

## **PREFATORY REMARKS**

## Prefatory Remarks

The present dissertation is a statement of my personal reactions, cognitive as well as affective to the life at large. As a result I have not faked dispassionateness either in the style of writing or in the gathering of materials. Man in honesty, takes sides and ethics avowedly is an affair of taking sides, though often it is cloaked under logic. This has been an established way of dealing with the problems of ethics. But that need not be the only way. The problem of free will, in particular, has an existential ring about it, and in keeping with the existentiality of the issue I have ventured freely between literature and philosophy. Both are, as Richard Rorty has suggested, are narratives of human encounter. There is hardly any literary work of depth without a philosophical dimension. And Greek drama, the tragedies in particular, are the sources of philosophical issues and ideas to the European mind of the subsequent ages. I open my book in a similar fashion.

Why at all do I address myself to dealing with the problem of free will? The answer, to start with, may appear non-academic, but a sharp distinction between the two worlds, academic and non-academic cannot perhaps be made. Our philosophical problems have their roots in the context of the non-academic world ; physics is temporally prior to metaphysics. As a conscious member of a society one cannot but fail to notice acts of corruption, nepotism and bribery in high places such that the common people have lost faith in politics, bureaucracy, legal institutions, defence etc. Virtue has become defunct and vice is being worshiped. All these may appear as mere tall talks but these are the problems of the time. All such things must be taken into consideration in order to understand the

philosophical mood of a person of this time because no one can jump over his or her own shadow.

Each case of corruption, bribery or indiscipline is attributed to “system failure”. Corruption and bribery are argued by some as necessary lubricants for a slow and cumbersome system of administration. Human responsibility is thus disowned. If no individual is responsible for the mess that exists, then there is nothing we can do to improve the situation. If we could ask a cleric, an officer, a physician, a teacher or a student about the illicit means they use, they will point either to a system or to another person; none of us is willing to shoulder the responsibility of the things we do and their consequences. But that would lead us to say that we have no freedom of will; whatever we do, we do—not out of our will. If that is the case, the institution of morality is at stakes, for freedom of will is looked upon as the essence of morality. Another point we would like to mention here, namely that whatever vices have been mentioned earlier as a sign of moral decline are also matters of legal concern. There are reasons to believe that the moral and the legal have essential similarity. Freedom of the will is presupposed by both the institutions. The difference between the two lies in the nature and extent of the authority each exercises. If freedom is a mere fantasy, the legal institution too loses its teeth, its prescriptive authority. However, it is hard to believe that human choices or decisions are not free and deliberate, that they are determined. But again, it is not a matter of mere personal belief or conviction. The whole thing must be looked at in an unprejudiced manner. This is how I intend to concern myself with the problem of free will.

The problem of freewill as opposed to determinism is an ancient one. In the West, the will and the problem of its freedom was brought to a

sharp focus by the Greek tragedians. It was later taken up by Aristotle. But before we proceed to map the heritage, we would like to chart out the conceptual tension obtaining between freedom and determinism, two apparently opposed concepts. :

The theory of free will is the theory that man is free to choose and act the way he wants to. Determinism, on the other hand, postulates that all events, including human actions are predetermined. It is a fact of our everyday experience that on many occasions we are free agents, able to do or refrain from doing something. The ordinary, commonsense man has always a belief in his personal free will. But that is questioned both by Christian theology and Physical sciences particularly physics. In the theological context it is usual to speak of termination, implying that everything, including every human choice, has been fixed in advance by divine fore knowledge. If God is all knowing does that leave any room for human choice and responsibility? The omniscient supreme Being of Christian theology renders human freedom a sham. A far more rigorous deterministic theory appeared with the progress of classical physics from the seventeenth century down to the end of the nineteenth century. Its continued success made determinism an absolutely inescapable doctrine, not only in the explanation and prediction of natural events but of human actions too.

The philosophical issues of the problem of free will are concerned with logical presuppositions and logical incompatibilities, to discover what the presuppositions and implications of the theories of freedom and determinism are and whether or not the two can be reconciled. The adherents of the reconciliation thesis are called compatibilists. Those who deny that such reconciliation can be brought about are the incompatibilists.

Sometimes the two concepts of freedom and determinism are so defined that one explicitly excludes the other. Yet it is worthwhile to notice that many philosophers are compatibilists e.g. Locke, Hume, Leibnitz etc.

Ordinarily, we contrast acting out of our own freewill with acting under compulsion. But, even the person who acts under compulsion is an agent, whereas, the person who is simply picked up by main force and thrown as missile-victim is not. The crux here is what is essentially involved is action, not freewill in everyday sense. Determinism too may be considered only in terms of causes necessitating these effects. But it is also possible to speak of conduct determined by the motives; and to say this is not so is clearly to imply that there was no alternative.

Modern problems in this area have centred round the claim that human actions are, or are capable of being (had we the knowledge) causally explained; that is, they either (a) fall under (causal) physical laws or (b) are physically determined (in the sense in which the movements of inanimate physical objects are held to be physically determined). This might mean, of a given event  $c$  (falling under a law) that its effect  $e$  (a) could have been predicted or (b) could not but have happened. When  $e$  is a human action, the tension is between describing it as voluntarily (if this means "within our power to do or not to do, as we choose") and claiming that it could have been predicted, or (given circumstance  $c$ )  $e$  could not but have happened. But to deny that human actions fall into the realm of causality as ordinarily understood creates problems. In what sense then can we be said to cause our own actions (and hence be responsible for them, as the concept of freewill implies) rather than have them accidentally happen to us? Compatibilists believe that the concept of freewill must involve causality.

In a nutshell, the summary of our present work may be given as follows : what we have tried first is to trace the problem in the history of human thought. The view on freedom to be held depends to a great extent on the theory of obligation one holds. In this regard, the utilitarian theory of obligation, with a special reference to Mill's utilitarianism would be undertaken. Human actions may not always be oriented to pleasure and happiness but in a broad sense, teleology can be pertinently talked about in connection with human actions. The Indian tradition too mostly took it for granted that the natural human attitude is to pursue happiness and try to avoid pain. However, there is also a critique of happiness and its aspects in the concept of *nivṛtti*. If there is a sense of *sukha*, which is not ultimately questionable and counterproductive, it has to be detached from the notion of desire and its pursuit. It must be associated with the cessation of desire. Instead of its gratification, it must be a happiness which amounts to contentment, inner peace, acceptance and recognition of one's identity. We find this in, different ways, in Buddhism as well as Hinduism. In modern iwestern thought also the idea of pursuit of happiness has not remained unchallenged.

It is survival, we may say, for which human beings act. There is no way out from this. Many questions would arise here. For example, what sort of survival do we have in mind? A brute also acts for survival. If survival is the last word, should we lead a life of a brute? By survival we mean survival with human dignity. To stand up like a man and not to submit like a brute, to measure up to our capabilities. Survival does not mean to exist merely but to have a fulfilled life. Such a kind of survival seeking fulfilment and self-realisation should incorporate a measure of altruism, should take other people seriously. We discharge our obligations and commitments

because we are free agents. If human actions were inexorably determined by physical states we could not have talked of going out of our way to help others, we doubt whether we could have talked of even acting selfishly. We have not gone for describing or explaining the quality of life to be led in detail. We are only in search of a least common factor in all of acts that are called moral, namely what makes a man a moral agent? . And whatever may be our theory moral obligation, it must have its corresponding theory of freedom. We have attempted to advocate a theory of "rational determinacy". It is what has freed man from mere brutality, but freedom cannot be completely de-linked from motives or causes. There are many technical ways to tackle the problem. But simply speaking, to act morally is to act rationally for survival. And this survival could not mean the individual survival, because no man can live alone.

To sum up, what we want to emphasise in an idiosyncratic manner is that exercise of the freedom of will is connected with our survival. By 'survival' we do not mean a raw, physical existence, but a 'good life' informed by duties and commitments, acquisition and practice of virtues and responsible dealings with our fellows. The moral agent as a free agent is not a solitary person. Morality presupposes a non-solipsistic universe.