

ROGHAYEH SHANBEH

Faculty Member, Department Language and Persian Literature,
Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran

Shanbehee@gmail.com

Determinism and Free Will from the Viewpoint of Sadi and Plotinus

Abstract

Affinities and common themes in human thought bespeak of interactions among opinions of the thinkers throughout the world and over the span of time.

In this respect, contribution of Greek thinkers and philosophers to the world especially Iran is undeniable.

Philosophical and literary thoughts of great Greek philosophers, including: Plato and Aristotle, especially, the Neo-Platonic school of Plotinus have overshadowed the philosophical, mystical and literary thought of Iran, so strongly that we not only witness their direct influence on the opinions and ideas of Iranian scholars, but also trace their philosophical thoughts among poets and writers who are not philosophers.

Among these common ideas is the philosophical issue of "determinism and free will" from the viewpoint of the great third

century AD Greek philosopher "Plotinus" and "Sadi" the celebrated poet and writer of the seventh century of Hegira (thirteenth century AD) who regardless of the historical, geographical and intellectual differences which exist between these two great men of philosophy and letters, share some commonalities.

The equivocal view of "Plotinus" on "determinism and free will" where it refers to his belief in predestination and its effects on human life to where it reminds man of his roles and responsibilities, bespeak of his rejection of rejected "pure determinism" and "absolute free will" because he sees man as complicated entity who has a free quintessence, although this free quintessence cannot exist beyond the realm of predestination and cosmic plot.

He believes if human actions were pre-ordained, volition, free will and freedom made no sense. But although he believed in volition and free will in human nature, he never deemed this free will as total.

Such an approach to "determinism and free will" which is in fact the belief in both "determinism and free will" is also significant in the view of "Sadi" on this philosophical issue.

Using his usual technique in Gulistan tales, that is; establishing binary oppositions in creating characters and themes with a dialectic and conflict between two of his characters one of which is in favor of determinism and the other advocates free will,

he actually discusses this issue in its various aspects including: aliment, death, effort and the effects of heredity and environment on education so that through strong arguments of characters in "Gulistan" tales we realize his belief in both determinism and free will in human life.

Keywords:

Plotinus, Sadi, determinism, free will

Determinism and Free Will from the Viewpoint of Sadi and Plotinus

Introduction

The issue of "determinism and free will" which is one of the issues considered by Plotinus, famous Greek philosopher, has also been considered in theology by many theologians such as Ashaere and Motazele³. But unlike Ashaere who have adopted "determinism" and consider God the creator of creatures and all their deeds and unlike Motazele who merely believe in "free will" and believe that 'A creature has power over his deeds whether good or evil' (Shahrestani, 1982:68). He believes in both "free will" and "determinism".

Although the beliefs of Ashaere and Motazele are rooted in the Quran⁴, but another group of Islamic sects, the Imamite Shiite, in contrast to Ashaere and Motazele, do not believe in pure determinism or free will but their belief indicates an issue in

between these two, that is; 'neither determinism nor free will but rather something in between these two issues' (Kulayni, 2002:224).

This class, that is; the Imamite Shiite believe in the precedence of God's knowledge over the deeds of the creatures but unlike Ashaere who believe all these deeds including good and evil are issued from God, believe in the issuance of these deeds from creatures themselves, and are of the belief that knowledge of something does not necessarily lead to its creation (Saduq, 1992: 18-19).

According to the Shiite philosophers and theologians 'man is the near cause of the deed and God is the remote and the first cause of it' (Davari, 1990: 134).

In regard to determinism and free will, Azizoddin Nasafi believes that in having "talent" man is compelled and free in diligence and this suggests that he believes in both determinism and free will (Nasafi, 2005: 211).

In regard to the issue of determinism and free will, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi also believes that: 'the deed in terms of its being a deed is condemned to be predestined by God, but committing it is up to humans' (Ibn Arabi, 2006: 241).

With this explanation we realize that the way of thinking of Shiite theologians in regard to the issue of determinism and free will is very close to Plotinus's opinion.

But Sadi had been born in a family of scholars of Shafei

sect (Zarinkub, 2000: 15). and had been trained in the Baghdad Nezamiye School where education was according to the tradition of this sect (Masse, 1990: 37).

Although this sect along with other Sunni sects, namely: Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali had prepared the grounds for the success of Ashari school in propagating theological principles (Nas, 1993: 755). and also some have considered him a follower of the Ashari theological school (Mohit Tabatabai, 1996: 288). but contrary to the Ashari, Sadi does not believe in determinism. It can even be said that although some believe that he had a tendency toward free will and freedom, (Zarinkub, 2000: 156). he is not solely reliant on human volition and free will.

In regard to the issue of determinism and free will from his point of view, Henri Masse writes:

We feel that Sadi vacillates between determinism which is imposed on him by tradition and custom and free will which originates from his heartfelt inspiration. (Masse, 1990: 243).

French researcher Sylvestre de Sacy also comments on his belief in determination and free will:

'Sadi is a moral teacher who is located between two opposing ideas: one is the belief in fate and destiny and predestination which turns man into a quite passive creature that accepts anything and the other autonomy and free will which abandons man totally to himself and apparently pulls him out of the scope of divine power' (de sacy, 1399: 470).

So regardless of all the historical, geographical and intellectual differences which exist between Plotinus, the Western philosopher, and Sadi the eloquent poet of the East, in terms of their views on the issues of determinism and free will, they are consistent. In this paper, the author aims at comparing their views in this regard.

While studying Plotinus's ideas regarding the subject of determinism and free will, we notice that he gives great importance to free will and man's role in determining his own destiny. He opposes the belief that everything is subject to a single principle, and believes that freedom and will, where everything depends on causes that have been pre-determined, is nothing but a name.

'If you accept that everything is subject to a single principle, then you will have no other duty than to surrender to destiny to take us wherever it wants. In such case, our perceptions are dependent on the causes that are pre-determined and our will depends on our perception and our freedom is nothing more than a name' (Plotinus, 1987: 298).

He who believes in human will and freedom and deems nothing without a cause and, at the same time, does not wish to endanger human autonomy, in expressing the reason for this tendency and will, speaks of spirit and its importance:

'Undoubtedly, the spirit is a principle of another nature to which we must pay due attention. This spirit is not an insignificant principle because, unlike other things, it does not spring out of a seed but is itself the cause for its own activities and effects. Spirit, while it is single and bodiless, has complete mastery over itself and is independent of all causes of physical universe. But when it descends from its orbit and falls into the corporeal body, no longer has complete mastery over itself because it is linked with other objects and hence sometimes in its activity becomes subject to external circumstances and sometimes dominates them and guides them according to its own desire' (Plotinus, 1987: 299).

He considers good and evil the fate that the cosmic plot gives man as fits his nature and moral characteristics (Plotinus, 1987: 327). To the extent that he explicitly states that the spirit brings good or evil ethics with itself to the scene of creation (Plotinus, 1987: 328).

But with all these circumstances along his deterministic thinking, he defines good and evil spirits in their degree of mastery over the body and corporeal desires.

'The better spirit gains more dominance and the evil one less because such a spirit surrenders to the emotions and states of body and obeys the desires and excitements and in destitute turns to baseness and in wealth becomes weak-minded and if he

comes to power, he will have a propensity for tyranny. But the better spirit abides the unfavorable circumstances and changes them rather than being affected by them' (Plotinus, 1987: 300).

So we realize that he believes in both destiny and human will because he believes that every spirit has a destiny given to him by the cosmic plot but after receiving this program from the world, he begins the game with his own artistry. So he is neither completely condemned to determinism nor has absolute free will:

'In the drama of the world, the fate bestowed to the spirit is by no means accidental, but rather the cosmic plot gives it to him and the spirit, after wearing the attire of the fate, in the cosmic drama which is governed by the cosmic plot, starts the game' (Plotinus, 1987: 328).

Sadi also in the form of anecdotes and tales related in Gulistan, has referred to this issue, that is; people being good and evil, and whether training and education can be effective on the nature of human beings or not including the fourth tale of the first chapter of Gulistan.

While narrating the story which is the tale of a clan of thieves being captured by the king's army and their being killed as ordered by him, he creates two characters, the king and the minister who, respectively, advocate determinism and free will, so

that with words and arguments that each of them expresses in confirmation of determinism or free will, he may delineate his central idea which is the effect of training and education on changing the human nature.

Among this clan of thieves and vagrants, there is a young man and the minister asks the king to give him an opportunity so that, under the education of the minister, his villainous temper and moral may change, but the king who believes that:

'an evil root will not thrive in a goodly shade. To educate the worthless, is like throwing a walnut upon a dome' (Sadi, 2000:32).

is not satisfied and to prove his claim that education and training are not effective in changing human nature and temperament, thus speaks:

'The wolf's whelp will at length become a wolf, although it be brought up along with men' (Sadi, 2000: 34).

But eventually influenced by the persistence and arguments of the minister who firmly believes that the young man can be guided and saved from inhuman temperament by training and education, despite his inner propensity, the king exempts the young man from execution.

Thus, through a dialectical structure and a dual confrontation in creating the characters of this tale in the form of king and minister and also the dual content of determinism and free will, emphatically refers to both issues- although the story ends in favor of the theory of "determinism" and as the king had

predicted, training of the minister was not effective on the young man who was evil in essence, as after a while, this young man who had adopted his father's temperament and character, and just like him had become the leader of another clan of thieves, murdered the minister and his sons in spite of the minister's favors.

It is true that in regard to the subject of "essence" and the impact of education on it, Sadi's thought is in favor of "determinism" just as in many cases; he does not consider education to be effective because he believes that the element, essence and nature of human beings is pre-determined, such as where he says:

'Although Silver and gold are produced from a stone, yet these metals are not to be found in every stone. The star canopus shines all over the world, but the scented leather comes only from yemen' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VII, Tale 6).

Or elsewhere he says:

'when nature has given capacity, instruction will make impression; but if iron is not of a proper temper, no polishing will make it good' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VII, Tale I).

But the reality is that all this emphasis on and advice about the issue of education and basically writing "Gulistan" and "Bustan" and expressing all those moral and social points and

advices, reveal his belief in "free will" and the attempt for gaining happiness.

That he severally refers to the necessity of acquiring art and to its superiority over birth and origin bespeaks of his firm belief in the "free will" of man.

'Ashes, although of high origin, fire being of a noble nature, yet having no intrinsic worth, are no better than dust. Suger obtains not its value from the cane, but from its innate quality' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VIII, tale LVI)

His stressed on the good companions and avoiding the company of the ignorant also demonstrates the fact that he does not confine prosperity and misery and goodness and badness of the mankind to the eternal providence. Just as in regard to companionship of the good he says:

'One day in the bath a piece of perfumed clay came to me from the hand of a friend, I Said to it, Art thou musk, or an artificial Compound of Sweets? For I am Charmed with the delightful odour. "It answered". I was a worthless piece of clay, but having for a season associated with the rose, the virtue of my companion was communicated to me; other wise I am the same identical earth that I was at first' (Sadi, 2000: Preface, 13).

Or elsewhere in connection with the same issue says:

'The Cloth that covers the kaaba, and which they kiss, is not famous from having been manufactured by the silkworm; it associated some days with one who is venerable, on which account it became venerable. Like himself' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VII. Tale, VIII).

Or about avoiding evil company he says:

'Whosoever associates with the wicked, although he may not imbibe their principles, will be accused of following their ways' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VIII, Tale LXXX).

So as it was mentioned in these tales and seemingly contradictory words which were referred to as "binary oppositions" the emergence of an idea is anticipated which suggests both determinism and free will. In this regard, we cite his beautiful words:

'A Capacity without education is deplorable, and education without capacity is thrown away' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VIII, tale LV1).

When we spoke of Plotinus's belief in the goodness and evilness of the spirit and that he considered goodness and evilness as part of the cosmic plot which had been bestowed to the spirit, the question we were dealing with was that in this case, when good and evil are out of man's control, then what does

praising or criticizing human beings on this basis mean?

In response to this question, Plotinus believes that praising and criticizing the players of the world stage is not due to their good or bad roles but rather due to their good or bad performance of those roles. Therefore he considers them involved in the praise and criticism they receive.

He believes that the beauty of the world is due to the harmony of the parts with the entire universe. He believes that the role we play in this harmony does not matter but how to play the role and the quality of the performance of the roles is what makes a considerable contribution to establishing this coordination:

'Beauty of the world depends on how the individual plays his role, even though it is ugly and evil, and thus participates in the harmony of the entire universe. A musical instrument does not produce a single sound and even its weak sounds help create harmony because harmony is created as a result of combination of disparate sounds' (Plotinus, 1987: 328).

Of course, unlike Plotinus, Sadi does not look at the world from the viewpoint of a philosopher and unlike him does not view the universe as an integrated whole so as to consider evil roles as necessary to its existence and harmony of its system but just like Plotinus who mentions a factor and origin beyond his

free will for his goodness and evilness, he believes that good and evil and happiness and misery have been pre-determined by God not man. Hence he says:

'The Divine will displaces one from the throne of royalty, and preserves another in the fish's belly' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VIII, tale LXXXVIII).

Or somewhere else, says:

'He who is born deaf, how can he hear; and he on whom the noose is flung, how can he avoid going? but this happiness is not procurable by the strength of the arm, until it is granted by God' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VIII, tale XCL).

In expressing the same theme he quotes a dervish while praying to God who says:

'O God shew pity towards the wicked, for on the good, thou hast already bestowed mercy, by having created them virtuous' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter VIII, tale XCVIII).

Or somewhere beautifully states that:

'Riches are not to be obtained by bodily exertion, but the remedy against want is to moderate our desires' Or 'If every hair of your head possessed two hundred accomplishments, they would be of no use when fortune is unpropitious' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter III, tale XXVIII).

But his stress on reward and punishment of the Judgment Day and inviting to goodness and virtue and referring to the brevity of life and not being proud of it, actually indicate his belief in effort and consequently, "free will" just as in this tale:

'A King having Commanded on innocent person to be put to death, he said, "O King, seek not your own injury by venting your wrath on me". The King asked, in what manner. He replied, "This torture will cease with me in an instant, and the crime there of will remain with you for ever' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter 1, tale XXX).

Or somewhere else, he says:

'Take the cotton out of thine ear, and distribute justice to mankind, for if thou refusest justice, there will be a day of retribution' (Sadi, 2000: Chapter 1, tale X).

After speaking of good and evil roles of men and that the cosmic plot has determined these roles, Plotinus has also spoken of blame and criticism because he does not believe in "pure determinism". He believes that man is not a simple creature because he is not merely what has been made. Because if this were the case, no justification existed for blaming him. But unlike other creatures, human beings are to blame. So it turns out that they possess free will but not a free will outside the predestination and cosmic plot. (Plotinus, 1987: 338-339).

In this respect, he states that by compliance and

compliance to wisdom and knowledge, man will have a better spirit. (Plotinus, 1987: First Treatise of Aeneid III).

Because: 'Man can make a better use of the range of his freedom at the rate that he uses his innate perception, wisdom and thought' (Heidari, 2005: 268).

In this regard, 'He deems independent only those who follow the workings of reason and are detached from the emotions and affections of the body' (Plotinus, 1987: 1049).

Conclusion

Just like Plotinus, Sadi also has an equivocal attitude towards determinism and free will because like him he refers to both predestination and its effects on human life and to free will and man's responsibility. But unlike Plotinus who has examined this issue complicatedly but explicitly from a philosopher's viewpoint, using a simple language but a dialectic structure, that is; "binary oppositions" technique in the form of two opposing characters or two contrasting themes, he displays the equilibrium resulting from unity of opposites.

References:

- 1- Holy Quran. (1995). Trans. Abdolmohammad Ayati, Tehran: Soroush.
- 2- Davari, R. (1990). Falsafeh dar Iran. Hekmat.
- 3- - Dekhoda, A. (1994). Loghatnameh. Tehran: Tehran University.
- 4- de Sacy, S. (1399). Magham Sadi dar Adabiyat French. (The Chain of the Beloved's Tress), Kavus Hasan Lee, trans. Jalal Sattari, Haft Orang.
- 5- Halabi, A. (2003). Tarikh Tamadun dar Islam. Tehran: Asatir.
- 6- Heidari, F. (2005). Pendarhaye Yunani dar Masnavi. Tehran: Rozane.
- 7- Ibn Arabi, M. (2006). Sharhe Naghsha Alfusus. researched by Abdoreza Mazaheri. Khorshid Baran.
- 8- Kulayni, A. (2002). Usool Kafi. Trans. Haj Seyed Javad Mostafavi Khorasani. Tehran: Center for Publishing the Culture of Ahlebeit.
- 9- Masse, H. (1990). Tahghigh Darbareye sadi. Trans. Gholamhosein Yousefi and Mohammad Hasan Mahdavi Ardebili, Toos.
- 10- Mohit Tabatabai, M. (1996). Nokati Dar Sargozashte sadi. (Articles about the Life and Poetry of Saadi), Mansour Rastegar Fasaee. Tehran: Amir Kabir.
- 11- Nas, J. (1993). Tarikh Jame Adyan. Trans. Ali Asghar Hekmat, Tehran: Islamic Revolution and Education Press.

- 12- Nasafi, A. (2005). *Ketab Alensan Alkamel*. With foreword by Henri Carbon and introduction and correction by Mary Joan Mullet, trans. of the introduction by Seyed Zia Aldinn Dehshiri, Tehran: Tahoori.
- 13- Plotinus. (1987). *Doreh Asar Plotinus*. Trans. Muhammad Hassan Lotfi. Tehran. Kharazmi.
- 14- Reqabi, H. (1998). *Sadi's va Falsafeh Zendegi. Zekre Jamile Sadi. Volume 2*. Tehran. Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance Press.
- 15- Sadi's. (2002). *Gulistan. Correction and explanation* Gholamhosein Yousefi, Tehran. Kharazmi.
- 16- Sadi. (2000). *Gulistan or Rose GARDEN*. Trans. Francis Gladwin (D. 1813 A.D), Introduction and Editing by Dr. S.H.S. Kamal Hai Sayyed Javadi, London. Al-Hoda.
- 17- Saduq, M. (1992). *Eteghadat Sadug*. Aftab Publication.
- 18- Shahrestani, A. (1982). *Tozih Almelal*. Trans. Mostafa Khaleqdad Hashemi, with introduction, margins, corrections and appendixes by Seyed Mohammad Reza Jalali Naini, Volume 1, Iqbal Publishing.
- 19- Zarinkub. A. (2000). *Hadise Khoshe Sadi*. Tehran. Sokhan.

