

IS FREEDOM POSSIBLE?

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Since many centuries the Western profane man is witnessing the eclipse of freedom. The modern man has severed the roots of Transcendence and as a consequence has fallen in the everlasting pit of human finitude. He has woven a web of 'knowledge' around him which is perpetually constricting his intelligence, will and soul. It is no accident that one of the existentialists feels himself to be a spider. The modern West has completely lost the starting point and there are no visible sign-posts leading to destination. The epistemological road is highly deceptive and leads no where. It is the sacred highway which leads to the castle of metaphysics. Therein lies the destiny of man. In order to understand the road to freedom it is incumbent upon the traveler to have a 'map' of the Absolute. Schuon says: "In metaphysics, it is necessary to start from the idea that the Supreme Reality is absolute...and that being absolute it is infinite...The distinction between the Absolute and the Infinite expresses the two fundamental aspects of the Real, that of essentiality and that of potentiality; this is the highest principal prefiguration of the masculine and the feminine poles. Universal Radiation, this Maya both divine and cosmic, springs from the second aspect, the Infinite, which coincides with All-possibility"¹³⁴. The term Absolute was introduced by Schelling and Hegel in the late eighteenth century though the concept existed much earlier. It signified the ultimate reality embracing the finite world. The nature of the Absolute was discussed by numerous Western thinkers but the profane methodology could not fathom the essentiality of the Absolute. The Absolute is the Alpha and Omega of intellectual metaphysics. It can only be studied metaphysically. The modern West correspondingly lacks the notion of the Infinite. The concept of infinity in mathematics, logic, theology, and metaphysics is either fallacious or merely peripheral. Even the Greeks could not envisage the idea in its metaphysical perspective. Guenon observes:"

¹³⁴ Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism, World Wisdom Books Indiana, U.S.A., 1986, pp. 15-16.

...the Greeks had no notion of the Infinite. Besides, why do modern Westerners, when they imagine they are conceiving the Infinite, always represent it as a space, which can only be indefinite, and why do they persist in confusing eternity, which abides essentially in the “timeless” If one may express it, with perpetuity, which is but an indefinite extension of time, where as such misconceptions do not occur among Orientals? The fact is that the Western mind, being almost exclusively inclined to the study of the things of the senses, is constantly led to confuse conceiving with imagining, to the extent that whatever is not capable of sensible representation seems to it to be actually unthinkable for that very reason; even among the Greeks the imaginative faculties were preponderant. This is evidently the very opposite of pure thought; under these conditions there can be no intellectuality in the real sense of the word and consequently no metaphysic¹³⁵.” The modern West sets limits to That which is without limits. Except for the Middle Ages, the Western consciousness has remained opaque to the concept of the Unlimited. It is the logic of transcendence which posits the possibility of knowing the limitless. The concept of metaphysical Infinity teaches us that it is by dint of Infinitude that the Absolute yearns to become conscious of Itself through man and universe. And it is All-embracing. The concept of the Infinite is intimately linked with universal possibility. Since the modern man does not understand the Absolute, therefore, he remains oblivious of the Infinitude implied in the notion of possibility. He fails to perceive that possibility conceived in its totality is unlimited. To set a limit to All-Possibility is a contradiction in terms. Also, the Westerners often make a false distinction between the possible and the -real and this constitutes their main difficulty in understanding the notion of freedom. From the metaphysical point of view, the possible and the real are identical and this is true regarding both forms of possibilities-the non manifested and the manifested ones.

Even the compossibilities form a ‘part’ of universal possibility. It is pertinent to observe that the Western concept of Being constricts the realm of possibility and this cannot be identified with the, Infinite. The Western ‘Chain of Being’ is tied to the Realm of finitude and consequently fails to

¹³⁵ An Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines,
Luzac, London, pp.119-120.

develop a meta-physical understanding of Non-Being or Nothingness. The Western debate on possibility, thus remains enmeshed in the world of shadows. Aristotle, no doubt, had some inkling of the realm of possibility but what little metaphysical understanding he achieved has been lost in the contemporary world. The profane methodologies cannot reach the essence of possibility.

Is Freedom possible? It is a question which needs to be understood in the metaphysical perspective. It is through possibility that freedom comes in the world. In the absence of universal possibility, no particular possibility could exist And hence no Freedom. Each possibility is unique and hence 'there cannot be two identical possibilities in the universe. Man is defined in reference to his possibility. And each man's possibilities have also to be taken account of. Possibilities are not merely quantitative, they are essentially qualitative. The existentialists attempted to understand human freedom in reference to the individual existential possibilities. Kierkegaard in his book *Either/Or* (1843) initiated an existential understanding of freedom. An individual faces his freedom in a situation of either/or. If there is no such possibility, the question of freedom does not arise. He, in his later works, delineated further contours of human choice. Freedom is not a concept. It is an existential reality. He concerned himself primarily with ontological freedom. Marcel's work, *The Mystery of Being* (1950) reflects his philosophy of freedom. Freedom is not a rational concept. It is not a problem but belongs to the domain of mystery. It is disclosed in self's possibility for commitment and reason, promise, and betrayal. Faith and freedom reflect transcendence. Jaspers in his *Reason and Existence*(1935) makes the truth of Existence confront man with transcendence by virtue of which freedom is disclosed to man. His phenomenological method establishes the concrete possibility of freedom. Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) is a phenomenological description of being-in-the-world. Freedom is disclosed in concrete situations and man wins or loses the possibilities of his existence. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is a phenomenological study of Being-in-itself(en-soi) and Being-for-itself(pour-soi). Man is condemned to be free. Freedom arises in a situation. Choice is the essence of freedom. Man cannot escape from it. It is interesting to note that the Westerners are habitual in tracing the genealogy and themes of existentialism from the Greek heritage. The fabric of Existentialism, for example, starts from Plato's Allegory of the

Cave recorded in his dialogue, *The Republic*. It banks upon the Symposium as well. It moves to St. Augustine's *Confessions*; Pascal's *Pensees*; Rousseau's *A Discourse on the Moral effects of the art and Sciences*; Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode*, Goethe's *Faust*; Hegel's *The phenomenology of Mind*, *The Introduction to the philosophy of History*; Holderlin's *Bread and Wine*; Stendhal's *The Red and the black*; Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* *Fear and Trembling*, *The Concept of Dread*, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *The Sickness unto Death*; Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* "the Grand Inquisitor" in the *Brothers Karamazov*; Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Joyful Wisdom*, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morals*. *The Will to Power*; Mill's *Autobiography*; Dickens's *Hard Times*; Arnold's *Dover Beach*, *Hebraism and Hellenism*; Crane's *The Open Boat*; James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; Rilke's *The Note books of Malte Laurids Brigge*, *Duino Elegies*; Kafka's *Diaries*; 1914-1923, *The Great Wall of China*, *The Trial*; Hemingway's *A Clean Well-lighted Place*; Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life*; Gasset's *In Search of Goethe From Within*; Heidegger's *Being and Time*, *What is Metaphysics*, *Holderlin and the essence of poetry*; Jasper's *Reason and Existenz*, *Truth and Symbol*; Sartre's *Nausea*, *Being and Nothingness*, *The Wall*, *Existentialism is a Humanism*; Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The plague*, *The*

Rebel; Merleau-ponty's *The Phenomenology of perception*, *The primacy of Perception*; Buber's *I and Thou*, *Between Man and Man*; Berdyaev's *Slavery and Freedom*; Marcel's *Being and Having*; Tillich's *The Courage to Be*. The literary overture is identified with Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. The work in question does not strictly record the authors in their chronological order but groups them in reference to the vital epochs and the corresponding themes. Though this existential repository excludes certain important writers and a few masterpiece writings on the subject yet it succeeds in giving a peep in the heart of existentialism. The essential contradiction of this movement is that it totally surrenders to human finitude. Either transcendence is denied or is placed within immanence. Even vertical transcendence, if any, remains on the periphery. The metaphysical understanding of vertical and horizontal dimensions is never developed. Freedom no doubt, is essential to man but first one must know what its essentiality is? The existentialists notion of possibility and freedom, is highly

constricted inspite of the claims to the contrary. The sealing of the metaphysical possibilities of human existence has restricted the scope of possibility. With the negation of the possibility of contemplation, the possibility of action has been highly cramped. The sphere of action has merely become an outwardness which is counterfeit to inwardness. The concepts of existential metaphysics unlike that of intellectual/ traditional metaphysics do not open limitless perspectives of possibilities. They simply extend the boundaries of the finite. The existentialists have no doubt, much to say than the Rationalists, Positivists, Empiricists, Dialectical Materialists, Linguistic analysts and other schools of thought but their basic error consists in insulating their phenomenological method from the objective principle of intellectuality. As a consequence their understanding of man and his situation turns deceptive. The concepts of individuality or person, reason, truth, nothingness, dread, freedom, choice, commitment, faith, transcendence, value, community, courage, suffering, love, joy, etc., lose their metaphysical meaning and significance. The existentialist, in the ultimate analyses, is merely the protogoras of existence. His phenomenological method fails to surmount the element of duality ingrained in the Western mode of thought. Since his idea of freedom emerges from this basic duality, therefore, it submerges into contradiction and become an ultimate constraint. True phenomenology makes the possibility of freedom manifest from the principle of “non duality” and consequently there arises neither constraint nor any contradiction. It passes from Non-Being to Being from “non duality” to unity. The source of freedom is the Freedom Itself. Man is a ray of the Infinite. He partakes of the universal possibility. He is the manifest degree of the Unmanifest. He is endowed with relative freedom in reference to the Absolute. His participation in the unity of Being shall make him free. Man takes his credentials from the Infinite. Though his relative freedom is absolute in a situation yet, in the ultimate analysis it is identified with the liberty Itself. Freedom is the reality and identity of a being which takes its light from the universal Being.

The fundamental lesson of the primordial tradition is expressed in the dictum ‘Know Thyself’. Man must know’ his own fundamental and primordial Nature’ before embarking on the voyage to the perilous seas. The modern West inspite of pretensions to the contrary does not know the essence of man; the fullness of his reality. The macrocosm and microcosm

aspects are not integrated in the hierarchy of the infinite. Man's isolation from his metaphysical rank degrades his whole being. It is a violation of inherent human dignity. His manifest behaviour is not the sole reality. Otherwise, he is caught in the net of multiplicity without an access to unity. He is identified with the surface aspects of his being. The Western disciplines lack the precise methodology to study the totality of man. Modern psychology, in particular, by a profane touch molests the sacredness of man. It mutilates his inner reality and transforms him into a hybrid. All systems and theories of Western psychology are condemned to take man as a phantom. Resultantly, the idea of freedom has been contaminated with the virus of finitude. The existential psychologists or psychotherapists are equally vulnerable to this widespread infirmity. The most fatal accident of the modern West has been to consider man merely an accident with no relation to the universal Substance. And without commitment with Freedom Itself, man's sense of freedom is illusory. It is metaphysics which unveils the layer of concealedness by maintaining a respectful attitude toward the inexpressible. It opens up a universe of possibilities. Unless one understands the metaphysical scheme of Reality, the perception of things shall remain essentially erroneous. The sources and modes of knowledge in the modern West, have remained highly limited. Sense-experience, reason and intuition have lost their metaphysical validity. Reason and imagination are completely divorced from intellect. Knowledge is not rooted in the Universal and the-formless. The concept of pure intellect with corresponding principal and archetypal truths is completely absent. Man's transcendent and immanent dimensions are not consummated metaphysically. Schuon says: "When we speak of transcendence, we understand in general objective transcendence, that of the principle which is above us as it is above the world; and when we speak of immanence, we understand generally speaking subjective immanence, that of the self, which is within us. It is important to mention that there is also a subjective transcendence, that of the self within us in as much as it transcends the ego; and likewise there is also an objective immanence, that of the principle in so far as it is immanent in the world, not so in so far as it excludes it and annihilates it by its transcendence...the Transcendent, by virtue of its infinity, projects existence and thereby necessitates immanence; and the Immanent, by virtue of its absoluteness

necessarily remains transcendent in relation to existence¹³⁶”. He derives freedom of the will from the totality of the intelligence. Objectivity which confers self-transcendence and sacrifice on the will thereby making it free. We agree in principle with this penetrating analysis of objectivity except with an observation that the term ‘freedom of the will’ which frequently occurs in the writings of Schuon is not an appropriate term. Though it is derived from the totality of intelligence yet it gives an impression as if it is a condition of freedom. The will is not the foundation of the primordial freedom; it is merely its manifestation. It is posited by reflection. It is not the freedom of the will but it is man who is free. It is he who chooses his will. Man’s totality and his freedom, in the ultimate analysis are identical.

Man is prefigured in the Absolute. He is fundamentally inspired by truth. It is his ultimate orientation with God which bestows upon him freedom without constraint. Freedom is not only possible it is equally desirable. The capacity to transcend ourselves ushers in a corresponding freedom. Man has to transcend his empirical ego and has to relate himself to the self. He is the meeting point of the inward and the outward. The metaphysical concept of personality rises above the notion of individuality and makes man as quasi-divine’. The western concept of individuality is isolated from the Self-the transcendent and permanent principle-thereby imposing on it a purely illusory existence. Individuality in order to become personality has to derive all its reality from the principle. This is what the existentialists, in particular, and the westerners in general, shall never learn. They consider man more or less, as a windowless system. Even where they provide windows they put down shutters to ward off the light of transcendence. However, at present, they have completely jammed these shutters. They do not want to see that man is relative to the Absolute and that he derives his reality from the Universal. And his task is to ‘possess the highest possibilities in their fullest development’. Guenon says:”...a being will remain throughout the whole of his individual existence what he is potentially at the time of his birth. The question why a being is himself and not another is a pointless one; the truth is that every being, each according to his nature, is a necessary element in the total and universal harmony¹³⁷”. The idea may be’ nauseating to those who

¹³⁶ From the Divine to the Human, World Wisdom Books,p. 1.

¹³⁷ Guenon, Op.Cit. pp.219-20.

do not take into consideration' the intellectual possibilities of each human being' and the circumstances in which they are undertaken. We do not make man the victim of his heredity or environment for the simple reason that man by an act of self-transcendence overcomes both inner and outer obstacles, if any. We simply want each person to be himself. And this is man's basic vocation which manifests in the possibility of Freedom. It make man choose between the real and the illusory; between good and evil.

Before concluding our discourse on the possibility of freedom it is significant to analyze a few aspects of Iqbal's concept of freedom. He raises certain questions; "Does the ego then determine its own activity? If so, how is the self-determination of the ego related to the determinism of the spatio-temporal order? Is personal causality a special kind of causality, or only a disguised form of the mechanism of Nature?. He thinks that the modern tendency to give a mechanistic interpretation of the consciousness does not understand the qualitative difference between the material and the human level. He says;" ...the controversy between the advocates of Mechanism and Freedom arises from a wrong view of intelligent. action which modern psychology, unmindful of its own independence as a science, possessing a special set of facts to observe, was bound to take on account of its slavish imitation of physical sciences. The view that ego-activity is a succession of thoughts and ideas, ultimately resolvable to units of sensations, is only another form of atomic materialism which forms the basis of modern science"¹³⁸. Though Iqbal's observation is (highly illuminating yet he fails to sustain it. The reason being) that he criticises science and philosophy from within the Western orbit. After demolishing one idol, he is trapped by the other in hope of philosophic salvation. There is shift of idols, no doubt, but the spirit of 'idolatry' remains essentially the same. He, in the particular instance, takes a fancy towards Configuration or Gestalt Psychology (and remarks, "There is, however, some relief in thinking) that the new German Psychology, known as Configuration psychology, may succeed in securing the independence of Biology. This newer German Psychology teaches us that a careful study of intelligent behavior discloses the fact of 'insight' over and above the' mere succession of sensation. This 'insight' is the ego's appreciation of temporal, spatial and causal relation of things- the choice,

¹³⁸ The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Ashraf, Lahore, 19, p.107.

that is to say of data, in view of the goal or purpose which the ego has set before itself for the time being...The essential feature of a purposive act is its vision of a future situation which does not appear to admit any explanation in terms of physiology...The view of the environment as a system of cause and effect is thus an indispensable instrument of the ego, and not a final expression of the nature of Reality. Indeed in interpreting Nature in this way the ego understands and masters its environment, and thereby acquires and amplifies its freedom”¹³⁹. He does not seem to transcend the one-dimensional Western spectrum. He wants the independence of psychology and biology from the physical sciences but does not envisage their independence from the network of the Western profane thought. He does not question the presuppositions of the Occidental world. Rather, he considers the spirit of Islam and the West as identical. This is precisely the reason that his critique of modern thought remains peripheral. Modern psychology can never understand the relationship of knowledge and consciousness. The element of ‘insight ‘ over and above the mere succession of sensations’ does not transcend the realm of consciousness. And knowledge understood purely in its metaphysical sense can in no wise be identified with consciousness. Consciousness is contingent and thereby cannot fully embrace the Unconditioned. Mechanistic psychology and the Gestalt one both belong to the contingent realm. Consequently, they fall short of knowing the totality of man. They deal with “phenomenal consciousness”. which by definition belong to the phenomena. The psychologist lacks the metaphysical method to study the nature of consciousness. He fails to realize that consciousness is one manifestation of the universal domain and that it belongs to a particular mode of being. It cannot be identified with the intellectual principle itself. There are multiple states of being, each state having a different participation in universal intelligence. Freedom has infinite possibilities of non-manifestation and manifestation. It cannot be realized by consciousness alone. Likewise, the principle of cause and effect does not belong to a single domain. The Western notion of causality is highly limited. The metaphysical conception of causation opens up limitless vistas of freedom and establishes an intimate relationship of necessity and freedom. It is, in fact, a final expression of the

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 107-108.

nature of Reality'. Divine necessity and Divine Freedom enjoy a metaphysical identity.

Iqbal further says; "Thus the element of guidance and directive control in the ego's activity clearly shows that the ego is a free personal causality. He shares in the life and freedom of the ultimate Ego who, by permitting the emergence of a finite ego, capable of private initiative, has limited this freedom of His own free will,"¹⁴⁰ It is pertinent to point out that freedom can both be 'acquired' and 'amplified.' Prayer in Islam is the ego's escape from mechanism to freedom. From our point of view if man chooses a right possibility, it enlarges and deepens the canvases of his personality and opens up higher possibilities of human existence. And if, on the other hand, he chooses a wrong possibility and sustains in his persistence, he ultimately loses freedom to realize his true essence. This is the modern 'Fall of Man'. The possibility of choose entails dread, anguish and courage. One has to achieve the identity of knowledge and being otherwise man shall turn into a mere fragmentation. However, his relative surrender to freedom can be reactivated by the alchemical work. It opens the soul to the spirit. It is Sulphur and Quicksilver which restore the creative equilibrium. Man no more remains divided within himself. He realizes the process of spiritual transmutation.

Thus, the possibility of freedom is such a risky Divine gift that if one becomes perfidious to it, it may destroy him completely. Our point of view is that the philosophical understanding falls short of the metaphysical one and this constitutes the failure of all philosophies of Religion. It is only when one transcends the limitations of one's ego or contingent consciousness that one is reunited with Freedom Itself. There is no limitation on Divine Freedom. Man becomes the vehicle of Absolute Freedom. It is the presence of the Absolute which confers reality on man. One can only understand the possibility of freedom if one starts from the Freedom Itself.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 108.