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Fatalism and Free Will: Which Is the Truth?

The most fundamental principle governing man's life is his "desire for life", his efforts toward safeguarding, and preserving his "self". Affection for one's own self leads to emotions such as joy and grief, which in turn classify every object as useful or harmful.

Four other factors should be mentioned here:

1- Variable external factors include things we interact with every day and night by means of our senses, such as beautiful or unpleasant scenes, various colors, shapes, smells and sounds, which can all have an influence on man's soul. The human soul, however, is capable of putting up a resistance toward them and even neutralizing them.

2- Constant external factors also form the components and relationships of man's life, such as weather conditions, living environment, geographical factors and social customs and traditions. These factors are capable of affecting some of man's activities. For instance, if curiosity, one of man's primary instincts, is surrounded solely by agricultural economies, it might well begin to dwell into issues concerning land and agriculture.

3- Variable internal factors are phenomena created by the human soul without needing any action or contact with any outside factors. Thoughts, speculations, and imagination are examples of these factors, which play a significant role in man's spiritual affairs.

4- Constant internal factors: include the positive and negative points of talents, intelligence, memory, will power, decision, instincts, curiosity, and feelings like hunger, thirst and fatigue.

In general, we consider these three factors to be effective in man's moves:

- a) His affection for his own "self",
- b) Attracting joy and repelling grief, which derive from man's interest in himself,

c) The four above-mentioned factors.

The point fatalists claim here is that all of man's affairs derive from his love for his own self and its results, and this cannot be possible unless these factors are considered absolutely necessary. Some, including Hume and supporters of new physics have denied the law of causation in attempt to justify free will. We must say that the principle of causality does not conflict with man's free will.

The cause and the effect are not always alike in type – this is why physicists have mistakenly thought the principle of causality is thus defied. However, accepting the principle of causality does not imply that all phenomena are of the same type, especially the intrinsic actions of nature. Thus, there should be a distinction between applying the principle of causality in the internal world and the external world.

The Characteristics of Will

1- Will is one of the phenomenon man and animals have in common, except for two differences:

The range of gaining what is advantageous and repelling what is harmful is quite vaster in man than in animals, where it is limited to the physical life. What is to man's advantage or to his harm, on the other hand, goes far beyond the physical aspect. Man likes to solve scientific problems, likes justice, and endeavors to make his ideas and thoughts embrace reality, but animals cannot do such things.

Man has “self”, “soul”, “character” and “conscience.” It is not possible to prove that animals have them. Furthermore, ... do animals feel the spiritual state we have when we use our will? It is immensely hard to prove whether they do or do not – particularly when we realize, as we will further on in this book, that human will has a great deal of various aspects.

2- Will is not always an extensive phenomenon. Its simplicity or complexity depends on the simplicity or complexity of the subject it focuses on. If the subject is complex, will can also be regarded as complex. For instance, if we want to draw a flower, since the flower consists of different parts, the will to draw it would also ramify into various branches. However, the multiplicity or complexity of will is qualitative, not quantitative.

3- Will can be strong or weak, depending on whether its motive is strong or weak. The stronger the motive, therefore, the stronger the will is.

4- Will is a tool for the “self” to achieve its goal. Thus, the reason for actions is not tendency or eagerness. Some classical philosophers and psychologists attempt to find the reason for actions in will, but that is not possible. They have mistaken the main destination which has motivated our journey with the means that will get us there.

5- Another one of the characteristics of will is that will is not a single phenomenon, but consists of various phenomena. Many intellectuals of the past and some of their contemporary successors have

considered will to be a singular phenomenon, whereas we believe it to be diverse for two reasons:

a) The causes and motives of will, which are of three types:

- Pleasing factors.
- Escaping pain.
- Love for the self.

Since the motives of will are diverse, will itself has variety, too. For example, joy and sorrow have different kinds, therefore the will it results in will also differ.

b) Since the “self” and also its characteristics and activities are different, so are the activities man does based on his will.

The Difference between Tendency and Will

By tendency we mean the initial wanting that has not yet become strong; will, on the other hand, refers to the wanting and eagerness that has become quite strong, an extremely important means to carry out an action.

The reason for making a distinction between tendency and will is the fact that we may tend to do many things, but we never actually take action, for we do not have the needed devices, tools or knowledge about its consequences. Defining a clear-cut boundary between tendency and will, however, is extremely tedious, of not impossible.

Classical philosophy believes that free will arose after will power did. Philosophers consider these factors as influential to actions:

- 1- Understanding and desiring the goal
- 2- Studying and contemplating the pros and cons
- 3- Attention to the means needed to get us to the end
- 4- Eagerness
- 5- Will power
- 6- Determination
- 7- Free will

The philosophers' treatment of the issue is insufficient, for here rises the significant question whether

free will arises before will power, after it or not at all.

The virtue of the subject does not necessarily imply that the action is definitely done. Man does each and every actions in certain, different conditions and situations; therefore, the needed motive has a critical role here. Not everything can serve as the motivating factor. A motive must remove from the subject what is to its disadvantage, or bring it what is advantageous. The mere existence of a goal cannot bring about actions. The three phenomena that influence actions based on free will are:

- a) The will to do it.
- b) The decision to do it.
- c) The supervision and governance of the “self.”

They are not enough, however, for the action to be carried out. In other words, none of the subject, the goal, will power, determination or free will can virtually be the real cause for the action – two wills, two determinations and the supervision of two “selves” are needed in free will-based actions.

The Difference between Will and Determination

In the past, intellectuals did not consider will power and determination to be any different; they only believed that immense willingness can bring about actions. However, there are a few important differences between them, and that determination is the amplified form of will power:

- a) We often feel that we have the will power to do something, but there is no indication of decision in us. The tendency may even become quite strong, but we do not decide to carry it out for fear of failure.
- b) There are different kinds of will, but decision is no more than one single truth. For example, the decision to fulfill the instincts of curiosity and emotions is the same, whereas the will behind them serves to make different forms of benefit become true.
- c) Will, as the eagerness to do things, can also pertain to impossible actions, but it is not possible to decide to do them. For example, we can wish to gain all the knowledge in the universe and become immortal, but it is impossible to decide to do so.

The Quanta of Will

Classical philosophers and psychologists believed that will arises constantly in the human psyche and depicts the path to carrying out or avoiding and action. However, when the will is carrying out an action, it can be considered as consisting of small parts we may call the “quanta of will.” As an example, although an artist has a general will – creating a beautiful painting – the painting itself consists of many tiny parts, for each of which there is a certain will.

Is the Will Free?

Some attribute freedom or fatalism to the will. They claim, for instance, that if they did something, they must have had the freedom of will to do so. We must disregard such beliefs; we cannot attribute freedom to the will. Will, whether in its strong or weak level, does not have freedom. In other words, “we have no freedom of will power, for will is an internal, psychological activity caused by one of our instincts.”

In fact, the will depends on our motives. The will has no freedom of its own; its freedom comes from the supervision of the “self.” Without the “self” governing it, will has no power at all. Although we have the will power to do the things we are free to do, we are not free to do only whatever there is the will to do; compulsory actions also have will power in them.

The “supervision of the self” is of utmost significance in discussing man's freedom. As we know, apart from instincts and other psychological aspects, man possesses a truth that has been called his “self,” his “psyche,” his “soul,” and also his “spirit.” For several reasons, the “self” cannot be man's total external and internal components.

The “self” has several characteristics. One of them is the fact that “It can govern all, or a majority, of the instincts. In other words, it can observe the activities of the instincts, justify them, or even prevent them.” The self has the capability to control or stop the instincts. In brief, the supervision and dominance of the 'self' over the internal resistance forces and other mechanical ones that motivate actions are the source of free will-based actions. The greater the supervision and dominance is, the stronger the free will be.

The Levels of Free Will

Another significant issue concerning fatalism and free will is the levels free will has. Since it is dependent upon the supervision and dominance of the “self,” and that can vary from one person to another, free will should also fall into different levels of intensity. If one's self is stronger, he will also have a stronger free will, and will not be much influenced by external or internal mechanical factors. When one's self is weak in its supervision and dominance, on the other hand, he will do fewer things at free will, and be more affected by mechanical factors. Ignorance towards the different levels of the supervision and dominance of the “self” has led to problems in the issue of fatalism and free will.

The problem we encounter here is that by accepting the supervision and the dominance of the “self,” we have no choice but to choose one of the two extremes; choosing each, however, will mean that there is a preference in the reasons, and when we assume a reason influential, free will is meaningless.

In response, we must say that the preferred factor does not defy the supervision and the dominance of the “self,” for if a motive makes the self-use its control to have an action performed, the other choice must not also be possible. However, we can prove for these three reasons that when the self-governs a choice, the other alternative is also not eliminated. The first reason is that if choosing the second

alternative is impossible when choosing the first one, why would man show repentance after the first one proves a failure?

Secondly, in many of our actions, as each second of our internal activity passes, the next second does not impose itself on us completely; in other words, we feel, subsequent to the next second, that although we may proceed, we are able to terminate the activity at any moment.

The third reason is the doubt man feels sometimes, putting him in a quandary, hesitant to choose alternative A or B. Making the decision calls for patience and thought; the fact that man becomes doubtful and needs to think whether to choose A or B shows that none of them impose themselves upon the “self.”

The Three Fundamental Principles in Proving Free Will

If we accept these three principles, we will certainly accept the phenomenon called free will.

1– The dominance and supervision of the “self” over the positive and negative poles of the action (acceptance or avoidance to carry it out)

2– The factors that make man carry out an action, are not so as absolutely motivating to eliminate the supervision of the self. When performing our will-based actions, we often do not wait to make sure whether the end or the outcome is acceptable and desirable or not; in other words, we take action before we are sure that we will succeed.

3– The gradual demise of the will and its vulnerability to any of the external or internal factors.

The Steps toward Making Free Will-based Actions Come True

The steps philosophers of the past believed was necessary in order to a free will-based action to be carried out was:

1– Focusing on the goal and desiring it

2– Focusing on the action and its feasibility

3– Judging the pros and cons of doing or avoiding the action

4– Willingness and tendency to do it

5– The will to carry it out

6– Deciding to do it

7– Free will and option

These steps are not correct, because:

First: Some people believe that the pros and cons of the goal itself are more important than the pros and cons of the action. Some, on the contrary, consider the judgment in favor of the action of more significance. Others consider both of them as equally important.

Second: Some people make the most efforts possible to evaluate the goal and the action; some others follow a purely Machiavellian procedure.

Third: In some people, there is an extremely short interval between tendency, will and decision; once they focus on the desirability of the goal, they immediately express their tendency, will and decision. In some others, on the other hand, there is a fairly long time between tendency and will, or between will and decision.

Fourth: Some people break their will at the least shadow of a doubt; in some others, the doubt is fought for a long time, and the will is preserved.

In a word, the conflicts of the “self,” its internal struggles and the conflicts its motivating factors suffer from, prevent us from discovering or finding a general rule. In other words, determining a place for free will in the preliminary steps of the action is almost obscured, for the three principles that form human free will differ from one human being to another, so free will strengthens and weakens, and may reveal itself in the preliminaries or the action itself.

Two Kinds of Will, Decision and Supervision in Actions based on Free Will

There are two different kinds of will in free will-based actions:

- 1- The will pertaining to the goal
- 2- The will pertaining to the action

For example, if our goal is to plant something in the ground, there is both the will for the goal and also the will to carry out the preliminary steps toward the action.

Sometimes there is one decision for the goal and another for the action in actions based on free will. At other times, since the goal is not under direct access by man, the decision for the goal is unclear, but decision to do the action exists. For example, if an artist decides to paint a beautiful picture with the purpose of selling it at a high price, the decision to paint the picture falls into his free will, but the real purpose – people liking the painting and buying it at a high price – does not, it is not at his direct will.

The supervision and dominance of the self in optional actions like decision-making pertains to both the

goal and to the action itself, and sometimes it pertains to the action only, for the goal is always directly under access and free will of man.

Both forms of the three mentioned phenomena – decision, will and the supervision of the self – are not of the same kind, for the will to do the action means asking for the tools needed, but the will pertaining to the goal is independent. The will to do the action is dependent on the goal. For instance, the goal may be interesting to man, but the action itself may be not. The will to do the action depends on the will of the goal, for no action can be desirable to man unless the goal is accepted by the human soul. This is why the mental and spiritual changes we undergo concerning the goal can also change our mental state about the action itself, for the less interest we have in the goal, the will to do the action will also decrease.

Apart from the above mentioned, there are also other reasons for the necessity of man's free will, which we will discuss now:

1– Imagination and induction: One of the reasons for the existence of man's free will is the power of inculcation and imagination. Man sometimes inculcates a vague phenomenon so strongly to himself that it seems real to him; for instance, he may imagine that he is the president of a country so intensively that he walks and talks like the president. If, however, he were asked at that moment if he were really that president, he would realize his imagining, and shamefully admit that he was just imagining.

Lovers also enjoy making mental images of their beloved; sometimes it gets so intense that they feel that their beloved is really there, next to them, talking to them, although the beloved may be miles away. Inculcation also plays an important role in man's psychological activities. Inculcation is significant in causing large-group movements. If we study the psychological lives of many people, we will see that half of it is filled with their ideals, wishes and imaginations. Imagination is quite important for poets, too. Imagination and inculcation form a resistance against external mechanical factors.

They show that the human soul has a kind of non-mechanical activity, and does not always submit to fixed laws of nature; in fact, it can influence and change phenomena, and display his independence against fatalistic nature. Imagination and inculcation actually depict the principle of the supervision and dominance of the self – the origin of free will.

2– Repentance: Repentance is one of the psychological phenomena everyone feels once in a while. When man is inefficient in recognizing what goal is desirable to him, or how to achieve it, or when he does harm while doing it, or loses something, he feels repentant, which makes him unhappy. If he realizes, however, that the loss he suffered was not his fault, he may feel sad, but not repentant. Sadness is different from repentance.

Man feels repentant when he fails to detect the reasons or the results of free will-based actions, but not in actions that he has no free will in. As Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi) says:

اینکه گویی این کنم یا آن کنم این دلیل اختیار است ای صنم

یک مثال ای دل پی فرقی بیار تا بدانی جبر را از اختیار

دست کآن لرزان بود از ارتعاش وآنکه دستی را تو لرزانی ز جاش

هر دو جنبش آفریده حق شناس لیک نتوان کرد این با آن قیاس

زآن پشیمانی که لرزانیدیش چون پشیمان نیست مرد مرتعش

مرتعش را کی پشیمان دیده ای؟ بر چنین جبری تو بر چسبیده ای

زاری ما شد دلیل اضطرار خجلت ما شد دلیل اختیار

گر نبودی اختیار، این شرم چیست؟ وین دریغ و خجلت و آزرم چیست؟

(You can say 'I'll do this and that' shows that you have free will, my dear one. Just make an example, and you'll see the difference between fatalism and free will. Some aged hands quiver themselves, but you can quiver your own hand, too. The Righteous God has created both, but they are not comparable. You may be repentant for making your healthy hand quiver, but the old man never feels repentant for his shaking hands. It is you who has the free will do it. In emergencies, we are distressed, and our repentance shows our free will. If there is no free will, why is there shame? Why all the repentance, shame and sorrow? In other words, when one wonders which one of two alternatives to choose, this indicates free will, for fatalistic factors never leave us at a dilemma; they only provide us with a

compulsory choice.)

In these verses, in fact, Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi uses the feeling of repentance as a proof for free will.

3– Feeling responsible is another reason for the existence of free will. Without free will, responsibility will be meaningless. If someone fatalistically does something, there would be no blaming him; if one has a duty to fulfill, however, he deserves to be reprimanded for failing to do it.

If an employee, for instance, does not go to work on time, and something happens due to his absence while he is relaxing at home, the employee is to blame, for he ignored the duty he was responsible for, and between the two factors – work and staying home – he chose the latter. Thus, the employee will be punished for being able to fulfill his responsibility by the supervision and dominance of the self, but he made no use of that power, and ignored his duty.

4– Shame: Sometimes man suffers from the feeling of shame. If it is due to actions outside his free will, he will soon escape the shame; even the wise would not consider that action to deserve feeling ashamed. In the cases where man has had no part in a shameful act, he comforts himself and escapes having a guilty conscience. Shame is one of man's greatest superiorities over animals. No animal feels shame, but man does; and he could never feel ashamed without free will. Shame is one of the passive phenomena based on awareness and the dominance of the self.

5– Difference in motives to fulfill duty: People fulfill their duties and obey laws in different ways. Some do it only for their personal benefit. Some others consider both their personal benefit and the others'. These people do not always let their self-follow their personal benefit, and sometimes make use of the supervision and dominance of the self. Some people fulfill their duty for the sake of the duty itself, which they consider the goal. They regard the duty as virtually valuable. Of course, the duty does not impress them so greatly that they have no psychological flexibility left.

When man fulfills his duty consciously and regardless of any mechanical factors, it shows he has free will. Some people fulfill their duties as a means to discover necessities and the good; due to their spiritual independence, they do not require any motivation to do their jobs. They constantly feel the will to fulfill their individual and social responsibilities, and always tend to do good and invite others to do good, too.

The latter group are superior to all the people mentioned previously, and their self has such supervision and dominance over their instincts that they need no other factor, even duty. Those who do not need to feel responsibility to rescue others' physical or spiritual lives, and sacrifice themselves to do so, are among this group.

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