

History and Human Evolution

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Table of Contents

History and Human Evolution Lecture I of II.....	4
What is Evolution?	6
The Problem of Bada' (Revision)	8
The Evolution of History in the Past	9
Human Relationships	11
Another Example	13
The Relation of Man with Himself	14
The Role of Prophets and religion on the Historical Evolution.....	15
History and Human Evolution, Lecture II of II	16
Man's Future from Different Viewpoints	17
The View of Scientism	19
The Viewpoint of Marxism.....	20
The View of Existentialism.....	22
The View of Islam	24

History and Human Evolution Lecture I of II

The subject of our discussion is the meaning of evolution in history, or in other words, man's social evolution and progress. Men of science assume two types of evolution for man: one of which is biological evolution, about which you may have read in biology and know that man is considered as the most perfect animal and the last link in the natural evolution of animals.

The meaning of biological evolution is clear: it is an evolution that the process of nature has produced without the intervention of man himself and without his asking for it. In this respect there is no difference between man and other animals; since every animal has reached a stage of evolution by a natural and coercive process. The same process has brought man to the stage that we call him a human being, and consider him a specific kind of species as distinct from other species.

But the historical or social evolution means a new process of evolution in which nature does not play the role it played in man's biological evolution. This evolution is an acquired one, namely, an evolution that man has secured by his own effort, and in every period has transferred it to the next generation through teaching and learning, and not through heredity.

The biological evolution has taken place without man's will power and initiative, and has been achieved through a series of laws of heredity. But the social or historical evolution, being acquired by man's effort, has not been handed down from one generation to another, or from zone to zone through heredity, and there is not even a possibility of its being such. It has been accomplished through education, teaching and learning, and primarily through the art of writing.

We see that the Quran swears in the name of the pen and tools of writing¹, and addresses the Prophet thus: "Read in the name of your God, Who created man from clotted blood. Read, and your God is the most exalted; He, who taught with the pen."² This means that God taught man how to use the pen; that is, He granted him the power to make progress in his historical and social evolution.

There is no doubt that human society since its origin, that is, since civilization first began to appear, has continuously progressed and evolved. We all know that like the biological evolution, social evolution, too, has been gradual, with one difference, and that is, with the passage of time the rate of evolution has increased in speed; in other words, it has followed a course of acceleration. It has moved on and on and has not been stationary, and the motion, too, has not been a fixed one. A car may move at a fixed speed of a hundred kilometers for several hours; but a speed with an acceleration means a gradual increase of speed in which the speed increases every minute.

But although evolution and progress seem an obvious matter, you may be surprised that there have been learned men who have doubted whether what has happened can be called progress or evolution. One may wonder that there should be any room for doubt in this matter. But the reason why they have expressed doubt about it will be discussed later on. Here, it is sufficient to say that although we do not consider their doubt justified and we believe that human society has continued its course of an all-round evolution and is

approaching its final phase, at the same time their doubts are not quite without foundation. Nevertheless, we must clarify the cause for this doubt in order to be able to fully understand the meaning of evolution.

What is Evolution?

We must first define evolution. Many matters seem at first so obvious as to require no definition. But when one tries to define them, he finds it very hard and is faced with difficulties. I have no intention of quoting all the definitions which philosophers have given for evolution. There is a fine point in Islamic philosophy which is subject to argument from the viewpoint of the Quran, and that is the difference between “complete” and “perfect”.

We use the word “complete” as the antonym of “defective”, and again we use “perfect” as the antonym of the same word “defective”. But does “complete” mean “perfect”? No. There is a verse in the Quran which is related to the question of Imamah and wilayah. It says:

“Now We made your religion perfect, and completed Our blessings on you and were content for Islam to be your religion.” (Quran, 5:3)

This shows that the Quran attributes two meanings to “perfection” and “completeness”. The blessings were completed from a defective state, and religion was perfected from a defective condition. But before explaining the difference between the two words, let me first explain the difference between evolution and progress, and then return to this matter.

Is progress the same as evolution, and is evolution identical with progress? They happen to have a difference and you may consider their usage. We sometimes speak of a sickness which is progressing, but we do not say it is evolving. If an army which is fighting in a land occupies a part of it, we say that the army is advancing, but we do not say that it is evolving. Why not? Because there is a sense of exaltation in evolution: evolution is an upward movement, a vertical movement, from a lower level to a higher plane.

But progress and advance is always on a horizontal level. When an army has occupied a territory and added some land to its own possessions, we say that it has advanced, which means that it has moved ahead but on the same plane that it had before. Why do we not say that it has evolved? Because, there is the idea of exaltation in evolution. So, when we speak of social evolution, it means man's social exaltation and not just progress.

Many things may be considered progress for man and society without being evolution and exaltation for the human society. We say this to show that if some scholars have expressed doubts about such progress' worthiness to be called an evolution, their view is not without foundation. Although we do not confirm their view, yet what they have stated is not entirely pointless. Therefore, there is a difference between evolution on the one hand and progress and development on the other; for progress and development are almost similar in meaning.

But the difference between perfect and complete can be explained in this fashion: If something consists of a number of parts, such as a building or a car, as long as all the necessary parts do not exist in it, we say that it is imperfect. But when we place the last part in it, then we can say that it is “complete”. In comparison, evolution has many phases and stages.

When a child is born with some defect in his limbs, we consider him defective; but even when he is born with all his limbs complete, it is still considered defective from another point of view; he must pass through

many stages of evolution in his education which are for him a form of exaltation and ascension by degrees and steps. So far our discussion was about the definition of evolution in the social and biological sense. But now we deal with other matters in this connection, the most important of which may be stated in three questions:

1. Has man, in his social life and throughout history, achieved evolution and exaltation?
2. Is human society undergoing evolution and will reach a fully evolved state in future?
3. If it is undergoing evolution, what is that ideal society, or, as Plato would say, that utopia of man, and what are its peculiarities?

We can understand the course of history up to the present; but what about the future? Should we close our eyes about the future and say that history inevitably moves on an evolutionary course? Is evolution in nature imposed by time? Is the ship of time voyaging on an evolutionary course without the slightest intervention of man and without any responsibility on his part? Have human beings in the past had no role as beings endowed with free will, freedom of choice and responsibility? Has the role of human beings in the past been secondary and subject to determinism or if there has been no such determining force in the past?

Human beings, by their own free will and choice and their own initiative and planning of their society, have determined an evolutionary course for their society, and have advanced it. This matter of free will and freedom of human beings in the past should not be forgotten.

Therefore, a group of men are worthy of praise and admiration, and they are those who had the choice to stand against historical evolution, or deprive it of their support, and prefer their personal welfare to the struggle for the sake of progress. But they chose the other way, and freely, by their own choice, followed the way of evolution, and sacrificed themselves. Similarly other human beings should be reproached and even cursed for posing hindrances in the way of this evolution.

If we do not recognize the future and have no plan for it, and if we pay no attention to our responsibility for making history, we too deserve being reproached by future generations. History is made by man, and not man by history. If we have no plan for the future, and do not realize our responsibility for the future of history, no one can promise us that this ship will reach its destination automatically.

The least that can be said is that it may either go ahead or turn backwards. This matter of ability to advance or reverse the course of events, the idea that there isn't a blind coercive force that drives events ahead, is in Islam, and especially in Shi'ism, a question, which from a sociological viewpoint (as I have explained in my book, *Man and Destiny*), may be considered one of the most sublime of Islamic teachings.

The Problem of Bada' (Revision)

In Islam there is an issue called bada' (revision). The concept of bada' has an apparent meaning which few would regard as acceptable. Some have even criticized the Shi'ah for believing in bada'. The meaning of bada' is revision in Divine Destiny (qada'), meaning that God has not fixed a definite and final form for the course of human history.

In other words, God says to man: "You yourselves are in charge of the fulfilment of Divine Destiny, and it is you who can advance, stop or reverse the course of history." There is no blind determinism either on the part of nature or the means of life or from the viewpoint of Divine Destiny, to rule over history. This is one way of looking at man, his history and destiny.

Therefore, as long as we do not understand the direction of evolution and man's ultimate goal, we cannot speak of evolution and merely state that man is progressing; for then, immediately, the question arises: towards what? If we cannot answer this question, what right do we have to speak of evolution? Don't we study history in order to open a way for the future?

If by studying history we get only so far as to allow it to introduce itself without showing a way for the future, what is the use of history? But we see that the Quran surveys history in a way to show us the path for the future, and this is how it should be. Therefore, our discussion is related to the past up to the present, and then the future. The question of our duty and responsibility is determinable only when, after becoming familiar with the past, we gain an understanding of the future too.

The Evolution of History in the Past

If we regard history from two points of view, there has been indubitable progress of man, if not an evolution. One of them is in the matter of tools and implements of life. Man has certainly made progress in making tools, and, of course, an amazing progress it has been. Once his tools consisted of unhewed stone, which later on was hewed and polished. Today he has attained the present advanced state of technology, craft and industry.

Man has not only advanced in technical skills and achieved stunning progress in production of tools, but he has made such a marvelous progress that if our predecessors and philosophers of a hundred or two hundred years ago had been told that man would advance so much in a hundred years time, as he has today, no one would have believed it.

You may call it whatever you like, either “progress” or “evolution”, there can be no doubt that man has made tremendous progress in making tools, and it may be expected to continue in future too, on condition, however, that it is not, checked by a historic catastrophe, a calamity which is again predicted by some men of learning.

They consider it probable that man's technical and industrial progress will reach a point when man may destroy himself and all his achievements in science and technology, his books, his learning and civilization and all its vestiges. A new type of human being may appear to start life from the beginning. If no such catastrophe occurs, there is no doubt that the creation of tools may further advance to a stage which may not be imaginable today.

This evolution is produced by the evolution of man's experience and his knowledge, for man has made so much progress in his experimental understanding and knowledge of nature that he has been able to conquer nature and turn it into a docile servant. This was one aspect of human progress.

Another aspect of man's evolution (which again may hardly be called “evolution”) is in the relations of social life and the structure of society (by “relations” here is not meant human relationships). Human society has gradually been transformed from a simple one into a complex structure. In other words, in the same way as he has advanced in technical and industrial matters from the simple cars of yesterday to the present day aircrafts and sophisticated spacecrafts, in the same way as in natural evolution a unicellular organism is so simple as compared with an animal like man in bodily structure, human society, too, has changed from a simple to an extremely complex structure.

Some have defined evolution as a process involving two stages: at first, there is an accumulation, that is, a multiplication of parts followed by division, characterized by a movement from homogeneity towards heterogeneity, or, in other words, movement towards organization between parts and organs interconnected by a unifying relationship.

For example, we know that in the process of fertilization, a cell which is formed by the combination of male sperm and female ovum has a simple form at first; then it begins the process of division (accumulation); one cell divides into two, the two into four, the four into eight, the eight into sixteen, and this division goes on. But it is only a question of quantity until a stage is

reached when there takes place another form of division; this is, one part becomes the nervous system, another emerges as the heart and system of blood circulation, and so on, and all these organs are interrelated forming an organized unity which is the human body.

In this respect, human society, too, has progressed, whether you may choose to call it 'evolution' or not. That is, the structure of human society has changed from a simple state into something complex. The structure of primitive and tribal societies was very simple. Someone was the chief of a tribe consisting of a number of people, and the chief divided the tasks between them, and these tasks were few in number. But you see that with the progress of science and technology, such division of work has become complicated because there are more tasks and more people to perform them. Compare the existing variety of jobs, tasks, professions and crafts of modern day with those of the societies of a hundred years ago.

Or look at the degree of specialization at the administrative and scientific levels. In the past, a man was able to master all the sciences of his own time. He could become an Aristotle or an Ibn Sina. But now the system of education has undergone such subdivisions, that we have hundreds of the like of Aristotle and Ibn Sina, each a specialist in his own field, who are not the least acquainted with other branches of science and quite unaware of even their existence in the world. This is a characteristic of our time, a quality that removes uniformity and homogeneity from among human beings and replaces it with differences and distinctions.

For, as man creates work, work too builds up man. As a result, although all are human beings living in one society, but they seem to possess different natures, since everyone is dealing with a task which is unknown to another who is engaged in another task. Every one of them seems to live in a different world of his own. The result is that human beings vary from one another. If we speak of progress or evolution in connection with society and its organization and division of labour, skills and talents, again the structure of human society has changed from a simple into a complex and extremely entangled one.

You may, from these remarks, realize that if things go on in this fashion, there is a danger of the creation of so many differences that the unity of mankind will be threatened; that is, human beings will resemble one another only in appearance, but their mental, spiritual, emotional and educational structures will be totally different from one another; and this is a great danger for humanity.

That is why it is said that technological progress has alienated man from himself, and made him a stranger to himself. It has turned man into a creature styled and tailored to the needs of his job and profession, and destroyed human unity. This is in itself a serious problem. In any case, we may say that from the viewpoint of social structure too, societies have evolved in the past. However, here, in addition to the problem of power and domination over nature and besides the structure of human society and social organizations, there are a number of other problems which are related to human nature, and that is the relationship of individuals with one another.

Human Relationships

Has man made progress in the quality of relationships of human beings with one another in the same way as he has made progress in the creation of tools, and in the complexity of social structure? If he has, then we may call it evolution and exaltation. Have human beings progressed in the sense of co-operation? Does a human being of today feel more co-operative towards others than in the past?

Has he made a proportionate advance in the sense of responsibility towards other human beings? Has man's exploitation of other human beings been really effaced? Or is it that only its form has been altered and that it has increased in degree? Has man's aggression against the rights of others diminished?

Have human relations improved in proportion to the advances made in building tools and with the complexity of social structure? Or have these problems remained the same as before? Or there may be some who claim that not only no progress has been made in this connection, but also there has even been a retrogression? In other words, can it be said in general that human values, and everything that is the criterion of the humanity of man, have advanced proportionately?

Different views have been expressed in this connection; some cynically deny it totally that man has made any progress whatsoever in this respect, for, they say, if the criterion of progress is welfare and happiness, we may hardly call it progress. For example, even in the case of tools, it is doubted whether they have provided man with welfare. As an example, speed is one of the things which has greatly advanced as exhibited by the telephone, airplane and other such things.

But can this improvement in speed be called progress when measured by the criterion of human welfare? Or, since speed is a means, it has produced comfort in one respect; in other respects it has deprived man of welfare: it carries a good man promptly to his destination, but it also carries a wicked man as quickly to his goal and as promptly in his evil purpose. A sound and honest man has found stronger hands and quicker legs.

A wicked man, too, has the same advantages. These means have made possible the transfer of a criminal from one part of the world to another part in a few hours, to kill thousands or even millions of people at once. What, then, is the final conclusion? Though I am not in favour of this cynicism, yet I wish to explain why it has been expressed by some. For example, is the progress in medicine a true progress? In appearance, it is, for I see that when a child suffers from diphtheria, right drugs and proper medical treatment are readily available.

This is progress. But some people like Alexis Carl who measure these things with the criterion of humanity, believe that medicine is gradually weakening human species. They say: In the past, human beings had resistance against diseases; the weak were destroyed and the strong remained alive, and this made successive generations stronger and resistant to diseases, and also prevented the unnecessary increase of population.

But now, medicine is artificially preserving weak persons who otherwise would have perished and were really condemned to death by nature.

Therefore, the successive generations are not fit to survive, and so every generation becomes weaker than its predecessor. A child born in the seventh month of pregnancy is by the law of nature condemned to death; but now medicine, with its progress and means, preserves this baby.

But what will become of the next generation? Moreover, there is the question of over-population. It happens that those who are fitter for the improvement of the human race are destroyed and those who are not competent to bring about this improvement somehow manage to survive. This is the reason for doubt in this matter.

Another Example

In connection with the mass media, one may think it wonderful to sit in a corner and at the right moment hear the news in which he is interested. But remember that this same thing creates so much anxiety and worry for human beings; for, in many matters, it is more advisable for man not to hear such news.

For instance, in the past the people who lived in Shiraz were unaware of the flood which overran Ghuchan, drowning so many people and making others homeless. But now they learn of it immediately and feel sad and anxious. There are thousands of such unpleasant happenings occurring in various parts of the world.

It was from the viewpoint of human welfare, and welfare as a criterion that learned men have doubted whether to regard speed as a measure of progress and evolution or not. However, we have nothing to do with these problems, for as we believe, there is ultimately an evolution and all these difficulties may be overcome—a subject which we will discuss later.

Thus, in the question of human relationships, we cannot say that any progress or evolution has taken place, or, even if it has occurred, it is not proportionate to the progress made in making tools and to the growth in social organization.

The Relation of Man with Himself

Another question is the relation of man with himself, which is termed 'ethics'. If we do not say that all the happiness of man lies in the establishment of a good relationship with oneself-and we do not say so because it would be an exaggeration-yet we may say that if the means of man's happiness are compared with one another to find a percentage of role of every factor, a greater part of human happiness would be found to lie in the relation of man with himself, or with his "self": the relationship of man with his animal aspect.

For, man, in spite of his humanness and the human values inherent in his nature, is also an animal; that is, he is an animal on which humanity has been imposed. In other words, he is an animal, which, by the side of his animality, also possesses humanity.

The question arises here whether the humanity of man is subordinate to his animal side, or if his animality is subservient to his humanity. The Quran says:

He who purifies the soul indeed attains deliverance, and one who corrupts it certainly fails (91:9-10)

The problem here is of self-purification, which means not being captivated by greed and concupiscence of the self, and not being in the clutches of one's base animal characteristics. As long as man has not evolved ethically and has not attained internal emancipation from his own animality, it is not possible for him to establish good relations with other human beings. Good human relations can come into existence when man liberates himself from the captivity of other human beings, and is also able to abstain from subjugating other human beings to himself.

So far we have discussed four points:

1. The relation of man with nature, in which he has made progress.
2. The relation of man with his society, which has progressed from the viewpoint of social structure and organization.
3. The relation of man with other human beings, and the quality of his relations with other members of his kind, which depends again on his spirituality and is linked with the substance of his humanity. In this matter there is doubt as to whether he has made progress or not: that his progress in this sphere has not been on a par with other aspects is beyond doubt; the real question is whether he has made any progress at all.
4. The relation of man with himself, which is the subject of ethics.

The Role of Prophets and religion on the Historical Evolution

Has man of today overcome his animality more than his ancestors in the past, and have the higher human values been realized in his existence? Or, has the quality of human existence been better in the past? The role of the prophets in the historical evolution, their role in the past and in the future, becomes clear in this connection.

Here we can discover the role of religion in the past and thereby find out its role in the future, and on the basis of scientific and sociological evidence, we can guess whether man requires religion in future for his evolution or not; because, the survival or annihilation of every thing is subject to its being able to fulfill human need. This principle has been stated by the Quran and is affirmed by science. The Quran says:

“As for the scum, it vanishes as jetsam, and what profits men abides in the earth ...” (13 :17)

There is a parable which I have repeatedly used in my lectures, and that is the parable of flood and the foam on water. It says that the foam disappears quickly and the water remains. Right and wrong are compared to water and foam, and what is beneficial remains, and what is useless disappears.

The question whether religion will survive in the future is related to its role in human evolution, that is, in the evolution of his essence, his spirituality and humanity and the evolution of good relation of man with himself and with other human beings-something which cannot be replaced by anything else, either now or in future.

The question, therefore, is that, either, in the future, human society will dissolve and mankind will be effaced from the face of earth as a result of collective suicide, or human society will attain its true destiny, which is an all-round evolution (evolution in his relation with nature, evolution in awareness, in power, in liberty, in emotions and sentiments and other kinds of human feelings). We believe that this evolution will be achieved-a belief which, in the first place, we have obtained under the inspiration of our religious teachings.

In a lecture entitled “The Significance of Occult Aids in Human Life” I have stated the point that this optimism concerning the future of humanity and human evolution and man's deliverance from reaching a dead-end, cannot be provided by anything except religion. It is the role of religion in human life which alone guarantees the evolution in the human essence of man's being.

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 shouldst 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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