

SELECT WESTERN PHILOSOPHERS ON THE “WILL” FACTOR

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Abstract: To survive is to struggle and to struggle does not mean any misfortune. It is always our response to the befallen events that decides whether it was sane enough or otherwise. We have scores of philosophies, Moral judgements and much publicised Ethical principles but the fact is not all are efficiently workable. It is sad that this simple reality of life is never accepted nor presented before the society due to the fear of losing identity and self-importance. Therefore, in the modern world at least we should admit or know, either the limitations of these philosophies or come openly to designate them as merely exhibition of scholarship and ornamental. Just as trusting all the religious principles and Ethics are ever efficient it is equally wrong to imagine that some external agency with supernatural powers would come to rescue on time in all human affairs. In fact the problems of all Moral philosophies had been continuously on rise while the solutions usually given on the basis of religious sentiments are losing their ground slowly. The preachers and self-styled godmen always effortfully show that they have encyclopaedic knowledge and so they have an authority on all subjects whether they have ever studied or not. Speaking little logically is their main defensive tactic. They take the fullest advantage of the flowery or rhythmic language to convince the ignorant mass, showing self as the owners of the ultimate knowledge. It is a sorry state because there is no entrance or periodic test or a strict check to estimate their knowledge. The reality is that there is no proper study of human psychology though exhaustive literature is available. This paper would attempt to present the different viewpoints on the genuine philosophical willing pattern proposed by great philosophers. This would enable us to seek true knowledge of human personality and subsequently get guidance. It is in this context that philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, William James etc. would be frequently referred to.

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KANT AND THE GOOD WILL

It is extremely difficult to finalize a list of actions which could be considered both Ethically and Practically right, so that no criticism would be levelled against. Mostly we think an action right or wrong on the basis of feelings and also to quite a good extent the result produced. However, speaking from the legal point of view we do take into account the intention of the doer which indirectly represents the Will. Well, in many cases, it may be voluntary or even by the force of circumstances that the Will gets displayed. In moral actions, it could be due to the norms of the society combined with the ongoing traditions which change from place to place and also with time. Therefore, we may conclude that it is a sort of moral obligation which forces us to do accordingly. We grow in accordance with the social order of the day combined with social and personal religious sentiments developed. There are numerous injunctions apart from these two. Therefore, not all our actions have a positive sanction by self. Ultimately the Will factor also gets manipulated depending on the circumstances. Generally it is the dictate of our common sense to which we stick and so it constitutes our personal Will. However, there are occasions when it is the sheer force of the impressive Ethical principles that creates another zone, where the Willing does not bother about the resulting loss or gain. Indeed there is some typical satisfaction for the Will with no rewards. But then there is always a strong desire to do proper Willing to gain right results along with an applause for the same. Therefore it can be safely concluded that moral ideals which prompt us to act are never fixed entities and so merely having awareness of the same may not promise a confident guide to moral conduct. Generally it is our Elective Will which guides us but then it is subjective and full of conditions and wishful thinking. At the same time it may be missing the rational shade which is ever necessary for strongly erecting the structure of Morality. Therefore, Immanuel Kant hints at it by underlying the importance to the sense of duty but not inclination. This rational outlook may be considered as rational or practical reason. For Kant it is only the ethical sense taking us to the rigid platform of Morality to perform an act of duty. By adjusting the mind to the sense of moral duty, happiness would seem to be an outcome. With this we have according to Kant Moral merit or Moral worth attached to the right action. In our actions there should not be contradictions or else it would lead us to immorality. All rational beings must adopt this principle so as to gain happiness to self and the society. With this background Kant introduces the term Good Will which can always be a solid foundation for personal life too when Ethics remain the priority for humanity. One of the most interesting features of Kantian philosophy is his presumption of human beings as rational and therefore have own liberty to judge the precepts of human morality. It is therefore our own Will which is responsible for the judgements. The human Will is not just aligned to reason but also to duty. It is at this juncture that Kant extends the discussion of Will with the concepts of noumena and phenomena. Therefore, there would be no scope for the contradiction for self regarding the approach once the Moral law is adopted as the exclusive or the only yardstick.

“And although we find examples of virtuous people who are not happy, because the results of what we do are not entirely under our control, and of happiness of some people not based on virtuous conduct, Kant says it is possible to find a critical solution for this antinomy of practical reason. There is a kind of happiness which springs from living virtuously. There is also a kind of happiness which springs from the fulfilment of desires and inclination. These two kinds of happiness when confused result in a practical

illusion that happiness is the determinant of actions governed by moral law as well as actions governed by inclinations and desires.”¹ Therefore Kant supports the Moral argument thoroughly. One can guess what Kant would argue upon. His total reliance on the intrinsic value of the morals makes him totally depend upon this argument where in he takes it for granted that moral values do have a perfect objective existence in the world. He extends this argument by suggesting that if it is really done so, then there would definitely be the need to the existence of an infinite mind which is timeless in its power. Therefore such an entity can faultlessly govern Universe or guide thoroughly so that a moral order can be established and sustained. Without the existence of such a mind and power i.e. God, it is highly improbable to run the world with moral laws.

SCHOPENHAUER’S IRRATIONAL AND BLIND WILL

In Kant’s viewpoint it is clear that Will must have a moral ground for its essential or proper functioning. Arthur Schopenhauer does not seem to accept the working of the Good Will as proposed by Kant. In fact Schopenhauer is quite doubtful about the very term and as a consequence of it, is totally sceptic about its functioning as described by Kant. For him the Will or Willing factor which arises out of deficiency is ever irrational and blindfolded. Therefore expecting the best results from such a Will is in itself a faulty idea. Furthermore thinking that the Kantian Good Will can promote unconditional good is also least convincing to him. The mixing or correlating the terms rationality and virtuosity cannot find a philosophical premise because both are sundered in their significance and further performance. Anyone who is having purely a mercantile attitude and therefore concerned only with the mundane affairs, at any rate, cannot afford to be cent percent virtuous. Therefore the purity, sublime nature, moral ground etc. may not find enough space to keep self activated. For such a person result is more important than the pathway adopted. This is the fundamental disagreement between Kant and Schopenhauer throughout. Kant seems to be quite confident and hopeful too, about the efficacy of the Good Will while Schopenhauer at any stage does not feel convinced. For Schopenhauer human life itself is filled with sufferings, complications and contradictions. Under such circumstances it is not at all wise to conclude human dignity based on morality alone. Man is definitely helpless in the hands of a blind Will which is extremely strong. Our life is merely the reflection of our Will. Since Schopenhauer has no faith in the workings of the virtues as a commoner expects, he is more inclined to take on Pessimism as the only reliable behavioural science that can provide some sense. He has gone to the extent of equating Reality to Pessimism with no hope and desire to emerge out of it. Pessimistic outlook therefore becomes the only tolerable attitude. This is because when the Will is blind and directionless, it is wrong on our own part to assume Morality as the base. This Will has manifested itself in all the spheres of life as an openly potent force. Therefore, in a way, Schopenhauer disagrees with the Socratic concept that Knowledge is virtue. There is always a continuous struggle for the Will to live. Whatever supports this struggle automatically becomes morally right and anything that opposes this venture is stamped as morally wrong. A little altruistic viewpoint appears in Schopenhauer’s dealings with the term Morality, particularly when he proposes that we must act with sympathy for others. This is because suffering is a part of life and a must for every living being. Man is a creature of circumstances which generate necessity. Therefore it is a manifestation of the Will itself. All his temperament is the result of his Will. Therefore, Schopenhauer feels our morality to be based on the Will to Live. In his own words we can get a greater clarity, “All willing arises from want, therefore from deficiency and therefore from suffering. The satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied. Further the desire lasts long, the demands are infinite; the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out. But even the final satisfaction is itself only apparent; every satisfied wish at once makes room for new one; both are illusions; the one is known to be so, the other not yet. No attained object can give a lasting satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification; it is like the alms thrown to the beggar, that keeps him alive today that his misery may be prolonged till the morrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we can never have lasting happiness nor peace.”²

NIETZSCHE’S WILL TO POWER OR RULE

The pessimistic approach of Schopenhauer though is ingrained with reality has a deeply seated feeling which only a matured mind can perceive. Other way around a reader without the knowledge of Philosophical Pessimism might conclude this to be a sort of submission before the fate or a fatalistic outlook subscribing to inaction. Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy is action oriented or studded and so expects human personality to get toughly constituted to avoid a meek submission before the adverse forces of life. Therefore Nietzsche’s Will demands or correlates itself with action supporting only Optimism. “...Nietzsche(unfortunately) has only rarely been considered an important philosopher. Instead, he is still popularly seen as, at best, an impressive aphorist whose psychological aperçus partly anticipated the theories of Freud, and, at worst, as one of the latest and perhaps the most inflammatory of a long line of German, opponents of the ideals of liberal enlightenment.”³ It is not just the Will to live by way of adaptation but it expects evading complacency while simultaneously attempting a display of manliness. Eventually it would lead to domination. Merely getting adjusted to the situation with no protest according to Nietzsche in no way qualifies to serve manhood. He comes out heavily on the struggle aiming for only adaptation, terming it to be a Slave Morality which would grow incessantly from the very germ of Pessimism. Therefore at any stage he indicates no sympathy in his philosophy to the weak Willed or Slave morality followers. He expects a sudden leap from this morality to Master Morality by accepting the challenges of life. This according to him would surely generate a healthy way of living and shaping the society in a progressive manner. Scientifically the Will to Power cannot be uniform. Depending on the individual’s capacity and requirements, it will have variations. Nietzsche thinks all virtues demand action and therefore achievement too. It is not that virtue and suffering always go hand in hand. If a virtue weakens the human personality or compels the owner to have self-pity then it is totally disdainful. Suffering in this context cannot be sympathised but must be banished by action or struggle to attain salvation. It is therefore the need of the hour to revise and revamp the values or dismissing the old ones to create a new pattern. Nietzschean Morality emerges through energetic actions. He does not suggest any Universal morality. People who nurture weakness through the virtues to gain attention of others would never mature. Those who

preach the values to the society secretly consolidate own life by steadily gaining what they aim. But the tragedy is those in turn who follow their words become victims permanently. This is actually a systematically drawn trap. So, at the outset, the theory stresses that all are equal itself is faulty without any proper investigation. It is in this context that Nietzsche has been very critical about Socrates and Plato. Knowledge within limits is workable but when it crosses the limits it proves to be dangerous without any utility. It can go against a proper living. Much due to this the philosopher vehemently supports the Master Morality to educate the ignorant mass which is highly impressed by the Slave Morality values, such as Love, Friendship, Peace, Happiness and Humility. He wants the Will to Power to be handled by only Supermen because only they can hold on to the Master Morality. With this he is rather supporting a special class of the society which is in favour of the Aristocratic principles in general. He wants to redesign the old fabric of the society that has not undergone any revival at all. It was deliberately woven for the benefit of only a chosen few by keeping the majority in dark. By liberating people from the Slave Morality he envisages a prospective future for all. In this regard he sounds to be a Meliorist having hope and faith in the human capacity to make this world a better place for living. Generally the term Superman is imagined as solely related to the physical plane only with full of vigour, strength and capacity. But Nietzsche corrects this approach by stating that in addition to the physical strength moral sense is equally important.

WILLIAM JAMES AND THE WILL TO BELIEVE

The pessimistic approach of Schopenhauer highlighting the blind and irrational Will had a complete contrast in Nietzsche's Superman concept wherein a purposeful and strongly constituted Will was introduced as a necessity to dominate. However, readers would find an extreme character in both the outlooks. William James who too shows a melioristic attitude insists on a firm belief that this life could be made worth living. However, like Robert Browning he doesn't think that all is well with this world. As a psychologist he felt everything begins with our belief system which later on steadily crystallises into an act. Therefore, having a trust in the Will to believe he totally dismissed the doubtful nature which periodically does more harm than any service. Being in the simplest form it does not require the owner to be an extraordinary personality or equipped with all amenities. Therefore, James wants everyone to discipline self with this trust for a better life. Life as such has many complications. Nothing can be taken for granted. There is no method to cause an abrupt shift nor bring about radical changes. Ultimately it is only our patience and set of workable beliefs which will come to our rescue. Everything has to go with action, that is, it has to negotiate everything practically only. Human beings have no control on the past deeds to reform them. Nature has its own whims and it clearly shows that we are weak before it. If we either expect or trust in the miracles to take place as we desire, it would lead to yet another disaster. All the resources which are available at the human level can be trusted and used accordingly. Instead of getting emotional the Will to believe expects us to take on events in the natural case as they are. The belief has only one platform to rely on and that is exclusively human effort. James also thinks that probably this philosophical view may not be easily appreciated by all, particularly scientists who expect everything to be result oriented and empirically qualified. James gives importance to the Will to Believe without losing the moral ground. No doubt sometimes he extends it to religion also. This could be because he wants philosophy to have a wider canvas so that it won't be restricted to only a limited influence. Ultimately the wider conception of every 'ism' should be utilized than constricting it to a narrow zone. Therefore he insists that, "Religion must indeed be a thing of the heart; but in order to elevate it from the region of caprice and waywardness, and to distinguish between that which is true and false in religion, we must appeal to an objective standard. That which enters the heart must first be discerned by the intelligence to be true. It must be seen as having in its own nature a right to donate feeling, and as constituting the principle by which feeling must be judged. In estimating the religious character of individuals, nations, or races, the first question is, not what they feel, but what they think and believe- not whether their religion is one which manifests itself in emotions, more or less vehement and enthusiastic, but what are the conceptions of god and divine things by which these emotions are called forth: feeling is necessary in religion, but it is by the content or intelligent basis of a religion and not by feeling, that its character and worth are to be determined."⁴ With his Pragmatic approach he goes to the extent of saying that God is a psychological necessity.

CONCLUSION

The nature of Will changes with age, experience, circumstances and our psychological mental frame. No one can claim to be exempted from the very process of willing. Philosophers as well as psychologists who have struggled to find out a single characteristic of the Will as the final one could manage to satisfy only a certain class of the society. Getting into the Kantian philosophy to adjust everything strictly on the basis of Moral ground or holding on to the Willing process in Schopenhauerean pessimistic manner or taking on the strife with a Master Morality or Superman principles as suggested by Nietzsche or giving a favourable consideration to James with his pragmatic approach seems to be a difficult intellectual exercise. Therefore, it is wise to adopt that which suits to own temperament and is feasible in the given set of circumstances but with a philosophical stance. This is because at any rate no philosopher has suggested freedom from moral values. Each philosopher's contribution is definitely unique and of course worthy too. Nothing can be dismissed. On the other hand if a hunt for the Coherent Will is pursued then the Will factor would be showing a sort of continuity with age while advancing in life. All these types might seem to be rather suitable to the different phases of life. There is no sense in comparing them because each has contributed according to own convictions. Further it would be always wise to know the limitations of human personality on all the planes. With this one can know the psychological deficiencies of a personality. Unnecessarily burdening human personality with bookish idealism would be damaging.

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