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Field in which norms of History Operate

Role of Final Cause in the Science of History

The scenes and stages of history which draw the attention of the historians cannot include all happenings or all aspects of historical events. In this world there are many physical, biological or physiological phenomena which are beyond the limits of the historical field. These phenomena have their own appropriate laws.

Some of them are of vital importance from the viewpoint of the historians and have retained their significance even after the passage of hundreds of years. But still they do not fall within the scope of the norms of history and are governed by other laws and norms.

All the phenomena which fall within the scope of the norms of history have one distinguishing feature which does not exist in the case of the other phenomena of the world. Every phenomenon in life and nature is governed by the causative system and comes into being as the result of a sequence of causes and effects. This sequence exists everywhere in this world.

For example, we take into consideration the case of the boiling of water in a kettle. It is a natural phenomenon which depends on certain conditions such as a particular degree of temperature and the nearness of the kettle to fire to a particular extent. This is the case of a sequence of a cause and its effect and a relationship of the present and the past in prearranged conditions.

But there exist some phenomena in the field of history which have a different type of relationship. They are linked to their objects. In their case an action aims at achieving a certain object, and in the terminology of the philosophers, besides the causative agent there exists a final and real cause also. Such relationships do not exist in every case.

When water boils as the result of heat, its past and the cause of the boiling are there, but the consequence of the boiling is not being visualized, except when boiling is done by human action. When a person performs an act with an objective in his mind, his act besides having a relationship with its

cause and with its past, also has a relationship with that objective, which does not exist at the time of the performance of the act and which can materialize only subsequently.

Hence this relationship is the relationship of the future, not of the past. This is true of all cases in which an act is related to its objective. Any historical act performed with a future objective in view and governed by the laws of history is a purposive act related to its final cause, that is its objective.

This objective may be good or bad, beneficial or harmful. On this basis an active historical movement in the domain of historical norms should be purposive and responsible. In relation to an action its objective has a future-looking aspect. It influences man because it exists in his mind.

Otherwise as far as its external existence is concerned, it is no more than a wish for the future. As it has no real existence, it is its mental existence that induces man to make efforts and take action.

Thus the future objective or the goal for which man makes an effort initiates and promotes his activity through its mental existence. Man can form in his mind a vivid picture of his goal with all its characteristics and conditions.

Now as we have found out a distinguishing feature of historical phenomena, or rather one of their characteristics which does not exist in the case of any other phenomena in the world of nature, we find that every action in the field of history is related to its objective, which is its final cause as well as its rationale.

In other words, this distinguishing feature consists in the role of the final cause in the action. In fact it is the mental existence of its final cause which motivates the action and mentally lays down its guide-lines, which form the relevant norms of history. The norms of history apply only to those actions which are purposive and have a goal besides being linked with other natural phenomena in a sequence of cause and effect.

It must be understood that every purposive act is not a historical act and hence every purposive act is not governed by the laws of history. To enter into the domain of the norms of history an act must have besides the dimensions of a cause and a goal, a third dimension also. This dimension must have a social aspect.

In other words, the act in question should affect society as a whole and the person who performs it should be a member of that society. It makes no difference whether the effect of the act is comparatively limited or extensive, but it must go beyond the individual level.

A man eats when he feels hungry, drinks when he feels thirsty and sleeps when he gets sleepy. But these acts, though purposive and performed to achieve certain objects, are individual acts, the effect of which does not go beyond a particular individual. In contrast the effect of a social act performed by a person having reciprocal relations with other members of his society, goes beyond his person.

For example the effect of the activity of a merchant, who performs a commercial transaction, of a commander who conducts a battle, of a statesman who concludes a political agreement and of a scholar who advances a theory about the world and life, goes beyond the person of those who perform these acts and influence the whole society.

Hence, taking inspiration from the terminology of the philosophers we may say: The difference between the philosophical terms of active cause, final cause and material cause, used by Aristotle has been a subject of frequent discussion among the philosophers. The above concept can be explained by means of these terms: The material cause of a historical act is society, for it provides ground for the act.

A historical act must affect society or a nation as a whole although the act in itself may be performed by one or only a few individuals. That is why a historical act governed by the laws of history is that act which is purposive and at the same time its effect goes beyond the individual level. Society being its material cause, such an act becomes a collective act of society as a whole.

The Qur'an Differentiates Between Individual and Collective Acts

The Qur'an distinguishes between an individual act and a collective act. Besides mentioning the deed-sheets in general, it mentions the deed-sheets which record the deeds of the individuals and the deed-sheets which record the deeds of a community or the nation as a whole. This is a way of making a fine distinction between the act of an individual and the collective act attributable to the whole society or the whole nation, a distinction between a three-dimension act and an act which does not possess more than two dimensions.

A two-dimension act has an active cause and a material cause only. Such an act is recorded in the deed-sheet of the individual concerned only. But a three-dimension act besides having an active cause and a material cause also has a final cause. It is, therefore, recorded in the deed-sheet of the individual as well as society.

On the Day of Resurrection society will not only be confronted with its deed-sheet, but will also be called to render an account of its deeds. The Qur'an says:

You will see each nation crouching, each nation summoned to its record. (It will be said to them): 'This day you are requited what you used to do. This Our Book pronounces against you with truth. We were recording what you were doing.' (Surah al-Jathiyah, 45:28 – 29)

Here the Qur'an speaks of the deeds of a community, that will be crouching before Allah, while the details of what they did as a community in this world will be read out to them. How well the Qur'an has said:

'We were recording what you were doing'

A collective deed-sheet is not the History of Tabari so that it should record all natural, physiological and physical events. It is a recorded reaction of the deeds of the individuals performed by them as a community or a nation. Such acts are purposive acts performed at least with the tacit consent of the community as a whole. That is why the whole community becomes accountable for them.

All this was about the deed-sheets of collective acts, as is clear from another verse which says:

Every man's deed-sheet We have fastened to his own neck, and We shall bring forth for him on the Day of Resurrection a book (deed-sheet), which he will find wide open. (It will be said to him): 'Read your book. You yourself are enough as reckoner against you this day.' (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:13)

According to this verse on the Day of Resurrection, each individual will have a separate case. Every one will be confronted with his own deed-sheet, containing all his big and small deeds, whether good or bad. No error, no slip and no accomplishment will be left out. This deed-sheet has been compiled by Him who knows even the tiniest things in the heavens and the earth.

Every man some time or other wants to conceal his weak points. He wants to conceal his sins. He does not want his neighbours, his relatives, his children or the members of his community to know all that he has been doing. He wants to conceal certain things even from himself. He deceives himself and pretends not to have committed any sin. But nothing will be left out in his deed-sheet. On the Day of Reckoning it will be said to him:

"Be your own reckoner, for you will find in your deed-sheet all the deeds that you have committed. Today you will be treated as the principle of justice demands. Today no one can hide a truth."

In the above verses the deed-sheet of an individual and the deed-sheet of a nation have been mentioned separately. At one place we find a nation crouching before Allah, and at another place we see that every individual has his own personal deed sheet fastened to his neck.

The distinction which the Qur'an has made between the deed-sheet of an individual and the deed sheet of a nation, is another way of expressing what we have said earlier to the effect that a historical act is that which forms an item of the deed-sheet of a nation.

Such an act has three dimensions. Not only the individuals and the nation will be given separate deed-sheets, but they will also be summoned separately. There will be two different appearances before Allah, one for the individuals and the other for the nations. In individual appearance all men will be brought before Allah one by one.

None will have any friend to help him at that time. All that will be helpful to a person is his own good deeds, pure heart and his faith in Allah, the angels, the revealed Books and the Prophets. This was the

account of the individual appearance. In this aspect the Qur'an says:

There is none in the heavens and the earth, but comes to the Beneficent as a slave. Surely He knows them and numbers them with right numbering. And each one of them will come to Him on the Day of Resurrection alone. (Surah Maryam, 19: 93–95)

There will be another appearance when the individuals will appear collectively, as whole nations will be summoned before Allah.

Therefore as there exist two kinds of deeds–sheets, there will be two separate appearances. The verse:

You will see each nation crouching, each nation summoned to its record.

Refers to the collective appearance.

It appears from the context of these verses that this second appearance will be for the purpose of reconciling the past relations of the nations to the requirements of justice and law. These relations have often been contrary to justice and fairplay. For example, among a people there might be an underprivileged person quite fit to be at the helm of affairs. All such wrongs will be redressed.

The Qur'an has called the day on which all this will happen the day of ***Taghabun*** or the day of disillusion. How will this disillusion take place? When all people will get together, each one of them will be feeling that in his worldly life he was cheated by his society. One that day when nothing but truth will be accepted. Each one will be compensated for the wrong done to him. The Qur'an says:

The day when He shall gather you for the Day of Assembling, that will be a day of mutual disillusion. (Surah al-Taghabun, 64: 9)

In short, there exist two types of deed–sheets: (i) Individual deed–sheets which deal with the individual deeds and (ii) Collective deed–sheets showing the deeds of each nation.

As mentioned earlier, an act of a nation is a three–dimensional act. The first dimension is provided by the doer, who is called the active cause by Aristotle. The second dimension is provided by the objective which the doer has in his mind. Aristotle has named it final cause. The third dimension is provided by the field of the action and the extent of its effect, is known as the material cause. The laws of history apply only to a three–dimension act. That is true of a collective act only.

Has Society Any Existence Independent of Individuals?

It does not behove us to think like some European philosophers that society has an independent and organic existence separate from that of the individuals, and that individual is nothing but a cell of the independent body that society is.

This is how Hegel and some other European philosophers think. They hold that a collective action is separate from and independent of an individual action. These people want to differentiate between collective and individual acts. They say that society is a genuine and organic being, and all individuals are actually squeezed into the body of this entity.

Each individual is just a cell of this body. From within society the individual opens a window for himself to the outside through which he influences society according to his ability and creative power. On this basis every discovery and every new idea represents an outlooking window of this Hegelian unit that society is. Many European philosophers have accepted this fictitious idea as a distinguishing feature of collective action as compared to individual action. But it must be said frankly that this idea is not correct. We need not indulge in such a baseless and wild fanaticism.

We do not believe that society has any conception besides being a collection of the individuals. It is evident that any philosophical discussion of Hegel's theory is beyond the scope of our present discourse, for the discussion of his theory about society requires the review of the entire system of his philosophy.

All that we want to point out is the incorrectness of his idea. In short, we need not invent a myth to differentiate between an individual act and a collective act, as for the purpose of making a distinction between the two, our explanation about the third dimension is enough. An individual act has only two dimensions. If there is a third dimension also, the act becomes a collective act. Society provides the ground for a collective act and forms its material cause.

In case the act is collective, it is recorded in the deed-sheet of a nation crouching before its Allah. That is the true difference between the two types of acts. As such the conclusion we draw from the foregoing discussion is that the subject of the laws of history is a purposive act having a social background, the effect of which covers society or the nation as a whole in accordance with its being limited or extensive.

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