

History and Human Evolution (Lecture II of II)

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Man's historical and social evolution, evolution of history, human relationships, role of Prophets in evolution, and the concept of Bada' (Divine revision).

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History and Human Evolution, Lecture II of II

Our former discussion was about the meaning of the historical or social evolution of man in the past. We examined the question whether the processes which man and his society have undergone may be called evolution or at least progress, or whether there is a third alternative explanation that in some aspects of social life considerable progress has been made, while in other aspects there has been no progress or evolution. Or we may, at least, say that if there has been progress it has been very slow and out of harmony with the rate of progress in technical matters and evolution of social structure.

The dimension in which man has not been able to make proportionate advance is the human dimension of social life. If we liken man's social life to an individual human being, technical progress and social development may be thought of as the body of society, while the human aspect of social life is the ethos of the individual. We may conclude, therefore, that humanity has physically overgrown, while its spirit and human ethos have made very little headway. The divergence between various views concerning the future is rooted in this matter.

Man's Future from Different Viewpoints

Some people are doubtful about the fact as to whether man has a future at all. They are uncertain because man is threatened with self-destruction. Such an uncertainty is evident among the enlightened and learned men of the West. Another group go a step further, and in addition to uncertainty, they are extremely pessimistic about humanity's future and openly cynical about human nature.

They believe that man's nature consists of animality, lust, selfishness, egoism, deceit, cunning, falsehood, tyranny and such things, and since times immemorial when man began his life and social existence, this familiar scene of life has been always as full of evil and mischief, both in the days of barbarism and in the age of civilization. They believe that civilization and culture have not changed the nature of man, and nothing has been able to transform the wicked nature of this creature called man.

The difference between the savage of primitive times and the civilized man of today is nothing with regard to goals and objectives. The only difference lies in the method of work, and outward form and style.

The primitive man, because of his primitiveness and lack of civilization and culture, committed his crimes more openly and unaffectedly, whereas the civilized man equipped with modern culture, commits the same crimes under the deceptive cover of high-sounding and stylish phrases and euphemisms. But both are essentially alike. What the wild man did, is not different in nature from what the civilized man does; the difference lies only in the outer form and appearance of their acts.

What is the conclusion? They say: pessimism and despair. What is the solution? They say: suicide,

collective suicide. Fortunately, there are few among us who think in this fashion. If there had been no such ideas at all amongst us, I would not have mentioned it. But the thinking exists, and it may more or less exist mainly among students, and I mention it because I have noticed such thinking in some of the books which I have come across.

What is amazing in what they say is that man, after having reached cultural maturity, should commit suicide. Why? Because, they explain, when we find that human nature is beyond remedy, every person has the right to kill himself, and encourage others to commit suicide too. This is the logic of the type of writers such as Sadegh Hedayat. Such a kind of thinking is prevalent in various forms in Europe, and statistics show that in spite of all the welfare that exists in the civilized world, the number of suicides is increasing daily. By comparing the figures published in our newspapers we see this steady increase between the years 1955 and 1975.

The Hippie movement was a social phenomenon, which was a reaction that took the form of dislike of civilization. It meant that civilization has failed to do anything for man, and that it has failed to change his nature. Do not compare this Western hippyism with our own hippyism, which is only a superficial imitation. But those who had originated this way of thinking in the West, had in fact a philosophy for it: the philosophy of disgust for civilization, and despair on account of its inability to do something to solve human problems. And this difficulty, too, is considered insoluble, a knot that by no means can be disentangled.

You may have read the reports coming from the UNESCO and elsewhere, as well as the articles written by our own experts, about the urge for taking refuge in narcotics. This trend in Western countries is the result of despair and cynicism about the future of mankind.

When man reaches the stage where he finds no remedy, when he thinks that reform and revolution have, both, failed to change man, when regimes and systems of government and economic and non economic solutions have only changed their form without changing the content, then some people say: let us drop this matter once for all. And this is one type of view and theory.

The View of Scientism

Before this, there existed another view or theory which finds no support in the developed countries today, although there are still some who follow it in the developing countries. This view began with Bacon and those like him who said that the remedy for all human pains is science: when you build a school, you destroy a prison.

By securing science and freedom, all sufferings will come to an end. Why does man suffer? On account of ignorance, weakness and helplessness before nature, sickness, poverty, worry and anxiety, oppression of man by man, need and greed. They offered science as the remedy for all these pains

There may be some truth in this view. Science remedies ignorance, and weakness, helplessness and abjectness in front of nature, and the pain of poverty—in so far as it is related to nature. But not all human suffering comes within bounds of his relation with nature.

What about the suffering produced by the relation of man with man, namely, greed, tyranny and oppression, which are derived from man's own nature, his feeling of loneliness, fear and anxiety? Science has not been able to remedy these. Therefore, this view that science can remedy all human pains has been abandoned in those countries. But in the countries which follow on the trails of the West, there are still individuals who think that science can really remedy all pains and sufferings.

Do not misunderstand me; my intention is not to negate science: for, as I said before, half of human pains find no remedy except through science. But man has other pains which constitute his 'human' suffering, the suffering which relates to his human dimension. Here science provides no help, and the scientists, when they reach this point, declare that science is neutral and indifferent; it is a means and it does not prescribe any goal for mankind.

Science does not elevate human objectives, and does not provide a direction. Rather, it must be said that man uses science as an aid in the direction which he selects in life. Today we observe that most of the human suffering is caused by human beings, by those who are well-informed, and not by the ignorant. In the problem of colonialism in the world of today and since the last few centuries, were it the ignorant who exploited and plundered the resources of others, the ignorant and the learned alike? Or were it the learned and well-informed men who exploited both the ignorant and others?

Therefore, this supposition that science and education are the remedy for all pains and suffering of humanity is unacceptable. What I mean by 'science' or 'education' is that which makes man aware of the world; and awareness or understanding is something which is necessary, and nothing else can take its place. Again, do not misunderstand me: understanding is not enough to remedy all the pains of humanity.

The Viewpoint of Marxism

There is a third viewpoint here which says that the problem lies somewhere else, and that we should not be cynical of man's nature and despair on its account. The answer as to why the past has been disappointing, is that you have not been able to discover the roots of human suffering. These roots lie not only in ignorance, helplessness and such things, but in the type of ideology ruling over mankind.

There is another problem for man which is independent of science, education and technology, and that is the problem of the ideology prevalent in society. To enable man, with all his human weaknesses, to start his struggle to change his situation, his ideology must be changed.

According to this view, since man left behind his early communistic system and since the institution of

private property came into existence, and since ideologies have been based on private property and class distinctions, and social systems have been based on class division, and the exploitation of human beings by other human beings has been given legality and legitimacy, all these defects and shortcomings, these bloodsheds, wars, conflicts, massacres and cruelties have occurred.

But if the ideology ruling over man is changed, then all these defects will be removed; for then, mankind takes the form of a united entity, and all will be like brothers. There will remain no trace of tyranny, fear, worry and anxiety. Then human society will advance in its human dimensions on a par with the technical and material evolution; the spiritual development of society will then be parallel with its physical growth. This is the view of Marxism.

Marxism considers the root of all human suffering to lie in the ideology of class distinctions and private property; therefore, a society which has attained its ultimate form is a classless society, free of any contradictions.

There are many objections against this theory. One of them is: if an ideology is merely a system of thought or a philosophy, does it possess the power to change man's nature? Why, then, science couldn't change the nature of man? If all the elements of an ideology consist only of understanding without possessing the element of faith or belief, how can it influence human nature?

Is the ruling ideology derived from the nature of human beings in power? Or is it ideology that shapes the nature of the rulers? If you believe in the priority of objectivity over subjectivity, can you say that the dominant classes oppress others because they possess that ideology? Do they possess this tyrannical ideology because their nature is tyrannical?

This means that their self-seeking nature requires it in so far as it is human nature to pursue selfish interests to the greatest extent possible. Then, according to this view, the quality of seeking profit has created this tyrannical ideology, and not that the ideology has produced that nature in man. Ideology is a tool in man's hand, and not vice versa. It is sheer idealism to say that man is a tool in the hands of his own thought and the ideology created by himself.

If that is true, when the ideology is changed while human beings remain unchanged, has man then reached a dead end to the effect that the greatest exploitation of man by man and the extreme suppression of man by man should be perpetuated by those in the name of a classless ideology? The heart of the matter is that, no matter what form the social system may have taken in the past, man has remained unchanged and used that system as his own tool.

How can we guarantee that it would not be repeated again? Do people have freedom in the countries where such an ideology is followed? There may be equality, but not in happiness; it is an equality in misfortune. There are classes there, but not economic classes. Out of a population of two hundred millions, ten millions control everything in the name of the communist party. Why do they not allow the other 190 millions to share the same privileges provided by the communist ideology? Because, if they do

so, then there would be an end to those privileges.

The severest repression and gravest misfortunes and miseries have been inflicted in the name of a classless ideology. A new class has emerged without bearing the name of a class. This is because when an idea or philosophy is related to the mind and based on an abstract understanding of mankind, such an understanding by itself cannot influence his nature.

Understanding clarifies the way for man to distinguish his interests better and to be more farsighted. But it does not offer him any higher goals. If I lack a higher goal intrinsically, in my nature, how can I find it? Do the Marxists not say that thought does not have any fundamental reality for man? If thought has no fundamental reality, clearly it cannot control human behaviour.

The View of Existentialism

There is another philosophy called existentialism, whose outlook of the world and man is the same as the materialist world-view. The existentialists have a plan and a theory which tries to solve the deficiency of Marxism, namely, the question of human values. Since in Marxism the questions of humanity and human values and ideas such as peace and justice and ethical norms are considered worthless, idealistic chimeras, existentialists clung to the question of human values in order to provide man with a source of inclination, not just a source of thought but something which would be attractive enough to draw man towards itself, something which would provide exalted goals besides material ends. That is why they emphasize human values and what is called man's 'humanity'.

One may ask: you who say that the world is a mass of matter and physical action and reaction, and that totality of being is confined to matter, then what are these 'human values' in a universe of matter? Where do they come from?

Let us now talk of man. According to this view, man has no reality except his body. Matter constitutes his entire being. What may be related to this material composition is profit, which is something real. If I am totally a material entity, and nothing but matter exists in me, then in my relation with the external world, too, nothing but matter can interfere, and I must seek something which has material objectivity. For me, food, clothes, sexual relations and housing are objective matters.

What, then, are the human values and the value of self-sacrifice which man senses within his being? They answer that they do not exist; however, man by his will can create values. Values do not have an objective existence; there is no such thing as 'value' in the external world that man can attain, they say.

Then, this question crops up: what is the destination of this mass of matter? It can only move from one point in space to another; reaching a destination which lacks a material or physical existence is meaningless. They say that values have no objective reality, but we give them 'value' by creating them.

This is one of the most comical and stupid remarks ever made. They should be asked: what do you

mean by your claim that you 'create' values, and 'give' value to an act, to friendship, to generosity, to sacrifice, and to service (which according to you have no value in their own nature, since value has no meaning in the world of matter.)?

Do you then mean that you can really give value to an objective existence? It is like saying to this steel microphone: "O microphone, I will give you the value of gold." Does it become gold with my saying so? Iron is iron. Or if I say: "O piece of wood, I grant you the quality of silver." If I keep on saying so to the end of time, it will not become silver. Wood is wood. Its reality cannot be changed, and man is unable to change it.

Therefore, granting value by creating it in the sense of giving objective reality has no meaning. What has meaning is giving an arbitrary, suppositional reality. What does this mean? It means, supposing something to be what it is not. Such arbitrary and conventional notions are useful only as means. For example, a non-Iranian visits our country, and we can grant him Iranian citizenship and an Iranian identity card, on the basis of which he becomes an Iranian national and can benefit from all the privileges and rights which an Iranian enjoys. The value of this conventional act is a means to something which may have an objective significance.

This is like saying that a man or woman may want his or her spouse to be handsome. If the spouse happens to be ugly, and if the other says, "I grant you the hypothetical credit of being handsome," and then begins admiring the spouse for his or her handsomeness, it is meaningless. This is the cult of idolatry, creating idols and then worshipping them. The Qur'an says:

"O man, how can you make a goal out of something that you have yourself created, and make an idol of something that you have yourself hewed?"

The goal must possess a reality beyond imagination and assumption. One cannot assume something for himself as a goal, and then think it to be real. The value of an assumed thing is only within the limit of its being a means and a tool. Therefore, it is an illusion to say that man creates his own values. It is here that Islam asserts the existence of its absolutely coherent ideology.

The View of Islam

Islam to begin with, does not regard the past with total pessimism. Secondly, it is not so cynical of human nature. It says: This testimony that man of today gives against human nature, to the effect that it is based on wickedness and mischief, is similar to the ignorant verdict that the angels gave about man before he was created, and God rejected it.

See how the Qur'an relates the secret truths of events that preceded man's creation:

"And when your Lord declared to the angels: 'I will make a deputy on the earth'..." (2:30)

In these words God declared His decision to create a being upon the earth who would be God's deputy and viceroy on this planet. The angels, for some reason or another, seemed to be aware of only the animal side of man, and no more. So they said to God, as the man of the nineteenth or twentieth century would say: "Do You wish to make a being Your deputy whose very nature is mischief and bloodshed?

Create a being, who like us, shall be free of bestial desires, and one which is wholly spiritual."8 How did God answer them? He said to them:

"Certainly, I know what you do not know." (2:30)

God says to the angels, "You paid attention only to one aspect of man: his natural and animal side, and are unaware of his spiritual and Divine aspect. I have placed something in his nature which makes him intrinsically free of any ideology. I have planted in him an inclination for exaltation. I have granted him an ideology, one of whose pillars is this natural and rational inclination. I have planted in his nature the seeds of love of truth, love of justice, and love of freedom. His essence is not totally selfishness, animality and class interests, or tyranny. He is a creature made of both light and darkness and this combination of qualities has lifted him above every other creature, above you who are angels and others besides you."

Can an ideology, which reduces all problem to that of classes and class interests, provide guidance for mankind? Can an ideology, which is totally rational or exclusively philosophical, heedless of any spiritual inclinations and unaware of the reality of man, serve as a guide for man? or teach and develop exalted values in man? Or, can the other view which makes the absurd claim that man is essentially devoid of a nature, and is merely an earthly and material being, and that he 'creates' or hallucinates values for himself, help man to know himself?

O man, know yourself!

O man, teach yourself properly!

O man, train yourself!

O man, know your goal!

O man, recognize the path of your evolution!

It is an insult to the station of humanity to consider all man's efforts in the past to be motivated by the selfish interests of individuals, groups or nations. As man has two natures, an exalted one and a base one, within him, this internal conflict has raged within every individual human being. Those who have been able to subdue their lower urges to the higher powers, thus attaining a sublime balance, stand in the ranks of the supporters of truth and justice.

Those who have failed in this combat, have formed the group of means, bestial and degenerate beings. As the Qur'an says, the most magnificent struggle of man has been the combined between the supporters of Truth and the followers of falsehood. Who are these two groups? Supporters of Truth are those who have been liberated from the captivity of external nature and of other human beings and from

the clutches of their own inner beast. They are those who have attained belief, faith and ideal, and rely on them. They are different from those human beings who seek material gains and are mean and corrupt.

The Qur'an speaks of the first clash and contradiction in the human world, which may either be interpreted historically or taken as an allegory:

“And relate to them truly the story of the two sons of Adam [Abel and Cain]—when they offered an offering, and it was accepted of one of them, and not accepted of the other. 'I will surely slay thee,' said one. 'God accepts only of the God-fearing,' said the other. 'Yet if thou stretches out thy hand against me, to slay me, I will not stretch out my hand against thee, to slay thee; I fear God, the Lord of all beings.

I desire that thou shouldest be laden with my sin and thy sin, and so become an inhabitant of the Fire; that is the recompense of the evildoers.' Then his self prompted him to slay his brother, and he slew him, and became one of the losers.” (5:27–30)

Islam takes the story of Abel and Cain to discuss the conflict between two human beings, one of whom has attained his ideal and belief and seeks truth and justice, and is free from materialistic inclinations; the other is a low animalistic being. The man with an ideal and Faith is one whose speech is Divine and chaste, and his deeds are wholly based on piety. He tells his corrupt brother: 'If you wish to kill me, I am not the one to kill.'

Thus killing is not a part of his human nature, for, he fears the Creator. But the other is fettered by his own carnal desires. The story of Abel and Cain is one of the most magnificent stories in the Qur'an, which describes the Qur'anic view of a man who has attained belief and the ideal and is freed from the bondages of nature, society and self. How steadfast he is in the way of his faith! While the other is inclined towards something which is quite the opposite of it.

This story should not be mistaken for a parable of the class conflict, which is a Marxist idea. While the Qur'an speaks of the oppressed on the one hand and oppressors on the other (*mala'* and *mutrafun*), it always tries to show that the progressive wars in history are those which are waged between men who have realized belief and faith and the profit seekers—a point which I have explained more fully in my book *The Rise and Revolution of Mahdi (A)*.

As there are two opposing processes within man, in human society, too, there are two types of human beings: those who are exalted and progressive, and those who are base and bestial. Rumi, the poet, says:

*The two streams of water, saltish and sweat,
Shall run through human nature until the doomsday.*

In this school of thought, which believes in the love of truth and love of justice as ingrained in the human nature, in this school which trusts in man and in human values, and which unlike Marxism does not negate them or consider them mere idealisms, these things are regarded as an inherent inclination towards the existence of discoverable truths, and not something conventional or imaginary created by man himself.

The Qur'an says: O man, know yourself, and your own reality; these values exist within yourself as they exist in the great world, and you are a microcosmic model of the entire macrocosm: *Mould yourselves in accordance with Divine norms.*

These are Divine qualities, the reflection of which exists in the inner depths of his being, and he must discover it.

Accordingly, what is the future of man? Should we repeat the words of angels and say that man has a wicked nature, and wrap our hearts in despair for his future? Should we follow such suicidal ways as that of hippyism and take refuge in narcotics and such stuff? Or should we expect a miracle from an ideology, the only quality of which is belief in class divisions, and overlook thousands of its shortcomings?

Shall we embrace a creed which says that motion is caused by contradictions, and without contradiction there is no motion, which means that when a society attains a stage in which there is no contradiction, it means a society without an ideal, without motion, a dead and stagnant society? Is the ultimate goal of man and his evolution to reach a position of standstill? Doesn't human evolution imply something far above the questions of contradiction and conflict?

Moreover, after man resolves those conflicts and contradictions and negates class controversies, he reaches a position when he must remove his own defects and this is only a beginning, the beginning of his vertical ascent which has no limit; for, in this system there is infinite room for ascension and edification even for the Prophet (S), though it is something that lies beyond our imagination, even though it is a reality for the Prophet (S).

This is why the ideal human society is in fact a society of men who have realized their ideal and attained faith and belief. It is the victory of effort, endeavour, piety and justice. Victory is one side of this coin of human existence, whose other side, as the Qur'an says, *is the victory of God's Party over the party of Satan.*

Man has been created to be an intelligent, aware, free and responsible being. From the first day that man has attained the station of humanity—regardless of whenever that might have occurred—he has been the deputy and vicegerent of God. There has been no time since the instant of creation of man when the earth was ever without the existence of a vicegerent, the *hujjat* (testimony) of Allah, that is, a being endowed with freedom and responsibility.

As long as mankind as such a Creator who has decreed for it a goal and purpose—a purpose which implies his knowledge of himself and ultimate conquest of evil and mastery over his own mind—the battle between good and evil, and between truth and falsehood, will continue. It will continue to the point—as predicted by our great religious figures—when it will ultimately result in a universal government, which is also interpreted as the universal rule of Imam Mahdi (A)—may God expedite his appearance.

On this basis, the evolution of man in his human dimensions has, by no means, reached a dead end from the point of view of Islamic Ideology. Islam, here, emerges as an ideology that relies on the spiritual aspect of human nature and which reclines heavily on recognition of this aspect of human nature. It stresses the need to make man aware of and to motivate him to develop and nourish this aspect of his being.

Islam seeks to achieve a balance between the two aspects: the higher and the lower, inherent in the human nature.

The recommended acts of worship, rituals, the enjoined abstinence from sins, the forbidding from lies, treachery, slander and oppression, all and all, besides their social value, are basically designed for cultivation of the human aspect of man and revival of his humanity.

Therefore, if we really desire to take a step the direction of this evolution, there is no alternative to rising above all the materialistic criteria and notions about human nature; that is, we must consider man as a being whose faith transcends the notions of class differences and classless society. Only then human struggle can acquire an essentially ideological character based on faith and belief.

But where is the beginning point of this struggle? The answer is: from inside oneself. This is what the Prophets have taught; and you will not find any example in other teachings which can equal in magnificence of meaning with what the Prophets of God have taught.

The Holy Prophet (S) sent an army to fight external enemies. The victorious warriors returned and the Prophet went forth to welcome them. Now look at the Prophet's sense of timing and occasion. At a moment when he is expected to congratulate them and welcome them with a cry of 'Bravo!', the Prophet (S) instead says to them: *“Praise on you who have taken part in the minor jihad, and who have yet to wage the major jihad ! Surprised, his Companions declare: “O Messenger of Allah, we don't have any battle ahead bigger than the one we have just been fighting?”*

The Prophet answers: the greater battle is the jihad against the self. This jihad is the struggle of becoming a human being. This is the viewpoint offered by Islam for understanding of man and his struggle against his own carnal self.

The Qur'an says in this regard:

“He who purifies the soul indeed attains deliverance, and one who corrupts it certainly fails.”

(91:9–10)

Issues such as these cannot be encompassed by other teachings which neither possess the requisite capacity to uphold them nor the room for such dicta and ideals.

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