

Destiny, Choice and Destination

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Great importance is given in many cultures on the determinants of a man's journey through life as earthly existence; this concept called destiny is present in most, if not all Eurasian populations.

The Mediterranean (Latin for "middle of the Earth") basin was an extremely fertile ground for cultural development and is having the biggest influence on Western cultural and spiritual life. The central spot belongs to the Greek culture with its myths and art, which in turn was assimilated with some modifications and spread throughout the Roman world; however Egypt can claim priority in being the first nation with a culture sustained by an administrative and religious system that has thrived for millennia. Middle Eastern cultures have perhaps the biggest global reach through religion (Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths and traditions inform 2/3 of world population), and one can note that even though religion – including Oriental religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc – seem to be the biggest divider or unifier of people, it also has very similar rules permeating them when it comes to human interaction and behavior, and those rules can be seen as the core of morals and ethics.

Eurasian cultures link man's existence with supernatural powers in various degrees; in ancient Egypt and the later Middle Eastern religions the supernatural is very different from man and functions according to special rules that man cannot know; man can only hope for divine favor for a good destiny. In ancient Greek and Roman cultures, man and gods have many things in common, and even though the power of gods is much greater than that of man, gods are portrayed as thinking in similar terms with man, with similar worldly weaknesses and desires. In Oriental spirituality, a similar development occurred in Hinduism and Buddhism, with the latter religion placing a narrower gap between man and deity. In Oriental spirituality karma has a very important role in the determinism of existence and in many ways can be assimilated to one's destiny.

Common aspects of destiny (in various cultures) include an inexorable course of life for individuals, predetermined and so strongly immutable that no human can change it; this course can be filled with drama and tragic events or greatness and important achievements for their communities or nation or even humankind (from Prometheus and Columbus to Newton and Fleming); destinies, like karma can be good or bad.

Destiny seems to follow a set of immutable laws that predetermines the result of human existence, much like the laws of physics and chemistry predetermine the end results of material transformation. Progressing from the lifeless material world (governed by the rules of physics and chemistry) to the biological, living world where we're still deciphering rules, it can be said that destiny is for one's existence what genetics is for one's body; as heredity (genes) pretty much determine how a body will develop and function, similarly a spiritual realm determines what accomplishments individuals will have in their lives, and even how their lives end.

The question of who is predetermined for what is a very complex one (a paradigm summarized in biology as "nature vs. nurture") and since many of its determinants are overlapping and interacting, the

interplay between biological determinism (nature) and a combination of factors that include freewill, ethics, knowledge, education, ideals, and circumstances (nurture) simply makes giving a straight answer impossible. However, we can try to answer this important question by using the most eloquent and consequential example known to us: The Bible. Jesus' destiny hanged into balance while he was tempted by Satan and making a choice with two possible but totally opposite outcomes. Ego, folly and greed were the potential weak points played on by Satan, and if you think that ruling over the world is a small temptation, think about how many leaders have given in to this one. Or if you say that the outcome was pre-determined, then think if Satan would have wasted any time on it (even with Jesus weakened by spending 40 days in the desert on his own) and why only after passing this test the angels started waiting on Jesus, and not from the very beginning. Finally, think about the tempting of the first people in the Garden of Eden if you think that we are bound by much other than our own choices.

With choice playing such a big role in a man's life, it becomes essential to have a set of rules that offer guidance when faced with the myriad of choices of one's life. The religious precepts from the Decalogue are providing the most encompassing moral and spiritual guidance of all ethical and moral systems.

Finally, the debate of destiny versus choice seems to have arrived at its destination, and we'll try to draw a conclusion on their relative importance. Since choices we make can turn a good existence into a bad one and vice versa (consider the tempting of Jesus), it is inevitable that choices trump destiny when it comes to the value of a man's life. In this light, spiritual and moral guidance of human existence can be considered the strongest determinant of an individual's life. For we humans, blessed with choice and conscience have the ultimate privilege over all other beings in the natural world for we indeed can improve our existence by making the right choices while guided by morals.