

## Perfection

Although the meaning of perfection is clear and needs no definition, we are forced to provide an explanation in this regard, so that mistakes would not be made in certain instances.

Without doubt, perfection is an existential trait with which a being is endowed. But when we compare an existential matter with various things, we find that there is perfection as compared to some, while as compared to others, there is no perfection, rather it might occasionally lead to deficiency and decline of its existential value. Likewise some others principally do not have the talent to possess some forms of perfection; for instance, becoming sweet is a sign of perfection for some fruits such as pears and honeydew. On the contrary, being sour or having other flavours might be a sign of perfection for some other fruits.

Another example is that acquirement of science and knowledge is perfection for man while stones and wood are not qualified to possess it. The secret behind the matter is that each being is accorded a specific substantial limit and boundary. Going beyond this boundary would turn that being into another form which is, by essence, inconsistent with it. Substantial changes might be coupled with a change in the molecular structure, increase or decrease of their atoms, elemental or inner changes in the atoms, transmutation of matter into energy or vice versa.

At times, it is possible that while the quantity and quality of the atoms and molecules of two things is the same, their essence is different, as the artificial seed of the plant is devoid of the vegetable property, growth and development while it is exactly similar to the natural seed in terms of elements and the form of composition.

In any case, each intrinsic value, on the basis of natural expedience is compatible with some traits and will be apt to reach the same brand of perfection. But the emergence of a novel intrinsic value does not always require the obliteration of former perfections. Many beings assume various functions alongside one another and preserve their former perfections, as, in plants, atoms and minerals are exactly present and the vegetable function is positioned above all and alongside them. The same holds true for animals and human beings.

In these types of beings, former perfections might, to a degree, facilitate the emergence of a more sublime (form of) perfection. But it is not that their progress would absolutely lead to perfection of the last function and be a new form or at least make no interference with it.

Rather in many cases the attainment of a perfection appropriate to the last form requires the restriction of former perfections, just as having a great deal of foliage interferes with a tree's process of bearing sufficient fruit or being exceedingly fat prevents a hound from reaching its ideal perfection of speed in gamboling and running. As a result, the true perfection of every being consists of a trait or traits which he can possess in tune with his last function. Other matters will be preferential perfection and the preliminary of perfection to the extent that they are useful for the attainment of a being's true (form of) perfection.

## The Chain of Perfections

When we compare a tree with gravel or a heap of sand, we realize that the tree actually possesses especial capacities not found in stone and sand. Despite the similarity in their atoms and molecules, effects are derived from the tree that cannot emerge from stone and sand.

We will express this truth in this way that there is potential perfection in the tree which is the plant feature and the origin of all activities and of produce exclusive to plants.

In like manner, plants are potentially possessed of perfections which inanimate objects are incapable of attaining, just as the sapling of a fruit-bearing tree is apt to bear loads of sweet fruit while no such capacity exists in stone and wood.

Evidently, by possessing the said function and faculty, the plant not only does not lose its physical qualities and natural powers but also uses them to promote its functions and to go through the path of its functions and the path of its development. Consequently, one can reach the conclusion that to reach perfection, a plant reaps benefit from natural powers and, of course is in need of them but to the extent that it can use them to reach perfection.

Likewise, an animal possesses vegetable qualities plus sense and voluntary movement which is a requisite of its animal state. In the same manner, it employs vegetable qualities to reach human perfection. It needs these qualities to the extent that they are beneficial for its animal development. In like manner, man possesses natural, vegetable, and animal qualities plus powers which emanate from humanity. Man employs all subordinate powers at the service of his human development. For this purpose, he needs them all to the extent that they are effective in reaching his human perfections. But as excessive foliage is not at all advantageous to the apple tree, one cannot regard the unconditional use of vegetable and animal powers useful for man.

The following conclusions can be drawn from this discussion:

(A) Corporal beings can be classified on the basis of existential perfections. Among beings with which we are familiar, inanimate objects occupy a lower position while animals are in the middle and human beings occupy the sublime position. Obviously, in this classification, the type and value of the perfection, and not its volume and amount, is taken into account.

Therefore, it should not be said that if man is more perfect than other animals, why can't he eat as much as a cow, run as fast as a deer, and devour like a lion?! Just as in the case of the superiority of plants over inanimate objects, it is not said that if a tree is superior to stone and sand, then why is not it as weighty as the Himalaya Mountains and why cannot mines of gold or oil wells be found in it?!

(B) Each corporal being which possesses a more sublime degree of existence has inferior powers to be employed in the way of its development.

(C) Employment of the inferior powers should be to such an extent that is useful for the attainment of more sublime perfections, else it will lead to stagnation and termination of the trend of development. And it will occasionally lead to decline and deterioration.

(D) With respect to the previous discussion, it can be concluded that the true perfection of every being consists of that which its last function demands, although this perfection has various degrees as bearing apples is perfection for the apple tree but it has various degrees. But other perfections which are substantially different from this one and which are naturally in a lower state are not actually regarded as the perfection of this being and are only deemed as a preliminary and a device.

Thus perfection can be divided into genuine and organic or actual and relative. Degrees can also be specified for genuine perfections.

E) To determine the extent of exploitation of inferior powers, it is necessary to take in mind the actual and genuine perfection. In other words, the inferior existential traits can be recognized even as an organic and preliminary perfection for something, in case they serve as rudimentary for an elevated and actual form of perfection. Here, once again, emphasis is laid on the necessity of recognizing man's actual perfection.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/self-recognition-self-improvement-muhammad-taqi-misbah-yazdi/perfection#comment-0>