

Preface

Man becomes the subject of various branches of science from different aspects: psychology, sociology, history, ethics, medicine, and even physiology and biology are branches of science which deal with man from a specific point of view. The present book aims at discussing man from the viewpoint that he is a being who can undergo perfection. We will deal with the ultimate form of perfection and the way it can be reached.

We will endeavor to recognize the way to reap more and better benefit from internal faculties and external facilities to reach perfection and true prosperity by means of reflecting in our own being, finding elements in our nature which are established to lead to and fulfill the main objectives, and recognizing inclinations existing for sublime human causes as well as relations which tie us with one another and enable us to make ourselves more powerful and prepared for progress and development by using them and striving to solidify and strengthen them. May Allah (SWT) willing, we take a stride towards the development of ourselves and others.

Thus, the subject put to discussion is man from the viewpoint that he is a being who can undergo perfection. The goal behind and use of this, is recognition of true perfection and the way to reach it. The method (of approaching it) is analysis of one's insights to retrace the desires and inclinations for perfection set in our being and elements which pave the way for us to teach it as well as investigation of conditions which can be used for this purpose.

To prove these issues, we will try to suffice with moral perceptions and simple rational reasoning and to discover the unknown by using the most lucid and definite things known and to refer- to complex rational and historical reasoning when the necessity arises.

The Necessity of Self – Recognition

For a being that is, by nature possessed of self-love, it is perfectly natural to engage in self-recognition and try to recognize (the elements of) his perfection and the means to reach it. As a result, understanding the necessity of self-recognition does not require complex rational or arbitrary reasons. For this reason, negligence towards this reality and absorption in matters which are by no means

effective in (leading man to) perfection and prosperity is unnatural and leads to deviation.

And the reason behind this matter must be sought and means of establishing soundness and salvation from it must be recognized.

Principally, all human endeavors, be they scientific or practical, are carried out to provide the enjoyments, interests, and benefits to man. As a consequence, recognition of man himself, his beginning, his end, as well as the perfection which he might reach, is prior to any other issue. Without the recognition of man's reality and his true value, all other discussions and efforts will rather be futile and baseless.

The insistence of heavenly religions, religious leaders, and scholars of morals on self-recognition and self-awareness is entirely a guidance to this innate and rational truth. The Holy Qur'an regards forsaking the soul as the requisite for forsaking Allah (SWT) and as the punishment of this sin:

”وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ...“

"And be not like those who forsook Allah, so He made them forsake their own souls... (59: 19)."

Elsewhere it says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ ۚ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَنْ ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ ۚ

إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ...“

"... Take care of your souls: he who errs cannot hurt you when you are the right way... (5: 105)."

Although divine verses pay heed to the universe and the souls, the Holy Qur'an states:

”سُنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ ۚ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ...“

"We will soon show them our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it will become quite clear to them that it is the truth... (41:53)."

It however, accords a special status to the verses pertaining to the soul with such an interpretation:

“وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ”

"And in your own souls (too); will you not then see (51:21)?"

The Holy Qur'an has reproached those who do not endeavor for self-awareness and who do not see divine signs within themselves.

The Holy Prophet (SA) has also maintained an exceptional significance for self-recognition and has introduced it as the means of theism:

"Whoever recognizes himself has recognized his Lord."

In this regard, numerous traditions with various contexts have been related from the Amirul -Mu'minin (AS). Late Amadi has cited about thirty of them in Ghurarul-Hikam. Among them are the following aphorisms:

"Self-recognition is the most beneficial of all recognition."

"I am surprised at one who seeks what he has lost while he has lost himself (i.e., his identity and essence) and does not search for it."

"I wonder how a person who does not recognize himself can recognize his Lord."

"The ultimate point of Knowledge is for man to reach self-recognition."

"The greatest triumph belongs to one who reaches self-recognition."

The Imam is also related as saying:

"The more the man gains knowledge, the more he endeavors for himself and strives in the way of being educated and reformed."¹

Necessary Explanations

As in this discussion certain terms are used which might be used exactly or similarly in other discussions with different meanings, we will provide the following explanations to preclude (any form of) misunderstanding:

(A) Self-recognition, as has already been pointed out, refers to recognizing the human being from the viewpoint that he possesses the gift and faculty for the attainment of human perfection. As a result, a degree of speculative knowledge which any one has with respect to himself does not make us needless of this discussion.

Likewise, here we do not intend to deal with the perfect speculative knowledge which is acquired in the midst of moral evolution and by which man openly observes his truth, because this is an outcome of self-cultivation and not a preliminary for it. This bears no relation to our discussion, just as knowing the body organs and their functions which is used in physiology, is not related to our discussion. Here we are not concerned with knowing the soul and internal forces in man as discussed in psychology, even though some definitive psychological issues might be used as the bases for discussion.

(B) Self-cultivation and, on the whole, awareness of the self, is intended to mold and give direction to vital activities and not to limit and stop them. And, in other words, the purpose behind this discussion is for us to learn how to regulate our scientific and practical endeavors and how to direct them, so that they would be effective in reaching true perfection.

Thus this discussion does not require the negation of objective realities, of the value of knowing them, or of any form of idealistic inclination which has a negative aspect just as pragmatic tendencies, which are based on the genuineness of the practical bearing on material and worldly life and which serve as the manifestations of humanism, cannot be a true indication of this discussion. We will rather see that it is contradictory to it, unless, for some of these philosophies, they make interpretations based on a sublime and vast world, something which the founders and followers of these schools do not have in mind.

(C) Introversion, introspection and self-examination here are intended to mean that by examining one's being, potential powers and inherent drives, one should get to know the true objective, the ultimate (point of) perfection, and the path towards true prosperity and progress. It does not purport that man should wink at his existential ties with others and negate facilities for progress and development provided in the light of social life and cooperation. As a result, the positive associations of these interpretations are aimed at. They should not be confused with terms such as individualism, introversion, self-conceit, egotism and the like which are used in psychology, ethics and elsewhere, and which have negative associations.

D) There are a group of other terms which have various idiomatic technical meanings and which are used in different branches of science with different meanings. It is even possible that some terms might have various meanings within one branch of science; for instance, the terms such as: wisdom, the soul intuition, sense, perception, imagination, faculty, power, instinct,...

In these cases, being tied down to a particular terminology would put both the speaker and listener in a narrow pass. For this purpose, to derive and specify the intended meaning, one must rely on verbal contexts. And those who are familiar with only a particular scientific or philosophical terminology should not restrict themselves to the framework of that very terminology so as not to misunderstand (the matters).

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