

Will and Choice

Consideration of various powers of perception and motivation sheds light on the emergence of the bases of will-power in man's soul and on the performance of voluntary action. That is to say, man at first senses a shortage and consequently becomes annoyed and upset. Or he might not experience a known pleasure and might thus seek (to find) it. Pain or expectation of a pleasure compels him to make efforts to remove his pain by performing an appropriate action and to provide the pleasure in mind and to eliminate his physical or mental need. As a result, the deeds of man are innately directed to eliminate the shortcoming and to reach perfection.

The motive behind performing these deeds is to remove pain or reach the desired pleasure. Now this holds whether man's deed is purely psychological or mental such as heartfelt concern or meditation or is based on stimulation of muscles or body organs with or without the involvement of external factors. Even when man performs a deed benefitting someone else, his main motive is to remove his own difficulty or reach his own pleasure, even if this pain and pleasure are brought about by the suffering or enjoyment of others.

Of course, man does not reach his purpose in every deed. In addition to the existence of favourable external factors, man's success is dependent on the soundness of perception and its power of distinction, as well as the sound recognition of how to eliminate the shortcoming, to employ his faculties and to use external factors.

At times, man's consideration of his needs takes place naturally and by body reactions; for instance, thirst and hunger. At other times, it takes place upon contact with the external world; for example, sensing danger would lead (man) to escape or to prepare to defend himself or seeing a pitiful scene would touch a person of noble sentiments into suffering from the deprivation of others and being stirred into helping them.

In the first case, association of external factors would at times, awaken a slumbering desire as already discussed. External factors likewise, could be effective in awakening innate desires and absolute psychological drives, as the call of the prophets awakens theism. Seeing and hearing their signs would also produce the same effect.

If at a single moment, just one instinct and desire exists in the soul, man immediately sets to satisfy it. In case the situation is favourable and in case there are no external barriers, man carries out the appropriate deed. But if there are various desires and if all of them cannot be satisfied at once, they will naturally clash with one another.

Whichever has greater attraction will draw attention to itself and will reach fulfillment, as some children prefer to play rather than to eat, as a hungry mother gives her food to her child, as a student prefers studying, as a devout man prefers to engage in worship rather than to sleep and as a combatant soldier prefers sacrifice in the way of Allah (SWT) to the comfort of himself and his family. In such cases, the value of man will become evident and his dormant aptitudes will flourish. And (either) prosperity or adversity will reach materialization. Principally this is the philosophy of the creation of man in a world of clashes and conflicts as repeatedly pointed out.

Now the question arises as to whether man should be an observer of the clash of desires and to pursue a desire when it becomes dominant due to natural or social factors or should assume a decisive and determining role with his mental and voluntary activities and even at times, abstain from satisfying his powerful natural demands? In the first case, man will submit to blind instincts and will be like a straw at the mercy of storm or flood. In fact, he will give up humanity and in other words, he will render meaningless the special human faculties. The Qur'an interprets this as "heedlessness", a heedlessness which makes man less than animals and puts him in worse errors:

“أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ ۖ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ”

“They are as cattle, nay, they are in worse errors; these are the heedless ones (7: 179).”

In the second case, another issue is raised: What is the criterion with which man should prefer some of his desires to others? As this question embraces religion itself, it must be answered irrespective of means that are taken for granted.

This question could be answered in three forms:

Firstly, on the basis of the innate desire to prefer what is most enjoyable, one would evaluate the affairs in relation to the pleasure they provide. When the affairs clash, one would choose the most pleasurable one. Of course in this evaluation, one must not set an instantaneous pleasure as a criterion because an affair with instantaneous pleasure might bring about great sufferings in the future. In addition we might not have experienced pleasure of some affairs so as to be able to compare them with other matters. Thus the sound means to determine what is most enjoyable is to recognize the essence of pleasure and its criterion and to find out through a rational analysis, which pleasure is more valuable and enduring. We have already made such an analysis and reached the conclusion that the pleasure of having *qurb* with Allah (SWT) is greater and more enduring everything else:

Secondly, one should compare the instincts on the basis of their ultimate aims and attach superiority to one having a greater goal. It has already been marked that instincts fall into two principal branches: one is the branch of preserving individual identity and the other one is the branch of acquiring perfection. The aim of the first branch is man's survival in this world to tread the path of his development. For example eating and drinking fulfill body needs for carrying on with worldly life. The goal behind the instinct to defend oneself is to be relieved of danger to continue living. The goal behind the sexual instinct is to promote familial and social sentiments for the survival of mankind. The end of the second branch is infinite and eternal. And obviously this goal is more superior and permanent:

Thirdly, instincts in the first branch are naturally like preliminaries, because their role is to pave the way and provide the means for development. As compared to these, the second branch is possessed of genuineness. Clearly the value of the preliminaries depends on the value of that which requires these preliminaries and it can never challenge the latter. In other words, none of the instincts of the first branch has dominance over the other one or over instincts of the second branch. On the contrary, each of them requires a specific motion.

Yet the instinct to seek perfection controls and dominates other instincts, as it necessitates the mobilization of all forces for the process of development. Thus it should practically be deemed dominant as well. Its demands must be established as the criterion for restricting and justifying other desires. Previous discussions proved (the fact) that man's perfection, for whose materialization all forces should be mobilized, is to reach *qurb* with Almighty Allah:

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