews expressed by Teilhard and Iqbal. Their central propositions either fit easily within a mystical paradigm or act as a reformist response to such a paradigm and mysticism operates in the background of all of their theological writing. I am not arguing that “consciousness” and “sociality” map neatly onto traditional mystical vocabulary but I do, however, believe they are inextricably linked with mysticism in the thought of Teilhard and Iqbal. For this reason, a successful investigation will require assessing the influence of mysticism on their thought while explaining their critique and proposed reform of certain mystical traditions. The importance of fundamental mystical categories and questions will be demonstrated: knowledge, love, and union. But the explanatory power of mysticism is dependent on a clear understanding of what we mean by the term “mysticism” itself and this is where we will begin.

Writing nearly thirty years ago in the opening chapter of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, Bernard McGinn offers a heuristic sketch on the nature of Christian mysticism. Here he asserts that modern discussions and analysis of mystical experience have stalled; in part, because of ambiguities around the term “experience” itself.\(^{700}\) The popularity of “experience” as a term in the study of mysticism is connected with a desire to bring such phenomena beneath a scientific lens. To think of a contained “mystical experience” is to think of a kind of sense data primed for physiological or psychological analysis. For Ninian Smart, emphasizing mystical experience served as a way to separate it from creedal interpretations in service to an argument made in the inaugural issue of *Religious Studies*,

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“Phenomenologically, mysticism is everywhere the same.”\textsuperscript{701} Experience divorced from interpretation is useful for building up variations on the perennial philosophy. Realistically, I am not certain it makes much sense to think or speak of such a thing as an un-interpreted experience. Methodologically, studies in the history of religions are unable to capture such experiences in a bottle for examination. Ethically, it is advisable to be squeamish about a paradigm so far removed from the contextualized and theologically rich accounts of mystics themselves. Interreligious dialogue is better served by authentic expressions of belief than efforts to pare down phenomena in search of a common core unrecognizable to religious practitioners.

McGinn has consistently argued for broadening the scope of studies in mysticism. He warns against efforts to separate mysticism from mystical theology, “I believe that it is dangerous to separate the two in the history of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{702} Writing in a 2008 issue of \textit{Spiritus}, McGinn describes the study of mysticism as a subset of the study of spirituality. He describes mysticism as “the inner and hidden realization of spirituality through a transforming consciousness of God’s immediate presence;” in other words, “mysticism is the goal of spirituality.”\textsuperscript{703} If this is correct, then examination of discourse on the ultimate goal of spirituality can properly be called the study of mysticism. In using “consciousness” or “mystical consciousness” as a heuristic, McGinn is able to underscore his broad approach. He writes, “It allows us to see the mystical element of religion as a process, a form of life, and not merely as a matter of raw experience, even of some special kind.”\textsuperscript{704} Turning to Islam, we can also draw a distinction between Sufism and Islamic mysticism. Schimmel calls Sufism “so broad and its

\textsuperscript{701} Ninian Smart, “Interpretation and Mystical Experience,” \textit{Religious Studies} 1, no. 1 (October 1965): 75–87.
\textsuperscript{702} McGinn, \textit{The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century}, xiv.
\textsuperscript{703} McGinn, “Mystical Consciousness: A Modest Proposal,” 44.
\textsuperscript{704} Ibid., 50.
appearance so protean that nobody can venture to describe it fully." In an introduction to the
topic, Paul Heck describes Sufism as concerned with the “relation of the soul to the other;” it is
the “spirituality of Islam” “mediated through multiple channels.” With this broad definition, it
is unsurprising when Heck stresses that all Sufism is not mysticism or “mystical experience;”
Sufism and mysticism are not synonymous.

Adopting a broad definition of mysticism as an aspect of the even broader scope of
spirituality within a religious tradition is critical to the approach taken by both McGinn and
Heck. This is justified by the richness and breadth of the subject matter. It simply does not make
sense to reduce the study of mysticism to mystical experience alone nor does it make sense to
detach mysticism from the larger spiritual and religious traditions where it was born, to which it
makes constant, creative reference. For our purposes, this approach grants a certain latitude when
assessing the relationship between Teilhard, Iqbal, and mysticism. To be clear, I am borrowing
the term “mystical theology” from a Christian context, where it first appeared in the work of
Pseudo-Dionysius, and using it more broadly to refer to any extended, communicated reflection
concerning mystical consciousness and a mystical concern for the final goal of spirituality in
Christianity and Islam, i.e. the unification of all things in God. In describing Christian debates
over the legitimacy of mysticism, McGinn counts “the proper understanding of union with God”
among the most pressing concerns. This same concern appears in the work of Iqbal and
Teilhard. In wrestling with the topic they come up with creative answers that are more sensitive

705 Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions of Islam, 3.
707 Ibid., 148.
to a mystical point of view than not, even amidst strident reformist tendencies. With this degree of breadth, we can more easily envision a comparative mysticism encompassing two or more theistic faith traditions. Focusing on this key issue of union, we can more easily draw fruitful comparisons between Iqbal and Teilhard.

Again, both Teilhard and Iqbal can be read and evaluated as mystical theologians. This is likely a non-controversial statement in the case of Teilhard who was steeped in stories of mystic saints from birth and began writing at length on the subject of mysticism during his wartime service. Concerning Teilhard’s personal relationship with mysticism, three facts come to mind. First, as a Jesuit, Teilhard was obliged to follow the *Spiritual Exercises*. In this sense, Teilhard is a mystic in the way of all Jesuits. In *The Divine Milieu*, he casually remarks, “I am supposed to meditate every day!” Second, in both his autobiographical *The Heart of Matter* and semi-autobiographical *Three Stories in the Style of Benson*, Teilhard recounts mystical experiences and their transformative effect on his life and thought. Indeed, like many mystic authors, Teilhard wanted to communicate something of this transformative power in his writing. Amy Limpitlaw cites a relevant letter in her doctoral thesis, “What I desire so greatly to propagate is not exactly a theory, a system, a *Weltanschauung*, but a certain taste, a certain perception of beauty, the pathos, and the unity of *being*.” Finally, Teilhard’s comment that he lived permanently in the “presence of God” has a vividly mystical cast. It is an echo of Teresa of

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709 Creative efforts have been made to engage in a comparative mysticism between theist and non-theistic traditions but I am fortunate in facing a slightly less daunting task.
710 See pages 11 and 12 in the introduction and *passim*.
711 Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 42.
Avila, “I used unexpectedly to experience a consciousness of the presence of God of such a kind that I could not possibly doubt that he was within me or that I was wholly engulfed in him.”\textsuperscript{713} Most importantly, the questions and concerns of a mystical paradigm are central to all of Teilhard’s work.

The question of whether or not to approach Muhammad Iqbal as a mystical theologian is more difficult. His father had a deep affinity for mysticism and ensured that Iqbal was steeped in a “mystical orientation” from a young age.\textsuperscript{714} Iqbal also describes some of the extraordinary experiences or visions associated with mysticism; in particular, the discovery of his father radiating a halo of light during a trance state.\textsuperscript{715} And more directly, family tradition claims Rumi appeared to Iqbal in a vision.\textsuperscript{716} Associated with the Qadiri tariqa, Iqbal maintained a deep appreciation for Sufi poetry and frequented the shrine (dargah) of al-Hujwīrī in the final years of his life. In an essay considering whether or not Iqbal can be called a Sufi, Mustansir Mir describes Iqbal’s reverence for certain Sufi figures as a kind of adab. According to Mir, it does not necessarily follow that Iqbal himself can be called a Sufi. A person could have a great deal of respect for priests and speak often in biblical allusions due to extensive religious education without themselves being a Catholic Christian after all. Mir points out that Iqbal does not subscribe to, or directly contradicts, several tenets associated with Sufism. Iqbal rejects the annihilation of the self, favors an appreciation of our present, physical world, and prefers

\textsuperscript{713} McGinn, \textit{The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century}, xiii.
\textsuperscript{714} Mir, \textit{Iqbal}, 3.
\textsuperscript{715} Iqbal Singh Sevea, \textit{The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15.
empirical to esoteric knowledge. Mir is right to argue that Iqbal cannot be called a Sufi in a conventional sense. But to what degree was Iqbal conventional in any sense? His critique of Sufism could be said to have a reformist motivation just as his dynamic engagement with Islamic thought is aimed at reconstruction. An argument of just this sort is advanced by Sakina Khan in an article for The Dialogue. For our purposes, the question is the thing. Iqbal, like Teilhard, is concerned with the present and final unity of all things in the divine. In consideration of this question he takes up problems of selfhood and annihilation at length. Javed Majeed puts it this way, “Iqbal’s notion of selfhood, then, is grounded in a complex interaction with Sufi notions of selfhood, breaking from some aspects of these notions, while calling attention to their valuable insights into inner experience and subjectivity.” Muhammad Ajmal notes Iqbal’s ambivalence to mysticism but goes on to identify “two streaks of mysticism” in his thought. One is “mysticism through thinking—in which the thought goes deeper and deeper and reaches the light.” The second is mysticism by heart, love, and “invocation of the Supreme Name.” This is the work of a mystical theology, albeit an unconventional mystical theology in historical context. But even as Mir rightly points out disconnects with the tradition, Iqbal still insists on the transformative power of spiritual development and the possibility for intimate encounter with a unique other self—hallmarks of mysticism.

But, even though I think it is defensible to treat two writers as mystical theologians on the basis of the kind of questions they ask, it may not prove satisfactory to everyone. McGinn’s

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presentation of “mystical consciousness” is not just about expanding the boundaries of mysticism after all. He wants a deeper explanation of what mystical consciousness is and how it operates. He cites both Lonergan and Merton in pursuit of a helpful definition. He writes, “In mystical consciousness, God is present not as an object, but as a goal that is both transcendent and yet immanent. He (She) is active in the human agent as the source, or co-author, of our acts of experiencing (that is, the reception of inner or outer data), knowing and loving.”721 In this he captures the transformative aspect of mysticism along with the interconnectedness of both knowing and loving. Notably, this overturns some of the emphasis on the transiency found in William James. Mystical consciousness is bigger than an intense yet fleeting experience because mystical consciousness is ongoing. As noted above, Teilhard fits within this model of mystical consciousness since he too makes reference to the presence of God. This is unsurprising since both Teilhard and McGinn are building their understanding of mysticism from many of the same sources in the Christian tradition. With Iqbal it is more difficult to make the argument; he does not reference the presence of God in those exact words. On the other hand, we did see in Chapter Two how Iqbal’s treatment of the “appreciative self” emphasizes its hiddenness and the need for its unveiling (unveiling or kashf is a classic Sufi concept).722 This leads Iqbal to describe a meditative process of discovery, “It is only in the moments of profound meditation, when the efficient self is in abeyance, that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner center of experience.”723 And, ultimately, this comes to an awareness of one’s egohood: one’s connection to God and the capacity for moving closer to God, i.e. into God’s presence. Here, to use

723 Ibid., 38.
McGinn’s terms, we have God present as a goal that is both transcendent and immanent. In Annemarie Schimmel’s terms, this is mysticism defined in its widest sense, as “the consciousness of the One Reality—be it called Wisdom, Love or Nothing.”724 As we move into a closer examination of how Iqbal and Teilhard themselves wrestle with the topic of mysticism and how mystical categories appear throughout their work, we will bring in the rest of McGinn’s definition to ask two additional questions. What does it mean to know and love in the thought of Iqbal and Teilhard?

**Critiques and Attacks of Mysticism in Iqbal and Teilhard**

At the end of a textbook introduction to the subject, Daniel Brown asserts “there would be no real serious diminution of the role of Sufism until the modern period, when Muslim reformers, anxious for a scapegoat for the apparent weakness of Islam vis-à-vis the West, focused on Sufism as the root of passivity and conservatism in Muslim religious culture.”725 It would be overly simplistic and generally unfair to accuse Iqbal of scapegoating, but the rest of the quote fits. He counts Sufism among the culprits who have sabotaged the political and social organization of the Muslim world. In an early critique, he writes, “Moslem Democracy was gradually displaced and enslaved by a sort of spiritual aristocracy pretending to claim knowledge and power not open to the average Moslem.”726 “Beware of the mystifier,” he warns young Muslims, “His noose has now been too long round your neck.”727 In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* he accuses Sufism of obstructing the vision of Islam as a “social

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727 Ibid., 156.
Iqbal, who favors a dynamism informed by tradition, accuses Sufism of fostering conservatism on two levels. First, Sufism fosters traditionalism and authoritarianism within itself. Additionally, the attraction of speculative thought in Sufism seduced some of the most creative Muslim thinkers away from the study of law, where they might have contributed to the overall social framework. “Conservatism is as bad in religion as in any other department of human activity,” writes Iqbal.

Iqbal believes great portions of Sufism un-Islamic, contrary to the needs and interests of modern people, and fundamentally misguided in the search for ultimate reality. The growth of Sufism developed under a “non-Islamic character,” he writes. By this he means it was influenced by both neo-Platonic and Persian thought and developed, to borrow words from his doctoral thesis, the qualities of “pure speculation and dreamy mysticism.” “Come, then out of the fog of Persianism and walk into the brilliant desert sunshine of Arabia,” Iqbal exhorts readers in an early essay. He associates neo-Platonic thought with a “quest after a nameless nothing” in both Christian and Islamic mysticism. He insists this “cannot satisfy the modern mind which, with its habits of concrete thinking, demands a concrete living experience of God.” This is why he considers “medieval mysticism” a failed project. He disdains the “life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically empirical outlook of our times.”

This does not mean Iqbal disregards mysticism altogether. We have seen in Chapter Two that he

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729 Ibid., 145.
730 Ibid., 119.
731 Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, 149.
732 Muhammad Iqbal, “Islam and Mysticism,” in *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, 156.
734 Ibid., 148.
735 Ibid., 143.
takes mysticism seriously as a legitimate conscious state and potential source of knowledge. But mysticism, for Iqbal, must be life-affirming, open to analysis, and active—it must preserve tension and drive progress. What Iqbal rejects is *fana*—annihilation of the self and it is important to remember the example of the Prophet in this regard. He stood in the presence of God, endured, and returned. And, it should be noted, that many Sufis themselves would not agree with Iqbal’s accusations of self-indulgence or socio-political quietism. In the documentary *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music of Islam* a member of the Mevlevi Order explains the *sema*, their characteristic whirling *dhikr*, as a four-part process: movement toward God, with God, in God, and then a return. With this return comes a renewed sense of purpose—a mission to unite rather than divide. If we take this explanation at face value, we must take note of the similarities in Iqbal’s preferred spiritual program of building up the self and then transforming society.

Less concerned with politics and the intricacies of social organization, Teilhard does not associate mysticism with deficiencies in governance through Christian history. He does, however, resemble Iqbal in an acute awareness of modern needs for a more tangible spirituality. Teilhard is strongly opposed to a mysticism and overall spirituality which fails to see an intrinsic value in the world of matter. Writing for “waverers” on the outskirts of Christianity and likely thinking of scientists like himself, he writes, “Thus it is those whose education or instinct leads them to listen primarily to the voices of the earth, have a certain fear that they may be false to themselves or diminish themselves if they simply follow the Gospel path.” He is worried an overemphasis on the fallen nature of humanity in the Christian tradition turns our present lives.

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736 Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2006), Chapter XXXII.
into a kind of theater. On this model, nothing has any value in itself except insofar as it proves faithfulness to God and prepares a person for salvation in a world to come. Teilhard imagines such a believer thinking, “Perfection consists in detachment; the world around us is vanity and ashes.” A scientist or anyone else looking for a positive and immediate value for their work can find little consolation at this extremity. Their best hope would be a kind of bifurcated life where the impulse to build up the Earth is separated from Christian spirituality. This is nearly identical to Iqbal’s own observations on the challenges of modernity. Iqbal writes, “Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e. from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others.” Teilhard and Iqbal both emphasize the need to recognize the “within” of the material world if religion is to provide any meaningful path to a purposeful and balanced life.

Teilhard is opposed to what he calls a “God-substratum” or a “God of non-tension.” By this he means a mystical paradigm whereby the practitioner identifies totally with the divine and annihilates herself—her self—in the process. In Teilhard’s way of thinking, union can be achieved in two ways: through complexity and tension or disintegration and relaxation. The first model, aligned with his vision of complexity-consciousness, leads toward the noosphere and a kind of union held together from the top. The second model involves a grinding down and smoothing out of all individuality in pursuit of an identification distributed across the bottom.

739 Ibid., 17.
740 Ibid., 14.
This effects a deindividuation and a depersonalization. Imagining the difference between a stained glass window and its constituent grains of sand might provide a suitable metaphor for this perspective. Since one party is annihilated, Teilhard purposefully avoids calling this second model a union and he associates this paradigm broadly with eastern mysticism, what he calls “the road of the east.” Writing just four years before his death, Teilhard marks a dichotomy between a mysticism of union and “love” and a mysticism of dissolution, “without love.”

Teilhard acknowledges a shared mystical sense between Christians, Hindus, and Sufis. He describes this as “a feeling for, presentiment of, the total and final unity of the world, beyond its present sensibly apprehended multiplicity: it is a cosmic sense of oneness.” But, like Iqbal, he is critical of mystical systems which pursue emptiness or seek a “nameless nothing,” to borrow Iqbal’s phrase. He associates Hinduism and Buddhism with pantheism and monism. He is, therefore, critical of the same tendencies in his understanding of “eastern” mysticism that he cannot tolerate in Christianity—the devaluation and detachment from the material world. In Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions, Ursula King acknowledges Teilhard’s lack of appreciation for the nuance of eastern religions but she is also at pains to demonstrate that his system is not primarily geographic and generally oriented toward change. In other words: (1) Teilhard was more concerned with broadly classifying mysticism based on his own perspective than he was with accurately representing non-Christian mysticisms (2) some of the flaws Teilhard associates with the “road of the East” are present in his own church and (3) his “road of the West” is a process, it is not yet realized. She makes a strong argument but we should

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744 Ibid., 209.
remember Teilhard’s declaration, “. . . Christian mysticism extracts all that is sweetest and strongest circulating in all the human mysticisms, though without absorbing their evil or suspect elements.”

Iqbal and Teilhard can be clumsy in how they categorize the mysticism they oppose but their goals are similar. They both want to distinguish their vision of the ultimate goal of religious life from what they see as a pervasive competing tendency that is ultimately unsatisfactory for the modern world. This, in and of itself, is not a unique position for the time. Anglican Dean William Ralph Inge, a contemporary of Teilhard and Iqbal, wrote his *Christian Mysticism* as a “corrective to Catholic views whose emphasis on negative theology (something he thought entered the Neoplatonic tradition from India) and on what he called ‘debased supernaturalism’ (that is, the concern for extraordinary mystical experiences such as stigmata and levitation) he judged grave dangers to true mysticism.” Inge’s critiques operated much in the same way of Iqbal’s and Teilhard’s. He believed a mysticism willing to acknowledge “the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal” superior to world-denying tendencies. The drive to associate “bad mysticism” with foreign influences, whether Persian, Catholic, Indian, or vaguely “Eastern,” is also present in all three thinkers. In all cases the critiques serve more as rhetorical device and polemic than careful analysis. What Teilhard and Iqbal call “Eastern” or “Persian” tells us more about what they want for a mysticism of the future than it does about the mysticism of any extant place and time. Iqbal and Teilhard are many things but they are not careful historians.

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Mysticism and Consciousness in Teilhard and Iqbal

Consciousness and mysticism are intimately related in Iqbal and Teilhard. Both thinkers treat consciousness as a key theme in their work and both explore the concept within a mystical paradigm because they think consciousness is inextricably linked to a more robust understanding of divine union. For Iqbal and Teilhard, consciousness is a sign of union in itself, consciousness can take on a mystical and revelatory character, and consciousness is developmental. Union shows forth from consciousness and consciousness tends toward union. In Chapter Two, we discussed how Iqbal builds on Bergsonian thought to argue for consciousness as an organic whole blending past, present, and a sense of purpose into the substance of a united ego. Through meditative awareness and introspective analysis, we have access to our own centralizing ego as a sign of the greater centralizing ego—the ultimate “I am.” The internal unity of conscious states making our selfhood possible is a reflection of a greater unity still. In this way God is both immanent, closer to us than our jugular vein, and transcendent.\textsuperscript{747} Teilhard considers the self-reflective consciousness of human beings an explosive moment in cosmic evolution but it is also part of a much larger story. Kathleen Duffy puts it succinctly, “The gradual emergence of consciousness so conspicuous in the evolutionary story convinced Teilhard that the Cosmos has a goal.”\textsuperscript{748} Human consciousness represents the culmination of an extraordinary series of unities forged by the external force of compression and the forward pull of radial energy. The introspective examination of our own consciousness reveals the most intimate “within.” The intuition of our own psychic center is a sign of consciousness operating throughout the universe

\textsuperscript{747} Qur’an 50:16.
along a continuum of increasing complexity, which is to say, a spectrum of unities. In prayer, Teilhard emphasizes these two aspects of relationship between God and creation,

I touch, as near as possible, the two faces of your creative action, and I encounter, and kiss, your two marvelous hands—the one which holds us so firmly that it is merged, in us, with the sources of life, and the other whose embrace is so wide that, at its slightest pressure, all the springs of the universe respond harmoniously together.749

Through the examination of consciousness, Teilhard is able to better identify the union between within and without, essential to his spiritual vision. And this union is the piece of a larger process of unitive becoming—an ontogenesis. For Teilhard, as for Iqbal, consciousness demonstrates the immanence and transcendence of God.

Iqbal accepts the possibility of mystical consciousness as a non-rational mode of consciousness that is nevertheless capable of providing knowledge. He writes, “For the purposes of knowledge, then, the region of mystic experience is as real as any other region of human experience and cannot be ignored because it cannot be traced back to sense-perception.”750 This knowledge comes as feeling in need of additional intellective movements of interpretation and articulation. Mystical knowledge supports Iqbal’s own interpretation of consciousness as an expression of oneness—tawhid. Mystics enjoy an “intimate association” with the eternal and, therefore, an awareness of the unreality of serial time.751 As noted above, Iqbal also admits the possibility of encountering the appreciative self in moments of profound meditation. This seems to be an encounter with the deeper ego; an ego-unity of conscious states reflecting the fundamental oneness of God. “Here, then, is pure duration unadulterated by space,” says Iqbal.752

749 Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 44.
751 Ibid., 18.
752 Ibid., 39.
Teilhard also writes of a kind of mystical consciousness. In *The Mystical Milieu* he describes “a song, a sunbeam, a glance” as three experiences piercing him like three arrows into the depth of his being “where all the faculties of man are so closely bound together as to become a single point.” Teilhard describes this as an experience of the world invading his being. He writes, “The vibration aroused a resonance in all my affections. It drew me out of myself, into a wider harmony than that which delights the senses, into an ever richer and more spiritual rhythm that was imperceptibly and endlessly becoming the measure of all growth and beauty.” For Teilhard, mystical consciousness emerges from the operation of a mystical sense apprehending the unity of all things—their *within*. He refers to this as a deeper knowledge beyond the mere “surface of the mystery of knowledge” provided by our sense perceptions. Teilhard describes mysticism as a kind of science. In *Teilhard’s Mysticism: Seeing the Inner Face of Evolution* Kathleen Duffy says this science requires a “sixth sense, one that opens to a dimension of the world that is available to all, yet not easily accessed by many.” In both Iqbal and Teilhard, mysticism is sometimes described as a particular mode of consciousness sensitive to, and ultimately providing some knowledge of, divine unity. Striking the mystic at the very core of her being while opening a connection to the vastness of the divine, this is an experience at once immanent and transcendent.

The developmental nature of consciousness, including its propensity for transformation, is also key to how Iqbal and Teilhard think about mysticism. With respect to consciousness as such, Iqbal describes inner life as “constant mobility, an unceasing flux of states.”

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754 Teilhard de Chardin, 117.  
755 Ibid., 118.  
analogy of our inner experience, conscious existence means life in time,” he writes.\textsuperscript{757} As noted above, these states melt into each other to form a qualitative unity in the appreciative self or centralizing ego, according to Iqbal. Perhaps it would be more accurate to borrow Teilhard’s distinction between unity and union here. Iqbal’s insistence on the qualitative nature of the appreciative self is more union than unity since the individual components no longer have numerical distinctiveness. The development of this union—the self—is central to Iqbal’s thought. Religion is a potential means to bolstering selfhood through contact with Ultimate Reality. Referring to types of religious consciousness “close to our normal consciousness,” Iqbal writes, “If these types of consciousness open up possibilities of life-giving and knowledge-yielding experience, the question of the possibility of religion as a form of higher experience is a perfectly legitimate one and demands our serious attention.”\textsuperscript{758} Iqbal describes religion as an effort to “clarify human consciousness,” “seize the ultimate principle of value,” “reintegrate the forces of one’s own personality,” “centralize the forces of the ego,” and endow a person with a “new personality.”\textsuperscript{759} In the \textit{Javid Nama}, Iqbal follows on the \textit{Mi’raj} and \textit{The Divine Comedy} (open to mystical readings itself) to develop a journey motif progressing through and beyond six celestial spheres.\textsuperscript{760} He also identifies three witnesses to one’s ego: the witness of one’s own consciousness, the witness of consciousness in another ego, and the witness of God consciousness.\textsuperscript{761} These are all transformative and developmental processes at work through the

\textsuperscript{757} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 38.
\textsuperscript{758} ibid., 146.
\textsuperscript{759} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 143-150.
\textsuperscript{761} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 157.
attainment of varied states of religious consciousness with an ultimate goal of bolstering the self, itself formed by the union of conscious states.

Kathleen Duffy rightly believes we can find the “story of his dynamic spiritual development” in Teilhard’s mystical writings. In *The Mystical Milieu*, Teilhard describes a series of successive circles leading him on a spiral path to a deeper understanding of the incarnation.\(^\text{762}\) At the level of the individual human, self-reflective consciousness enables the drive to grow and to be. In *The Divine Milieu*, each human is described as a “particular centre of divinization” such that swapping out our consciousness for another would change our world entire.\(^\text{763}\) Teilhard writes, “In each soul, God loves and partly saves the whole world which that soul sums up in an incommunicable and particular way. But this summing-up, this welding, are not given to us ready-made and complete with the first awakening of consciousness.”\(^\text{764}\) Because each soul and each consciousness is a unique being and unique process, each human person is irreplaceable. We are undergoing individual journeys and individual transformations. Teilhard’s understanding of consciousness is also tightly bound up with his understanding of evolutionary development across a cosmic timeline. Writing as early as 1916, he refers to the disordered ant hill of living beings arranging itself in long paths moving toward greater consciousness if one adopts the proper scale.\(^\text{765}\) A similar perspective is mentioned by Iqbal when he calls consciousness a “luminous point in order to enlighten the forward rush of life.”\(^\text{766}\) This is an inheritance from Bergson who writes, “From this point of view, not only does consciousness appear as the motive


\(^{\text{764}}\) Ibid., 23–24.


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principle of evolution, but also among conscious beings themselves, man comes to occupy a privileged place.”

Iqbal and Teilhard both believe evolution is ongoing and that the human being is at its leading edge. For this reason, consciousness and sociality are linked together in their thought and this means the two concepts are linked together in a mystical paradigm.

**Mysticism and Sociality in Teilhard and Iqbal**

Sociality and mysticism are intimately related in Iqbal and Teilhard. Both thinkers treat sociality as a key theme in their work and both explore the concept within a mystical paradigm because they think sociality is inextricably linked to a more robust understanding of divine union. For Iqbal and Teilhard, sociality is a sign of union in itself and sociality is developmental. Union shows forth from sociality and sociality builds toward union. Like consciousness, Iqbal views sociality as a sign of tawhid—the living out of tawhid. He writes, “The essence of tawhid, as a working idea, is equality, solidarity, and freedom. The state, from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavor to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization.” This follows on numerous Qur’anic exhortations, perhaps most especially the call for people to get to know each other, “People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another.” Prayer is a quest for illuminative knowledge according to Iqbal and “the spirit of all true prayer is social.” He refers to the potential for a Brahmin to stand shoulder to shoulder with an Untouchable as a “tremendous spiritual revolution.” The boundary demolishing power of Islam is itself a sign (aya) of God, “From the unity of the all-inclusive Ego

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767 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 192.
who creates and sustains all egos follows the essential unity of mankind.” Unity is present at all levels, individual and social, because the tawhid of the creator permeates creation. Writing specifically about Iqbal’s thoughts on ecumenism, Reza Shah-Kazemi notes the centrality of “mystical consciousness” and calls love the “basic theme.”

In Teilhard we have already seen in Chapter Three how sociality is the continuing operation of radial energy pulling the world forward through union. The inclination among human beings to love one another is a much more complex iteration of the same energy which drew the first atoms into compounds. For this reason, as is the case with Iqbal, the building up of the individual is inextricably linked with the building up of society. Ursula King describes Teilhard’s notion of union as a process involving “the inner unification of the self, as well as the outer unification of what surrounds it, that is to say, other people as well as work and nature.” God creates through and in union. The forward progress of evolution must take place through the union of individuals in society. Kathleen Duffy explains, “It is only through a high degree of sympathetic interaction that humanity will be able to reach its next critical point.” Sociality, therefore, is a sign of God’s becoming. Teilhard expresses this best in prayer,

Grant, O God, that the light of your countenance might shine for me in the light of that ‘other.’ . . . Between myself and men, and with the help of your eucharist, you want the foundational attraction (which is already dimly felt in all love, if it is strong) to be made manifest—that which mystically transforms the myriad of rational creatures into a sort of single monad in you, Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist and the body of Christ, both present and emergent, are at the heart of Teilhard’s

771 Ibid., 75.
773 King, Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions: Spirituality and Mysticism in an Evolutionary World, 212.
775 Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 122.
mystical vision. The consecration of the host is the perfect bridge to carry Teilhard’s thought toward the mystical transformation he believes is effected by sociality. We shall see how the same movement plays out in Iqbal.

In Chapter Three, we discussed Iqbal’s understanding of sociality as transformative unity at length. Reading across his corpus, we find that he conceives of societies developing their own self-consciousness formed from the unity of its citizens. As with Teilhard, this is an extrapolation from the same processes which build up the individual. Iqbal writes of conscious states flowing into each other within the ego-unity or selfhood of the individual. Society works on the same principle writ large and expressed through a variety of means, e.g. deliberative assemblies. This is clearly transformative and it mirrors Iqbal’s tendency to think in terms of ego-unities at every level: individual ego-unity, national or societal ego-unity, the ego-unity of an international community of Muslims, and the divine ego-unity. It is tempting to think of these ego-unities using the Teilhardian paradigm. You can imagine a series of concentric circles moving from the individual toward the divine with tawhid—ultimate spiritual and religious principles—acting as the centripetal force allowing individuals and societies to form, develop, and hold together. In Teilhard, however, we have a Eucharistic worldview. His process builds toward the body of Christ in what becomes a clearly mystical transformation, i.e. a transubstantiation. Iqbal cannot go down this same road. Iqbal’s vision of a new world is idealistic but presented in grounded terms. It is “simultaneously intellectual, ethical, religious and humanistic” and “It is the human will and aspirations that will bring such a world into existence,” explains Mustansir Mir.776 So, with respect to the final stages of sociality, is Iqbal in any way comparable to Teilhard? I think

so. Iqbal envisions building up the body of the umma—the Muslim community guided by spiritual principles. In Mysteries of Selflessness such a community is intimately linked with one or more individuals who have strengthened their own selfhood on Iqbal’s model—what Javed Majeed calls a form of self-divinization.\footnote{Majeed, “Introduction to Muhammad Iqbal’s The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,” xxii.} We can pair this concept with Iqbal’s claim that such an individual, or many such individuals, become one with the community while maintaining their distinctiveness in union. This suggests a divinization of the community as a whole in what must be called a kind of mystical transformation even if it is manifestly not on the same level as Teilhard’s vision of communal apotheosis.

As an expression of radial energy, Teilhard thinks of sociality as emerging from and leading toward God. The formation of the noosphere is part of this process. Christ or Christ Omega is always the terminus, although Teilhard sometimes writes without direct reference to Christianity in an effort to attract waverers or unbelievers. Teilhard considered himself a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in this way.\footnote{Romans 15:14-16.} Like Iqbal, Teilhard reflects on practical steps to achieving an increase in sociality and union. Kathleen Duffy lists three Teilhardian conditions for a “dynamic human future: sustainable structures, education toward the future, and love.”\footnote{Duffy, Teilhard’s Mysticism: Seeing the Inner Face of Evolution, 99.} These conditions can feed into specific political and pedagogical agendas even if Teilhard seldom went into the weeds in this way. We are still waiting for Teilhard’s ideas to be fully adapted to practical programs of social transformation even though his inspiration and resonance with institutions like the United Nations is often noted. Love is closer to the heart of the final transformation for humanity. As with Iqbal, it is important to recognize that this final step is
linked with the practical methods of achieving social union. The drive and ultimate goal of the entire process of socialization is God. The outcome is mystical union. Describing this “divine operation,” Teilhard writes,

> It is the quantitative repletion and the qualitative consummation of all things: it is the mysterious Pleroma, in which the substantial one and the created many fuse without confusion in a whole which, without adding anything essential to God, will nevertheless be a sort of triumph and generalization of being.\(^{780}\)

### The Shared Spirituality of Teilhard and Iqbal

Teilhard and Iqbal both engaged in the reconstruction of religious thought. For Teilhard, this at times amounted to theorizing and encouraging a “new mysticism.” Iqbal is much more ambivalent about the term “mysticism,” as we have seen, but his program is informed by mystical thought and is aimed at clarifying the ultimate goal of spirituality. Given the shared inheritance from Henri Bergson and shared concern for a spirituality responsive to the modern condition, it is unsurprising their paradigms bear substantial similarities as has been noted by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch and affirmed by Ursula King. In this study we have shed some further light on these similarities by (1) explaining their shared use of a mystical paradigm with a special emphasis on consciousness and sociality and (2) further delineation of their concern for modernity by identifying shared questions and challenges. We will now outline some of the additional characteristics in the spirituality of Teilhard and Iqbal in search of a clearer picture of how their visions complement each other using classic mystical categories: “knowledge” and “love.” It will prove helpful to produce a succinct answer to the question of what this “new mysticism” or “new spirituality” looks like.

**Knowledge and Science**

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\(^{780}\) Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 95.
Teilhard and Iqbal embrace the material world. Iqbal proudly writes, only Islam “says ‘yes’ to the world of matter.”\textsuperscript{781} Teilhard considers the total rejection of the physical world an excess and error of failed forms of spirituality. He, by contrast, encourages a healthy love for the word with the understanding that the world builds up the soul and souls bring fulfillment to Christ. For his part, Iqbal writes, “There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of spirit.”\textsuperscript{782} Teilhard and Iqbal both insist there is a corresponding “within” to every “without.” They share in a kind of Bergsonian panpsychism, meaning that thought or consciousness is in all existing things with human self-consciousness at the current evolutionary pinnacle.\textsuperscript{783} Teilhard writes, “Everything that exists has a basis of thought, not a basis of ether.”\textsuperscript{784} Iqbal suggests, “It is possible to take thought not as a principle which organizes and integrates its material from the outside, but as a potency which is formative of the very being of its material.”\textsuperscript{785} Since all things share a within, we cannot bifurcate matter and spirit. Matter cannot be discarded as dross.

A shared appreciation for scientific research and knowledge is an outgrowth of valuing the material. Iqbal was an early voice championing the role of the Islamicate world in developing the scientific method. “Europe has been rather slow to recognize the Islamic origin of her scientific method,” he dryly observes.\textsuperscript{786} Citing five relevant passages, Iqbal notes the Qur’anic emphasis on knowledge through observation.\textsuperscript{787} The Qur’an tells us the natural world is filled

\textsuperscript{781} Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 8.
\textsuperscript{782} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{784} Teilhard de Chardin, Writings in Time of War, 41.
\textsuperscript{785} Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 25.
\textsuperscript{786} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{787} Ibid., 11.
with signs (ayat) and similar sentiments are expressed in Jewish and Christian writings. Teilhard’s special vocation as a scientist-priest is itself a sign of how he believed the close inspection of matter could bring one closer to the divine. As a geologist, his keen eyesight for identifying different types of stone is oft-used as a metaphor for his program of scientific and mystical seeing. Kathleen Duffy offers a fine summary of how Teilhard developed all of his senses “so that he could see ever more deeply into the heart of matter.” Styling scientific research itself as a kind of mysticism is considered one of Teilhard’s signature traits. Iqbal makes a remarkably similar suggestion, “The truth is that all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of Nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer.” Thomas King, SJ, rightly calls scientific research an act of adoration for Teilhard. “Religion and science are the two conjugated faces or phases of one and the same complete act of knowledge,” writes Teilhard. Science and religion “Both aim at reaching the most real . . . through the purification of experience,” writes Iqbal. Teilhard and Iqbal are united in the desire to know. “Say, My Lord increase me in knowledge,” instructs the Qur’an. “I want to dedicate myself body and soul to the sacred duty of research. We must test every barrier, try every path, plumb every abyss,” Teilhard exclaims.

Ultimately, Teilhard focused on the study of evolutionary science as a particular source of insight. Describing Teilhard’s thought, Ursula King writes, “at the very heart of religion lies

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788 Qur’an 2:164, Job 12:7-10, and 1 Clement 24:3.
789 Duffy, Teilhard’s Mysticism: Seeing the Inner Face of Evolution, 38.
790 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 73.
791 King, SJ, “Scientific Research as Adoration.”
794 Qur’an 20:114.
795 Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 34.
the phenomenon of mysticism, culminating in a radiant center of energy and love linked to a
dynamic, evolutionary mysticism of action.” And I believe Iqbal too would have been
sympathetic to this approach. He argues that the use of wahy (revelation or inspiration) in the
Qur’an “shows that the Qur’an regards it as a universal property of life; though its nature and
character are different at different stages of the evolution of life.” The Qur’an cannot be
opposed to evolution according to Iqbal’s reading. On his interpretation, three of the main ideas
in the Qur’an are resonant with evolutionary thinking: the unity of human origins and the keen
sense of the reality of time and life as movement in time. He argues that Ibn Khaldun picked up
on some of these same ideas when he developed his insights concerning the changing nature of
society in The Muqaddimah.

For Iqbal, a meaningful spirituality for the future must reflect the dynamism of the
Qur’an. In Islam he finds a desirable balance between the drive for new vistas of life and
tradition. Tradition may seem like a backward force or an anchor but, for Iqbal, it is ultimately
stabilizing, centripetal. It ensures unity and societal self-consciousness as evolution presses on.
As with Teilhard, this is a central tenet in Iqbal’s spirituality: humanity has a future. In Rumi he
finds a model for this way of thinking, “The formulation of the theory of evolution in the world
of Islam brought into being Rumi’s tremendous enthusiasm for the biological future of man.”
While he does not share in Teilhard’s work as an evolutionary scientist or forensic
anthropologist, Iqbal draws similar theological conclusions from the fact of evolution.

796 Ursula King, Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions, 232.
797 Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 100.
798 Ibid., 112–13.
799 Ibid., 132–33.
800 Ibid., 147; Iqbal cites two relevant poems from Rumi: Masnavi iii 3901-6, 3912-14 and Masnavi iv 3637-41, 3646-48.
Spirituality cannot be universally passive or regressive. It must affirm and guide human development in its search for knowledge and power.” Citing Rumi once more, Iqbal shares Teilhard’s commitment to the idea that scientific research “sharpens our perception for a deeper vision” of reality.⁸⁰¹ Iqbal describes the scientist as mystic seeker discovering a “vision of the total infinite which philosophy seeks but cannot find. This vision and power must “combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity.”⁸⁰² In the Javid Nama he writes, “God save us from separation without union! Science without love is a demonic thing, science together with love is a thing divine.”⁸⁰³ In both thinkers, mysticism and science are closely interrelated because they are both sources of knowledge culminating in a vision of sufficient coherence and scope to build the future.

Love and Action

Iqbal and Teilhard have unique and expansive definitions of love. The Teilhard Lexicon is worth quoting at length on the topic. Love is,

Unitive and differentiating energy originally flowing from the divine focal point, having emerged, par excellence, in the charity of Christ. Activates person-to-person and center-to-center relationships. Not to be confused with purely sentimental affection. Love is the very sap of creative union and the mark, in the person, of the convergence of the universe. Love is the fundamental cosmic energy that moves the universe. Teilhard sings with Dante of the “love that moves the sun and the other stars.”⁸⁰⁴

In an explanatory introduction to The Mysteries of Selflessness, Iqbal provides his own definition. He writes,

The ego is fortified by love. The word is used in a very wide sense and means the desire to assimilate, to absorb. Its highest form is the creation of values and ideals and the endeavor to realize them. Love individualizes the lover as well as the beloved. The effort

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., 72.
⁸⁰² Ibid., 73.
⁸⁰³ Iqbal, “Javidnama,” 305.
to realize the most unique individuality individualizes the seeker and implies the
individuality of the sought, for nothing else would satisfy the nature of the seeker.\textsuperscript{805}

With a shared faith in building up the future, Teilhard and Iqbal both develop a definition of love
encompassing creativity and action. “Love is not passivity. It is active and creative,” declares
Iqbal.\textsuperscript{806} Writing of Teilhard, Ursula King summarizes his position artfully, “When Teilhard
spoke of a ‘new mysticism,’ he meant mysticism dramatically oriented toward action; a
mysticism which is supremely a mysticism of loving, of the dynamic, all-transforming fire of
love which can, if we so believe and wish and work, create the world anew.”\textsuperscript{807} Describing an
active approach in his own words, Teilhard emphasizes creativity. He writes, “To begin with, in
action I adhere to the creative power of God; I coincide with it; I become not only its instrument
but its living extension. And as there is nothing more personal in a being than his will, I merge
myself, in a sense, through my heart, with the very heart of God.”\textsuperscript{808} In one of the most well-
known passages of \textit{The Divine Milieu}, he adds, “There is a sense in which he is at the tip of my
pen, my spade, my brush, my needle—of my heart and of my thought.”\textsuperscript{809} Creativity is at the
very heart of the human journey to the divine according to Iqbal. He writes, “Thus in his inmost
being man, as conceived by the Qur’an, is a creativity activity, an ascending spirit who, in his
onward march, rises from one state of being to another.”\textsuperscript{810} To shape one’s own destiny and the

\textsuperscript{805} Iqbal, “Mysteries of Selflessness,” 5.
\textsuperscript{806} Muhammad Iqbal, “McTaggart’s Philosophy,” in \textit{Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal}, ed. Latif Ahmad
\textsuperscript{807} Ursula King, \textit{The Spirit of One Earth: Reflections on Teilhard de Chardin and Global Spirituality} (New York:
Paragon House, 1989), 27.
\textsuperscript{808} Teilhard de Chardin, \textit{The Divine Milieu}, 26.
\textsuperscript{809} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{810} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 10.
universe entire allows the human being to become co-worker and co-creator with God. This union is transformative of both self and society.

Iqbal believes the ego fortified by love. Teilhard would agree. Love personalizes, individualizes, and differentiates. Describing the meeting of disparate elements in the divine milieu, Teilhard writes, “There they concentrate, little by little, all that is purest and most attractive in them without loss and without danger of subsequent corruption. There they shed, in their meeting, the mutual externality and the incoherences which form the basic pain of human relationships.”

The wheat is separated from the chaff; the center is strengthened in union. For Teilhard, love is exemplified by the life of Jesus and also his Sacred Heart; “A Fire: a fire with the power to penetrate all things.” Iqbal praises the Prophet, “In the Muslim’s heart is the home of Muhammad, All our glory is from the name of Muhammad.” And he invokes fiery language akin to Teilhard’s when describing the effect of love on the self; “By Love it is made more lasting, More living, more burning, more glowing. From Love proceeds the radiance of its being.” Love is divine command; it is the fire of the burning bush blazing forth from the human being. Iqbal and Teilhard always think of love in relationship to the divine.

In Teilhard’s thought, love and union are meaningful because they stretch on into infinity through their synthesis in the Super Personal Center—Omega Point. In Iqbal we find a remarkable correspondence to this way of thinking, “If the ultimate reality, i.e. Love, has any significance for the life of its own ego-differentiations, it must itself be an all-inclusive ego

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811 Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 86.
812 Matthew 3:12.
813 Teilhard de Chardin, The Heart of Matter, 47.
which sustains, responds, loves, and is capable of being loved.”\textsuperscript{816} In Teilhard we find a remarkable correspondence with Iqbal when he writes approvingly of the human need to fashion one’s own self on the understanding that “within himself and his most personal development, it is not himself that he is seeking, but that which is greater than he, to which he knows that he is destined.”\textsuperscript{817} On Iqbal and Teilhard’s understanding, the fire of love cannot leave ashes in its path. Love does not annihilate. Love welds, forges. Teilhard and Iqbal both think of love in conjunction with action. “The only danger to which the ego is exposed in this Divine quest,” writes Iqbal, “is the possible relaxation of his activity caused by his enjoyment of and absorption in the experience that precede the final experience.”\textsuperscript{818} Both thinkers value the idea of tension—to be taut with creative work. It is helpful also to approach their ideas while thinking of tensile strength. Iqbal’s development of the self or Teilhard’s centration are both models describing an individual possessed of increasing potential energy—like a coiled spring. Union in love builds toward greater energy and greater becoming. This is the “flight of the hawk” described by Iqbal.\textsuperscript{819} It is the promise of Teilhard’s best-known quote, “The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”\textsuperscript{820}

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\textsuperscript{816} Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 114.
\textsuperscript{817} Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 38.
\textsuperscript{818} Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 156.
\textsuperscript{819} Iqbal, “Javidnama,” 348.
\end{flushleft}
Conclusion

Teilhard and Iqbal work in relationship to their respective mystical traditions. They wrestle with this inheritance and they reject some of its core components but it informs all of their central ideas. Ultimately, if the question of divine union strikes close to the heart of mysticism, then Teilhard and Iqbal land there as well. Examining their shared interest in consciousness, particularly the self-reflective consciousness of human beings, reveals how they treat it as a transformative phenomenon bearing marks of union all the way through. At the level of the individual human, Iqbal provides a more nuanced analysis of conscious states. Because consciousness is part of an ongoing process of evolution, it leads directly to sociality. Here we capture the spirit of the future. The possibility for humanity to build toward greater levels of consciousness still. On a mystical paradigm, sociality is a synthesizing phenomenon culminating in a kind of divine union. Teilhard is more specific on what this looks like but there is some room for comparison between his body of Christ, in the sense of a nascent noosphere, and Iqbal’s understanding of an ideal umma. Both thinkers share incredible optimism for the future. “The solution of all problems is found in love,” writes Iqbal.821 Teilhard imagines all of humanity reaching out to accept the fire of divine love. Consciousness must culminate in sociality for Teilhard because, “The only subject ultimately capable of mystical transfiguration is the whole group of mankind forming a single body and a single soul in charity.”822 If humanity is to have any future at all, it must be a future of the all together. Speaking on Teilhard in 2007, Bernard McGinn notes the potential of this forward-looking mysticism,

His vision of the unity in diversity of convergence toward Omega suggests that one way of understanding the relation of Christian and non-Christian forms of mysticism is as an

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821 Muhammad Iqbal, “McTaggart’s Philosophy,” in Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal, 185.
822 Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu, 121.
eschatological event, though one we are called upon to work toward by our efforts at dialogue and collaboration with others in our comment to ‘living the truth in love,’ as Paul put it.\textsuperscript{823}

The mysticism of Iqbal and Teilhard is one of knowledge, action, and love: knowledge discovered together, action directed toward building a better world, and love on a scale cosmic and divine.

\textsuperscript{823} McGinn, “The Venture of Mysticism in the New Millennium,” 78.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study is a comparative analysis of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Muhammad Iqbal focused on how the themes of consciousness and sociality are developed and interconnected in their respective worldviews. Research efforts sought the exposition of these themes throughout the oeuvres of both authors and in letters and journals, published and archival. Taking a short article by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch as inspiration, this study is the first sustained comparison of Iqbal and Teilhard de Chardin and the only sustained comparative study of Teilhard with any Muslim thinker. The scope of research in this project has also brought numerous primary and secondary sources within the respective orbit of each thinker into conversation for the first time and it marks the first published citation of previously unused or sealed archival resources held by Georgetown University.

The analysis of consciousness in Teilhard and Iqbal has revealed (1) the importance of their shared inheritance from philosopher Henri Bergson (2) a shared commitment to the unity of consciousness and (3) a shared commitment to a particular kind of panpsychism within the context of panentheism. With respect to sociality, both thinkers write of the phenomenon as a transformative union bearing out the future of consciousness through the joining together of disparate peoples. Iqbal envisions this union as the coming together of the umma bound together by the centripetal force of Islam, whereas Teilhard imagines the entire cosmos forming the Body of Christ in a transhumanist eschaton. Ultimately, Iqbal’s view is more grounded and more attentive to the immediate dangers of imperialism, economic inequality, and power differentials overall than Teilhard’s cosmic vision. Despite such differences, and despite their respective
critiques of mysticism, it is shown that both Teilhard and Iqbal share a mystical paradigm devoted to knowledge, love, and the building of a better world.

Summary and Implications

In Chapter Two we discovered Iqbal’s and Teilhard’s separate analyses of consciousness have three significant themes in common: panpsychism, unity, and development. An inheritance from Henri Bergson, their panpsychism is significantly modified by their shared panentheism and their divergent religious traditions. Iqbal and Teilhard both believe the presence of consciousness in all things is an extension of a divinity ubiquitous in the universe and, nevertheless, greater than the universe. Following on this, all existing things have a degree of interiority and are, therefore, interconnected on an ontological rather than solely material level. The self-reflective consciousness of the human being provides us with insight into our relationship with all that surrounds us. Consciousness, the instrument of this insight, is also the very substance of that relationship.

An embrace of panpsychism flows directly into novel considerations of unity and unity is a central concern for both Iqbal and Teilhard. With a deep commitment to tawhid, Iqbal develops a theological anthropology wherein the human being is characterized by the unity of her conscious states and her capacity for synthesizing further experiences into a greater unity still. Thinking along evolutionary lines, Teilhard does not parse the interior of the human being with as much detail as Iqbal. Instead, Teilhard makes an effort to explain the development of consciousness from the smallest particles to the human being along an axis of increasing complexity. Teilhard believes this system is drawn forward through degrees of interiorization and centricity by what he appropriately terms radial energy. He describes a law of attraction
drawing all things toward convergence. As expositions of unity, Iqbal’s model of human selfhood fits neatly with Teilhard’s model of evolutionary history.

Both Iqbal and Teilhard believe consciousness is developmental. Teilhard is more specific about its past development along the evolutionary timeline. Iqbal is more specific about its development in the present moment through the agency of individual persons acting as God’s co-creators and deputies on Earth. For Iqbal, the building up of selfhood is what prepares the ego to survive death. Iqbal and Teilhard both emphasize the need for action and a sense of purpose. They write of the active human being holding herself in a state of tension and it is helpful to think also of a kind of tensile strength built up through such exercise. The development of consciousness is ongoing. Consciousness has a future. Humanity has a future. Teilhard and Iqbal both bridge consciousness with sociality because they both envision a greater union than that which has culminated in the individual human. Human existence is not serialized or isolated, and it is not mere theater playing itself out upon the stage of materiality. Teilhard and Iqbal conceive of humanity in duration, as part of a process of continuous creation in which our actions spent in building up the world have a real consequence as expressions of divine energy.

As described in Chapter Three, Iqbal and Teilhard envision a higher degree of unity at the societal level with their respective religious traditions acting as the ideal catalysts for growth and stability. For Teilhard, the reach and administrative efficiency of Rome makes it the appropriate vehicle for human unification. As a flag bearer for Christianity, the Catholic Church is also the representative of a biblical vision committed to worldwide synthesis in the Body of Christ through love. Teilhard’s entire worldview is captured in his vision of the Eucharist expanding to fill the entire cosmos. His human phenomenon builds toward the Christian phenomenon because
he believes Christianity affirms and advances the same insight he finds in his scientific and phenomenological analysis. His Omega Point is Christ. Developmental consciousness and society are advancing toward the pleroma, the all in all. In Islam, Iqbal finds the ideal instruments for human unification across all boundaries. The dynamism of the Qur’an is a spur to greater progress. The qibla, the arrangement in rows for daily prayer, and the circumambulation (tawaf) of the Kaaba are incentives toward an egalitarian union beyond race, tribe, and nation state. It is accurate to say that while Teilhard believes sociality is working toward the Body of Christ, Iqbal believes sociality will form an increasingly vibrant umma. These commitments of creed and tradition are an important point of divergence between the two thinkers and should not be downplayed or brushed aside. At the same time, they share in the belief that humanity should tear down artificial boundaries in pursuit of a shared commitment to creativity, research, and building up the future. There is a great deal of room for interreligious dialogue and engagement on these terms. Among the most interesting results of this study is the revelation that Teilhard would agree with Iqbal’s most substantive critiques of Christianity and Iqbal would agree with Teilhard’s most substantive critiques of Islam, particularly Islamic mysticism. Both thinkers want their own religion to be a religion of the future and such an approach may bring their understanding of Christianity and Islam closer together than they realized.

The Teilhardian vision for the future of consciousness is the development of a noosphere brought about by the union of consciousness among individuals to produce a new reality greater than its constituent parts. For some, this becomes a transhumanist future akin to the speculations of science fiction. For those more faithful to Teilhard’s own vision, it is a transubstantiation of humanity itself. Whatever the result, increasing globalization and an increase in the scope of
sociality between peoples is a preliminary stage. Looking at Iqbal through a Teilhardian lens, there is notable concord with some of these ideas even if his thought doesn’t approach the same dizzying heights. Iqbal and Teilhard both do not just believe that consciousness moves toward union but also that this union is transformative. Iqbal writes of societal unity producing a new kind of consciousness or collective will. He imagines Muslim countries held together by the centripetal force of Islam and Muslim societies renewed through a reciprocal relationship with the most spiritually developed individuals. This bears a strong resonance with mystical paradigms wherein the individual emerges from *dhikr* transformed and is therefore prepared to transform the world.

Iqbal is far more attentive to power differentials and facts on the ground with respect to the future of sociality than Teilhard. This is due in part to inclination. Iqbal was also more focused on the individual human in the present moment when theorizing about the unity of conscious states. But circumstances played the most significant role in shaping Iqbal’s perspective on power and colonialism. Teilhard suffered harsh and sometimes arbitrary authoritarianism, it is true, but he also enjoyed the privilege of power in race, class, and nationality without subjecting these accidents to extended scrutiny. Looking at Teilhard through an Iqbalian lens can make us more attentive to such lacunae in his thought and the need to serve justice in the present moment if a cosmic vision is to retain any meaning. But as soon as we become grounded in the intricacies of present-day difficulties, we must also acknowledge the pervasiveness of hope in Teilhard and Iqbal. In consciousness they see the divine present and active throughout the universe and beyond. In sociality they see the blending of consciousness at
work in the continuing creation of a universe building toward greater degrees of transformation and union. As argued in Chapter Four, this is a worldview shaped within a mystical paradigm.

Iqbal and Teilhard both opposed tendencies toward quietism, passivity, and self-annihilation across mystical traditions insofar as they understood them. These critiques were often unfair and reveal more about what Teilhard and Iqbal thought an ideal mysticism should look like than they reveal about other theories and practices. I argue that both Teilhard and Iqbal were mystical theologians and that a mystical paradigm acted as the primary influence and context for their overall worldviews. Their understanding of consciousness building from individual unity and toward greater unity on the social scale is a type of mystical itinerary. They both envision knowledge, particularly scientific exploration, as an act of prayerful communion with the divine. They both believe in love as the driving force bringing the world closer to God. It is the force of love which brings two conscious centers into union and for this reason our individuality must remain intact. Just as consciousness is a measure of our being, love is a measure of our sense of creative purpose—our future. Reading Iqbal and Teilhard as mystics is to recognize their belief that divinity is all around us and we only need open our eyes to bear witness. It is to recognize also that we are called to live purposeful lives filled with hope, creativity, and love, because in this way, we too become divine.

Limitations

This study has three limitations: (1) limitations of collected data, (2) a lack of prior literature on the subject, and (3) a narrow scope. Proximity to archival holdings concerning Teilhard at Georgetown University and a reading knowledge of French allowed me to supplement my research with significant insight from his unpublished correspondence while
critiquing the accuracy of his work in translation. With Iqbal, I was fortunate that his major work was either written in English or produced in translation. Nevertheless, I believe my study of Iqbal could be further supplemented by archival research on the specific questions and themes advanced in this dissertation. While nearly every monograph written on Teilhard in the 1960s refers to the widespread interest in the topic and subsequent wave of publications, the enthusiasm was not sustained. Neither Iqbal nor Teilhard has received the attention they deserve and the secondary literature on both thinkers suffers from significant gaps. While this has given me the advantage of making original contributions in this study, I was hampered by the inability to respond to literature that was directly on point. There is a need for more comparative studies of Teilhard and Iqbal in general and with each other. Finally, this study took on a necessary limitation of scope from the outset by focusing only on the themes of consciousness and sociality. My plan was influenced by the recognition that consciousness and sociality provide insight into the most fundamental preconceptions and structures of Iqbal and Teilhard’s thought but there are many more points of fruitful comparison than what is covered above. I hope future writers will choose to engage, challenge, and build upon my work here.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

A new study of Teilhard is especially timely given his recent citation by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato si’* and the even more recent decision of the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture to unanimously approve a petition for Pope Francis to consider lifting the 1962 *monitum* against Teilhard’s writing. If these actions lead to a renewed interest

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in Teilhard studies, the field will be stronger for this consideration of his thought in comparison with Iqbal. Most importantly, the ideas and implications found in both Teilhard and Iqbal continue to have a powerful resonance for contemporary questions and dilemmas. In theorizing about consciousness and sociality, Teilhard and Iqbal were ultimately theorizing about what it means to be a human being. More specifically, they were asking what it means to be human in relationship with the rest of humanity and with God at a time when the ascendancy of science was paired with the most xenophobic and murderous tendencies of our species.

The themes of consciousness and sociality chosen for this study have opened up numerous opportunities for future research. Generally, any future analysis of Teilhard and Iqbal would benefit from being responsive to these themes while asking new questions or emphasizing different primary sources. With respect to interreligious dialogue, it would be enormously beneficial if additional studies focused on the practical implications of Teilhardian and Iqbalian thought, i.e. how one might live and teach their ideals. The foresight of Teilhard and Iqbal has also predicted potential research into panpsychism and the unity of consciousness that may already be bearing fruit scientifically and ought to be investigated theologically. It is also true that the terminological and philosophical density of both Teilhard and Iqbal can be off-putting to new readers. Any progress in spreading their ideas will require new introductory texts able to summarize and clarify their thought while highlighting its potential.

**Future Prospects for Globalization and Muslim-Christian Understanding**

Following on the suggestion of Catherine Cornille, the second and third chapters of this study conclude with the consideration of four “challenging questions” addressed by both Teilhard and Iqbal: (1) the challenge of scientific materialism, (2) the challenge of death, (3) the
challenge of racism, and (4) the threat of extinction. These are not Christian or Muslim problems in isolation, they are human problems with Christianity and Islam offering reflections and potential answers. The shared emphasis on human progress between Teilhard and Iqbal invites sympathetic readers to solve problems and each of the questions above could be expanded into a full-length paper. But we need not think only in terms of problems. One of the most striking insights of both Teilhard and Iqbal is that globalization is not just a fact or a dilemma but also an occasion for hope. Whether it be spiritual democracy or the noosphere, love can lead us to a world with more bridges and fewer walls. At a time of unprecedented hostility toward globalization and cosmopolitanism in the United States, focused studies of Iqbal and Teilhard on these topics could be a source of valuable competing narratives. New volumes on the potential contributions of Teilhard and Iqbal to political thought are sorely needed. Another tantalizing question is whether Iqbalian and Teilhardian thought could inform new approaches to interreligious dialogue overall. Both writers possess a vision concerning the relationship of God, religion, science, and modernity. Perhaps Teilhard’s notion that a belief in the future could act as a bridge between faith traditions could be further theorized in the light of Iqbal.

*Future Prospects for Panpsychism and Unity: Integrated Information Theory*

Panpsychism seems to be undergoing a resurgence in scientific circles and the analysis of consciousness in this project could support a need for future theological reflections on the subject if the trend continues. *The New York Times* reports its movement away from the scientific fringe as a “surprising development” of the last decade. For evidence, the article cites three sessions on panpsychism at a 2016 conference on the Science of Consciousness. The same conference has

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825 Johnson, “Consciousness: The Mind Messing With the Mind.”
since promoted panpsychism to a place among its 2018 themes. Oxford University Press has also recently released *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives* as part of their Philosophy of Mind Series. At the vanguard of this movement are the proponents of Integrated Information Theory (IIT); a theory initially proposed by Giulio Tononi, a neuroscientist holding the Distinguished Chair of Consciousness Science at the University of Wisconsin.

In his original 2004 articulation of IIT, Tononi presents this central hypothesis, “consciousness corresponds to the capacity of a system to integrate information.” This claim emerges from a phenomenological analysis revealing “differentiation – the availability of a very large number of conscious experiences; and integration – the unity of each such experience.”

Returning to the title of the theory, we need to understand the meaning and relevance of “information” and “integration.” Tononi provides a classical definition for information, “the reduction of uncertainty among a number of alternatives outcomes when one of them occurs.”

Computer sensors like the one which opens the sliding doors for me at the grocery store are quite limited in the amount of information they can process in comparison with the human being.

Tononi notes, however, that digital cameras and other sophisticated computer systems can also differentiate between an enormous amount of states. The key difference between us and a camera, he argues, is our ability to integrate information. He explains, “This is because, due to

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the multitude of causal interactions among the elements of your brain, the state of each element
is causally dependent on that of other elements, which is why information can be integrated
among them.\textsuperscript{830} The photodiodes of a camera do not share information with each other and can
work independently. But if you cut up a human brain into constituent components, its
consciousness cannot be salvaged. He goes on to point out that the importance of integration is
phenomenologically evident: we cannot conceive of colors without shapes or reduce our visual
field to just the right or left half. Tononi writes, “And indeed, the only way to do so is to
physically split the brain in two to prevent information integration between the two hemispheres.
But then, such split-brain operations yield two separate subjects of conscious experience, each of
them having a smaller repertoire of available states and more limited performance.”\textsuperscript{831} It is
possible a splitting of consciousness also occurs in healthy brains when automated tasks are
engaged; imagine driving a well-known route while participating in a deep conversation with
your passenger. Alternatively, Tononi et al. suggest, “some of these functions may be mediated
by feedforward circuits” that are unconscious because they lack integration.\textsuperscript{832} The ability to
integrate, to forge a unity and synthesis of information, is consciousness itself according to IIT.
This accords well with Iqbal’s insistence on the unity of conscious experience.\textsuperscript{833} It also
resonates with the key Teilhardian maxim: the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

A major hypothesis of IIT is that consciousness can be measured with the value $\Phi$ \textit{phi}.
Christof Koch advises, “Think of $\Phi$ as the synergy of the system. The more integrated the system

\textsuperscript{830} Tononi.
\textsuperscript{832} Tononi et al., “Integrated Information Theory: From Consciousness to Its Physical Substrate,” 455-456.
\textsuperscript{833} Iqbal, \textit{The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam}, 80–82.
is, the more synergy it has, the more conscious it is.”

In the most recent formulation of IIT, calculation of $\Phi$ is described as “the distance $D$ between two probability distributions: the cause-effect repertoire specified by the whole mechanism is compared against the cause-effect repertoire of the partitioned mechanism.”

The larger mechanism is partitioned in a way to cause the least difference to the cause-effect repertoires before evaluation of the parts against the whole. Inability to calculate $\Phi$ in a human brain is a current limitation of this research. The authors suggest this difficulty is not intractable since “discrete, analytically tractable brain models based on neuroanatomical connectivity . . . could provide a suitable approximation of large-scale neural mechanisms yet permit the rigorous measurement of integrated information.”

Even with a viable experimental method, the numbers are too big to proceed. The authors write, “to calculate $\Phi_{\text{Max}}$ exhaustively, all possible partitions of every mechanism and of every system of mechanisms should be evaluated, which leads to a combinatorial explosion, not to mention that the analysis should be performed at every spatio-temporal grain.”

Interestingly, a recent effort has been made to produce an index of consciousness partially grounded in insights from IIT useful for the clinical assessment of brain-injured, unresponsive patients.

The authors of this study describe conscious experience as differentiated (i.e. differentiated from other experiences) and integrated. Consciousness requires

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834 Christof Koch, “A ‘Complex’ Theory of Consciousness,” *Scientific American*, July 1, 2009, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-theory-of-consciousness/; the symbol $\Phi$ is missing in the online version of this article but is present in the July 2009 print edition of *Scientific American Mind*.


836 Ibid.

837 Ibid.

an optimal balance of these two properties as afforded by the complexity of a healthy brain. They describe their approach:

> Here, we introduce an empirical measure of brain complexity, the perturbational complexity index (PCI), which gauges the amount of information contained in the integrated response of the thalamocortical system to a direct perturbation. We test PCI on a large data set of TMS-evoked [transcranial magnetic stimulation] potentials recorded from healthy subjects during wakefulness, dreaming, nonrapid eye movement (NREM) sleep, and different levels of sedation induced by different anesthetic agents (midazolam, xenon, and propofol), as well as from brain-injured patients who had emerged from coma (overall, 208 sessions in 52 subjects).\(^\text{839}\)

An acknowledged limitation of this study is the small number of brain-injured patients (n=20), but their work shows promise as an objective measurement of consciousness. This work and IIT more broadly provides a potentially measurable spectrum comparable to the axis of complexity-consciousness envisioned by Teilhard.

IIT is a form of panpsychism since even the tiniest particles have a non-zero \(\Phi\) phi. Tononi and Koch address this topic directly in an article titled “Consciousness: Here, there and everywhere?” They write,

> IIT was not developed with panpsychism in mind (\textit{sic}). However, in line with the central intuitions of panpsychism, IIT treats consciousness as an intrinsic, fundamental property of reality. IIT also implies that consciousness is graded, that it is likely widespread among animals, and that it can be found in small amounts even in certain simple systems.\(^\text{840}\)

They are quick to point out, however, that this is not the same as believing everything to be conscious—to use my terminology from above, it is a kind of low panpsychism recognizing the ubiquity of proto-consciousness. The authors also believe IIT has more explanatory power than

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\(^{839}\) ibid.

previous articulations of panpsychism. In part, this is because they are asking a different range of questions. With respect to evolution, for instance, “natural selection gives rise to organisms with high $\Phi^{\text{max}}$ because, given constraints on the number of elements and connections, they can pack more functions per element than their less integrated competitors and thus are more adept at exploiting regularities in a rich environment.”

This is markedly similar to concepts of interiorization and cerebralization found in Teilhard. Koch, in fact, makes frequent, favorable mention of Teilhard. Tononi and Koch also believe they have answered a critique of panpsychism articulated by John Searle, “Consciousness cannot spread over the universe like a thin veneer of jam; there has to be a point where my consciousness ends and yours begins.”

Rather than a thin veneer of jam, IIT focuses on integrated aggregates. Tononi and Koch explain that two people in conversation form a new system on the basis of their interactions but measurement ($\Phi > 0$) of this system will not exceed the individual $\Phi$ of the participants as separate entities. In consideration of the noosphere, it is interesting to wonder if a system combining two or more humans could be imagined where the $\Phi$ does, in fact, exceed the individual components. Writing for *Scientific American*, Christof Koch acknowledges the implications for artificial or cybernetic intelligence, “The theory does not discriminate between squishy brains inside skulls and silicon circuits encased in titanium. Provided that the causal relations among the transistors and memory elements are complex enough, computers or the billions of personal computers on the Internet will have nonzero.”

To be comprehensive, any

841 Ibid.
future theological considerations of artificial intelligence or consciousness broadly will need to consider IIT. They would also do well to consider the early contributions of Teilhard and Iqbal, who suggested many of the possibilities now being taken seriously by cognitive neuroscience.

**Concluding Thought**

I conclude in the hope that we are on the verge of a renewed interest in Teilhard and Iqbal. This is my hope because I believe the study and teaching of Christian and Muslim theology will be incomplete unless these thinkers receive due consideration. This is my hope, also, because I believe Teilhard and Iqbal offer uniquely important contributions to how we might imagine the present condition and future promise of humanity. In our self-reflective consciousness, the dignity of the human being is to share some small part of divine knowledge and creativity. Ours is the privilege to reach out and seize upon the universe to find God with us, wherever we are.\(^{845}\) God says to humanity, “The wisdom of My creating you is to see My vision in the mirror of your spirit, and My love in your heart.”\(^{846}\) The promise of Teilhard and Iqbal is that our lives matter and we are part of something larger than ourselves. They both envision a future where individuals will be brought together through the creative pursuit of knowledge and the loving bond of an indissoluble union by which we are made more fully ourselves. This is a union more powerful than those of creed and nation state. This is a union transformative and divine.

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\(^{845}\) Matthew 1:23 and Qur’an 57:4.

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