

## A Study of History

No event or change in man's social or personal life takes place haphazardly or incidentally. There is no question that the balance of energy throughout the world is completely orderly. Here we are concerned with how strongly laws and rules dominate human life and its various aspects. Let us first consider these three theories:

1- Living within a closed circle of laws and rules, man is confined to strictly obey them in his social and personal life. Thus, he is just like other creatures or animals, following a predefined set of rules for his life.

2- Human life is totally different from other living beings, and man cannot be considered as imprisoned inside the laws of the universe, for man is quite distinct in his ability to think, choose and decide, and many others. Therefore, the history of mankind cannot be interpreted by means of a fixed set of laws.

3- The various aspects of man's existence is influenced by man's interactions with the events around him throughout his life, just as a grain of wheat develops by interacting with different factors around it. If the grain were put in a system free of natural laws, where it could be affected by unlimited factors, we would undoubtedly be unable to predict what were to happen to it. Likewise the destiny of man is an entirely open system, where he is affected by various factors.

Since man is gifted with intelligence, authority and many other characteristics, he can never be confined in a closed system, and his fate will thus be certainly unpredictable. No intellectual has ever been able to accurately foresee his own or his society's futures by means of concretely scientific information, for there are so many unpredictable events in man's life that any foreseeing is impossible. We must keep in mind, however, that though man's existence is quite open, and his being influenced by various factors should not contradict with his absolute domination over himself and the world he lives in.

As we have already seen, some scholars believe man to be entirely imprisoned by the fatalistic factors of history, and consider human beings totally incapable of freeing themselves from the chains of laws controlling their existence. Let us consider how they are mistaken from two points of view:

a) Seeing history as a series of events, in which a large number of people are affected by natural factors and other people, is just like considering them as completely helpless. Sometimes powerful tyrants make such slaves out of the meek, drowning them in pain, that it seems as if true freedom and independent character is a luxury only the elite can enjoy.

b) Incorrect generalizations can bring about errors in the philosophy of history, for some intellectuals interpret all aspects of human life on the basis of one or a few of their selected factors. For example, a group of researchers have concluded from studying the history of various societies that the fundamentals of social life in some communities are compatible with racism. They not only associate these societies with racism, but also try to expand it for all societies of the world. Those who tend to interpret history by forcing one or a few factors do not realize that you need not know the cause in order to know its effect, but if one knows everything about a cause, knowing its effect will follow.

## **What Is the Philosophy of History?**

The philosophy of history studies the causes and consequences of historical events and changes. One basic question here is whether studying the philosophy of all of history is possible, or should history be studied era by era. Some scholars believe it is possible to achieve the entire philosophy of the collective history of man.

Their theory was criticized on the fact that we cannot create a collective history for a history that occurs only once. We must keep in mind, however, that historical components are not in total conflict with each other, and have many points in common. For instance, if the leaders of a society prove atrocious, the people will be ready for mutiny and revolt. Another common point is that economic failures lead to stagnancy in human lives.

A significant point in the philosophy of history is that there is no conflict between history being consisted of parts and fragments and at the same time having orderly, systematic components.

## **Causality in History**

Some scientists believe that it is not possible to account for history on the basis of causality, for man makes history, and as a conscious, free being, man cannot be explained by means of causality. However, there are a few points concerning this belief that we must keep in mind:

1- Despite man's freedom of will, he cannot entirely eliminate causality. Although he is able to affect historical events with his knowledge, he cannot make annihilate what exists, or vice versa. The more man activates his talents and the more knowledge he acquires, his freedom of choice will also broaden, and stronger he will be in manipulating the causality of causes and the motivation of motives. Man's free will is in no conflict with the role of causality in history, as it does not contradict the fact that some laws dominate his mental, spiritual state and his movements.

Some others, on the other hand, consider unexpected events as a reason to rule out causality in history. They believe, for example, the black cloud that caused the heavy rain in Waterloo and Napoleon's defeat as a contradiction of causality. They have obviously neglected the distinction between events that happen unexpectedly and events that happen with no reason. Even though Napoleon couldn't predict the rain, the movement of the clouds and the rain were not without reason.

2- The most important – and the most delicate – point in understanding the philosophy of history is distinguishing the sequence of events and the cause and effect relationship between them. If an event follows another, it does not necessarily imply that the former caused the latter to happen. Many historical events have occurred one after another without any making the next one take place.

## Is History Motivated Internally or Externally?

There are two theories on what causes all historic events:

1- There is no external cause for historical events. Any incident or development in history is caused by what has happened before it, and is itself the cause of future events. No outside factor can play a role in history.

2- Historical events are, despite being influenced by causality, also affected by the supernatural. As everything else in the universe, what happens in history is under God's control.

Historical events altogether, like other phenomena in the world, do not originate from their own internal components and relationships, for the components and relationships themselves are bound by the same laws that do not originate from their own innate self; the laws governing the components and relationships of the universe do not originate from their innate self, either.

Since every component and relationship in history and the universe is undergoing change but the laws governing it are fixed, the origin of the laws must be something other than the universe or history. Therefore, history – whether that of mankind or the nonmaterial – must be motivated by things beyond historical changes.

Accepting a factor other than historical events as the motivating reason for history does not contradict the laws governing history, just as accepting that certain laws govern the universe does not conflict with the divinely nominative role. Or the fact that the laws governing the material aspects of the human body are not at odds with the laws governing man's mental and psychological aspects.

However, the movement of the human body organs follows physical and physiological laws, but does at the same time originate from man's will and decision, which does not fit into the laws of physical muscular movement. This is why we say when an intellectual accepts the fact that history follows laws, it is the same as accepting that history has a spirit, a soul, different from historical changes and events themselves. Some intellectuals have elegantly used the term “the conscience of history” instead of the

“spirit of history” – the ultimate of an issue, quite different from a person.

## Is There a Single Motivating Reason for History?

If we mean by the motivating reason for history its true nominator, which would obviously mean the One God. However, if we are referring to the ultimate end for history – where history is heading for – even if such an end exists, it is impossible to discover using scientific and philosophical methods, for history as a whole, made up of various events and changes, it has no will or knowledge of its own to make it able to search for and move towards its goal. In other words, even if all of history does possess a single truth, it is unlikely for these human beings who can act with awareness and foresee its future completely. However, as a being living in history itself, man can predict the future to a limited, conditional extent.

Basically, in order to find out whether history is motivated by only one reason or more, we must take into consideration the identity of history – is the identity of history a single reality that we should designate a motivating reason for, or does the variety of historical events and changes prevent us from reaching a sole reality for it? In fact, by considering the following components as the identity of history, we will see that it cannot be regarded a single reality.

- 1- Man's effort toward providing himself with a suitable life,
- 2- man's endeavors to discover the world he lives in,
- 3- the love and affection man uses to justify his own life,
- 4- building the tools he needs to survive,
- 5- making laws and rights that make social life possible,
- 6- the influence of outstanding figures in history,
- 7- devastating wars,
- 8- cruel rivalries,
- 9- inventions and discoveries,
- 10- the resistance great men show against the selfish,
- 11- the rise and fall of cultures,
- 12- the rise and fall of civilizations,
- 13- the effect of natural disasters upon human life,
- 14- the conflicts and confrontation among human beings,

The above-mentioned factors affecting history are in so much contrast with each other that it is impossible to find something in common between them and reach the single reality that can be the reason of historical components and elements.

## **The Necessity of Distinguishing the Necessary Factors from the Determining Factors in History**

To explain the importance of making a clear distinction between these two factors, we must take the phenomenon called life into consideration from these two points of view:

- 1- The factors necessary without which life cannot go on, such as breathing, eating, sleep and health.
- 2- The factors determining the quality of man's life, like poverty or wealth, science and knowledge, success and failures, courage and cowardice.

The first kind of factors makes it possible for human life to continue, but the second kind provides human life with a specific quality. Rather like human life, the history of mankind too possesses these two factors:

a) The factor necessary for making the components and elements of history, which are the natural and psychological reasons behind historical changes and events. The reason why man began agriculture, for instance, was that he could not live without cereal and farm products for food. Human beings built houses and dams, or began mining to make it possible for their own life to go on. Economic activities, setting laws and enforcing social responsibilities, executing the necessary policies for human life have also originated from such factors. These factors, necessary for making historical events, cannot describe the quality of history.

b) There are a few points we must consider before we can discuss the factors determining the quality of history:

- Considering man's identity and characteristics, the factor determining the quality of human life is the "ideal me", or the "ideal ego", which is the base of all aspects of human life. If man's ideal ego likes wealth and money, he will see everyone and everything from that point of view. A beautiful work of art will be valuable to him only because it costs a lot of money. Or if someone loves power, he will see everyone as something he should dominate.
- The factor determining the quality of man's social life differs from his individual life. This factor is so important that it can be the most effective way to identify the determining factors underlying historical events.
- There are two distinct qualities in social life:

- a) The primary quality, which includes the necessary elements of life.
- b) The secondary quality, which includes the human relationships, social relationships, cultures, ways of thinking, ideals, lifestyles and various values.

The basic factor in the primary factor of social life is the necessity of harmonizing and moderating people's wills. There are two types of will harmony:

- a) Forced moderation, which results in forced harmony, has unfortunately existed in most societies throughout history.
- b) Natural moderation, which causes natural harmony among people.

The factors that can bring about natural harmony among people are:

- 1- Sharing duties and jobs is a necessity in social life, and can harmonize people's wills.
- 2- The only kind of ownership possible in social life is limited ownership, for unlimited ownership can cause disturbance and trouble among the people.
- 3- Two phenomena that have roots in man's self-loving quality, and are important to natural human life are the attraction to pleasure and escaping pain. They also influence controlling wills. These two phenomena motivate the most important of man's activities, and history cannot be interpreted without considering them. The principle of protecting oneself (self-love, in other words) has guided man toward gaining benefits and avoiding pain throughout all of history.
- 4- Social laws can also moderate human selfishness, especially when they are compatible with man's true nature.
- 5- Attention toward the divine tradition according to which cruelty is mortal.

The above items must be considered when discussing historical events.

## **Various Viewpoints on the Factors Motivating History**

Scholars have presented different theories on what motivates history. Let us take a look at some of them:

- 1- Human nature
- 2- Natural, e.g. geographical, factors
- 3- Political factors
- 4- Power, which Nietzsche strongly advocated

5- Geniuses and influential figures

6- The hidden factor that draws societies into different fates. This idea was presented by Spengler.

7- Extraterrestrial factors: ancient people believed that other planets influence and control all human aspects

8- The absolute idea presented by Hegel

9- Economic phenomena

10- The will of life, as seen in Schopenhauer's philosophy

11- General intelligible life, which is superior to natural events. Bergson presented this idea.

12- Sedimentary ideas, like inheritance, as suggested by Gustav le Bon.

13- The increase and density of population

14- Sexual instinct, which Freud supported

15- Original social ideas, as suggested by Whitehead

16- Fortune

17- Love and hatred, suggested by Empedocles' philosophy

18- Truth-seeking and ambition for greatness

19- Dissatisfaction with the existing conditions

20- Religion

We believe these three factors to be the most significant in motivating history:

- God
- Man
- What is useful to man

1- God: God's influence on history is the same as God's influence on other natural phenomena. The elements of history, from man to the pyramids of Egypt, carved stones, transcribed tablets, every one of man's physical or mental accomplishments which inform us about the past, are all created by God.

On the other hand, all thoughts, wills, decisions, discoveries, achievements, great leaps forward and the

activation of potentials – which make up history – refer to God. Even man's chosen activities and their observable effects – may it be, at times, disabilities – also originate from God.

This piece of poetry by the Iranian poet Anvari shows a very clear historical trend:

اگر محوّل حال جهانیان نه قضاست چرا مجاری احوال بر خلاف رضااست

بلی قضاست به هر نیک و بد عنان کش خلق بدان دلیل که تدبیرهای جمله خطاست

هزار نقش برآرد زمانه و نبود یکی چنانکه در آئینه تصور ماست

(If the events and developments of the world are not based on destiny, how come they are not always to our satisfaction? Indeed, it is fate that controls the good or evil; all speculations about it are false. Time goes a thousand ups and downs, but not even one of them can we predict.)

2- Man: Ever since history began, there have been human beings – whether rulers or outstanding figures – who have influenced their own and others' fate. Man's mental and physical power and achievements has shown throughout history how significantly his role has been. If man were truly imprisoned in his natural or social surroundings, he would never be able to step out of his caves and explore the oceans or outer space. Those who ignore the role of human thought and will in history are unintentionally ridiculing man; although man does affect history, it cannot be exactly evaluated qualitatively or quantitatively.

Since human life – whether individual or social – and even the society and nature are open systems, the fate of their components cannot be accurately qualitatively or quantitatively determined. This is the reason why significant historical events, like the rise and fall of cultures and civilizations, are always expressed with a range of probability.

Man's will power and thought has been able to recognize his real ideals, ends and tools in any period of history, and take action to acquire them, and he has been successful at times and unsuccessful at other times. The important point in man's role in shaping history is that God has enabled him to dominate history, and understand and cooperate in harmony with his fellow beings.

3- What Is Useful to Man: What remains in history is what is useful to man. However, what is useful to man must also be in accordance with the fundamentals of human life.

انزل من السماء ماء فسالت اودية بقدرها فاحتمل السيل زيدا رابيا و مما يوقدون عليه فى النار ابتغاء حليه او متاع  
زيد مثله كذلك يضرب الله الحق و الباطل فاما الزيد فيذهب جفاء و اما ما ينفع الناس فيمكث فى الارض كذلك

***“God sends down water from the sky, and the rivers flow each according to its vastness; and the flood causes foam on the surface of the rivers; it is like the foam of ore when it melts in the furnace to make ornaments or utensils therewith. Thus God compares truth with falsehood; then as for the foam it passes away as scum upon the banks of the river but as for that which is of use to mankind (like water or ore) it remains on the earth. Thus does God set forth parables to explain the divine words of revelation.” (13:17)***

Man always seeks what is to his benefit, some of which is for him to continue living – his self-love. Man's ambition for his own benefit must be controlled enough not to deviate from the right direction.

The factors suggested by scholars as being motivating in history have sometimes been so, albeit not absolutely. For instance, sedimentary social trends, like fears and hopes, speculations and tendencies and stagnant cultural elements are, although not totally ineffective, not considered as absolute factors motivating history. Cleopatra's beauty did affect the position Anthony, the Roman general had, and Auguste Comte's love for Clotilde did mellow his thoughts and make him support positivism.

## **Does History Advance on an Evolutionary Path?**

Man's advance on an evolutionary path in history is a quite unclear and improvable issue. What is observable in history is the expansion of human thoughts and influences throughout nature. The last two centuries, in which man's domination on history has increased extremely, has made some think that history is advancing on an evolutionary path. But can we insist on evolution when human virtues and values are diminishing?

The fact that man still does not grieve over others' sorrow, that he attempts to destroy other human beings, that he still cannot control his own desires and moderate his selfishness, conveys the demise of history, not evolution. These factors cause history to suffer from retardation rather than evolve:

- 1- Lack of human awareness and consciousness
- 2- The lack of constructive love
- 3- Dignified, noble emotions fading away
- 4- The conflict between power and righteousness
- 5- Lack of self-recognition
- 6- Lack of psychological balance

- 7- Lack of self-control
- 8- Neglecting outstanding figures
- 9- Inability to live without weapons
- 10- Infatuated passion for scientific issues instead of realistically studying them
- 11- Human relations being dominated by greed
- 12- Greed and profiteering becoming the factor of survival
- 13- Hedonism
- 14- Sacrificing human values
- 15- Seeing oneself as the end and others as the means
- 16- Avoiding a great loss by means of a smaller loss
- 17- Disorders in the functions of living organisms
- 18- Ruining one's environment
- 19- Genocide
- 20- Issues about men and women remain unsolved
- 21- Man in conflict and opposition with himself
- 22- The disappearance of emotion and unity in life and personality.
- 23- The gradual transformation of independent characters into unoriginal ones
- 24- The extinction of tender human emotions
- 25- The waning of motherly emotions
- 26- Lack of appreciation towards beauties
- 27- Genetic deterioration
- 28- The popularity of nihilism
- 29- Fear and worry about the future of mankind
- 30- Unawareness toward the reason for creation

- 31- Inadvertent emphasis on “tomorrow”
- 32- Man's alienation from himself
- 33- People's alienation toward each other
- 34- Bargaining and haggling rules almost everything
- 35- Incapability of social leaders in fulfilling their vows
- 36- The place of arts is unknown
- 37- The problem of relative and absolute, and also constant and variable remain unsolved
- 38- Imitation in issues concerning life
- 39- The problem of children's education
- 40- Neglect toward man's will and free will
- 41- Suicide increases
- 42- Ignorance towards the blessings God has lent us
- 43- Lack of a logical relationship between the self and other than the self
- 44- The problem of the relationship between the individual and the society remains unsolved
- 45- The human brain is incomplete
- 46- Ignorance toward the value of human lives
- 47- War and crime
- 48- Neglect toward seeking perfection and emancipation
- 49- Ignorance toward God and the supernatural
- 50- People disturbing and hurting each other
- 51- Neglecting lying and other sins
- 52- Deceit and hoodwinking.