

Chapter One

Fate, Free Will and Prediction

Destiny

Each follows in the world his own line of destiny which is determined by his own nature and actions—the meaning and necessity of what happens in a particular life cannot be understood except in the light of the whole course of many lives. But this can be seen by those who can get beyond the ordinary mind and feelings and see things as a whole, that even errors, misfortunes, calamities are steps in the journey, the soul gathering experience as it passes through and beyond them until it is ripe for the transition which will carry it beyond these things to a higher consciousness and higher life. When one comes to that line of crossing one has to leave behind one the old mind and feelings. One looks then on those who are still fixed in the pleasures and sorrows of the ordinary world with sympathy and wherever it is possible with spiritual helpfulness, but no longer with attachment. One learns that they are being led through all their stumblings and trusts to the universal Power that is watching and supporting their existence to do for them whatever for them is the best. But the one thing that is really important for us is to get into the greater Light and the Divine Union—to turn to the Divine alone, to put our trust there alone whether for ourselves or for others.

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Destiny in the rigid sense applies only to the outer being so long as it lives in the Ignorance. What we call destiny is only in fact the result of the present condition of the being and the nature and energies it has accumulated in the past acting on each other and determining the present attempts and their future results. But as soon as one enters the path of spiritual life, this old predetermined destiny begins to recede. There comes in a new factor, the

Divine Grace, the help of a higher Divine Force other than the force of Karma which can lift the sadhak beyond the present possibilities of his nature. One's spiritual destiny is then the divine election which ensures the future. The only doubt is about the vicissitudes of the path and the time to be taken by the passage. It is here that the hostile forces playing on the weaknesses of the past nature strive to prevent the rapidity of the progress and to postpone the fulfilment. Those who fell, fell not because of the attacks of the vital forces, but because they put themselves on the side of the hostile Force and preferred a vital ambition or desire (ambition, vanity, lust, etc.) to the spiritual siddhi.

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Each has his own destiny which he brings with him into the world.

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Each has his own destiny and his entering into a particular family in one life is only an incident.

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Obviously, neither Nature nor Destiny nor the Divine work in the mental way or by the law of the mind or according to its standards — that is why even to the scientist and the philosopher Nature, Destiny, the way of the Divine, all remain a mystery.

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Nature is very largely what you make of her — or can make of her.

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Destiny is not an absolute, it is a relative. One can alter it for the better or the worse.

Free Will and Determinism

It is difficult indeed to make out what Planck means in these

pages¹ — what is his conclusion and how he arrives at it; he has probably so condensed his arguments that the necessary explanatory links are missing. The free will affair, I see by glancing through the previous pages, arises only incidentally from his position that the new discoveries grouped round the quantum theory do not make a radical difference in physics. If there is a tendency to regard laws as statistical — in which case there is no “strict causality” and no determinism — still there is nothing to prove that they cannot be treated and may not be advantageously treated as dynamical also — in which case determinism can stand; the uncertainty of individual behaviour (electrons, quanta) does not really undermine determinism, but only brings a new feature into it. That seems from a hasty glance to be his position. Certain scientific thinkers consider this uncertainty of individual behaviour to be a physical factor correspondent to the element of free will in individual human beings. It is here that Planck brings in the question of free will to refute the conclusion that it affects strict causality and the law of determinism. His argument, as far as I can make it out, is this:

(1) The law of strict causality stands because any given action or inner happening of the individual human being is an effect determined completely by two causes, (a) the previous state of his mind taken as a whole, (b) external influences.

(2) The will is a mental process completely determined by these two factors; therefore it is not free, it is part of the chain of strict causality — as are also the results of the free will.

(3) What is important is not the actual freedom of the will, but the man’s consciousness of freedom. This creates an inner experience of conscious motive which again creates fresh motives and so on indefinitely. For this reason it is impossible for a man to predict his future action — for at any moment a fresh motive may arise. But when we look back at the past, then the concatenation of cause and effect becomes apparent.

(4) The fact of strict causality (or at least the theory of it)

¹ *Max Planck, The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), pp. 84–87.*

stands therefore unshaken by the consciousness of free will of the individual. It is only obscured by the fact that a man cannot predict his own actions or grasp the causes of his present state; but that is because here the subject and object are the same and this subject-object is in a state of constant alterative motion unlike an object outside, which is supposed not to change as a result of the inner movements of the knower.

There is a reference to causal law and ethical law which baffles me. Is the “ethical law” something outside the strict chain of effects and causes? Is there such a thing at all? If “strict causality” rules all, what is such an ethical law doing there?

That is the argument so far as I can follow it, but it does not seem to me very conclusive. If a man’s conduct cannot be predicted by himself, neither can it be predicted by anyone else, though here the subject and object are not the same; if not predictable, then it must be for the same reason, the element of free will and the mobility created by the possible indefinite intrusion of fresh motives. If that is so, strict causality cannot be affirmed, though a plastic causality in which the power of choice called by us free will is an element (either as one among many contributory causes or as an instrument of a cause beyond itself) can still be asserted as possible.

The statement that the action of the individual is strictly determined by his total mental state + external influences is doubtful and does not lead very far. It is possible to undermine the whole idea of inevitable causality by holding that the total existing state before a happening is only the condition under which it happens — there are a mass of antecedents and there is a sequent, if it may be so called, or a mass of sequences, but nothing proves that the latter are inevitable consequences of the mass of antecedents. Possibly this total existing state is a matrix into which some seed of happening is thrown or becomes active, so that there may be many possible results, and in the case of human action it is conceivable that free will is *the* or at least *a* determining factor.

I do not think therefore that these arguments of Planck carry us very far. There is also of course the question raised in the book

itself whether, granting determinism, a local state of things is an independent field of causality or all is so bound together that it is the whole that determines the local result. A man's action then would be determined by universal forces and his state of mind and apparent choice would be only part of the instrumentation of Universal Force.

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In the case of Socrates and that of the habitual drunkard raised by you, the difference you make is correct. The weak-willed man is governed by his vital and physical impulses, his mental being is not dynamic enough to make its will prevail over them. His will is not "free" because it is not strong enough to be free, it is the slave of the forces that act on or in his vital and physical nature. In the case of Socrates the will is so far free that it stands above the play of these forces and he determines by his mental idea and resolve what he shall or shall not do. The question remains whether the will of Socrates is only free in this sense, itself being actually determined by something larger than the mentality of Socrates, something of which it is the instrument, whether Universal Force or a Being in him of which his daemon was the voice and which not only gave his mind that decisive awareness of the mental ideal but imposed on it the drive to act in obedience to the awareness. Or it may be subject to a nexus between the inner Purusha and the Universal Force. In the latter case there would be an unstable balance between determinism of Nature and a self-determination from within. If we start from the Sankhya view of things, that Being would be the soul or Purusha and both in the strong-willed Socrates and in the weak-willed slave of vital impulse, the action and its results would be determined by the assent or refusal of the Purusha. In the latter the Purusha gives its assent to and undergoes the play of the forces of Nature, the habit of the vital impulse, through a vital submission while the mind looks on helpless. In Socrates the Purusha has begun to emancipate itself and decide what it shall accept or shall not accept — the conscious being has begun to impose itself on the forces that act on it. This mastery has become

so complete that he can largely determine his own actions and can even within certain limits not only forecast but fix the results — so that what he wants shall happen sooner or later.

As for the Superman, that is the conscious being whose emancipation is complete by his rising to a station beyond the limits of mind. He can determine his action in complete accord with an awareness which perceives all the forces acting in and on and around him and is able, instead of undergoing, to use them and even to determine.

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After reading Krishnaprem's exposition [*on free will and determinism*], I saw what might be said from the intellectual point of view on this question so as to link the reality of the supreme Freedom with the phenomenon of the determinism of Nature — in a different way from his but to the same purpose. In reality, the freedom and the determination are only two sides of the same thing — for the fundamental truth is self-determination, a self-determination of the cosmos and in it a secret self-determination of the individual. The difficulty arises from the fact that we live in the surface mind of ignorance, do not know what is going on behind and see only the phenomenal process of Nature. There the apparent fact is an overwhelming determinism of Nature and as our surface consciousness is part of that process we are unable to see the other term of the biune reality. For practical purposes, on the surface there is an entire determinism in Matter — though this is now disputed by the latest school of Science. As Life emerges a certain plasticity sets in, so that it is difficult to predict anything exactly as one predicts material things that obey a rigid law. The plasticity increases with the growth of Mind so that man can have at least a sense of free will, of a choice of his action, of a self-movement which at least helps to determine circumstances. But this freedom is dubious because it can be declared to be an illusion, a device of Nature, part of its machinery of determination, only a seeming freedom or at most a restricted, relative and subject independence. It is only when one goes behind away from Prakriti to Purusha and upward

away from Mind to spiritual Self that the side of freedom comes to be first evident and then, by unison with the Will which is above Nature, complete.

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Well, the determination of human life and events is a mysterious thing. Can't help that, you know. Fate is composed of many things — Cosmic Will + individual self-determination + play of forces + Karma + x + y + z + a + b + c ad infinitum.

Predictions and Prophecy

I am afraid I have no great confidence in Cheiro's ideas and prophecies — some prophecies are fulfilled but most have gone wrong. The idea about the Jews is an old Jewish and Christian belief; not much faith can be put in it. As for the numbers it is true that according to occult science numbers have a mystic meaning. It is also true that there are periods and cycles in life as well as in world-life. But too exact a meaning cannot always be put in these things.

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Mother says Cheiro has always missed his predictions. They are (at best) half truths which you have to turn this way or that to get something out of them corresponding with the fact.

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Your extracts taken by themselves are very impressive, but when one reads the book, the impression made diminishes and fades away. You have quoted Cheiro's successes, but what about his failures? I have looked at the book and was rather staggered by the number of prophecies that have failed to come off. You can't deduce from a small number of predictions, however accurate, that all is predestined down to your putting the questions in the letter and my answer. It may be, but the evidence is not sufficient to prove it. What is evident is that there is an element of the predictable, predictable accurately and in detail as well

as in large points, in the course of events. But that was already known; it leaves the question still unsolved whether all is so predictable, whether destiny is the sole factor in existence or there are other factors also that can modify destiny, — or, destiny being given, there are not different sources or powers or planes of destiny and we can modify the one with which we started by calling in another destiny source, power or plane and making it active in our life. Metaphysical questions are not so simple that they can be trenchantly solved either in one sense or in another contradictory to it — that is the popular way of settling things, but it is quite summary and inconclusive. All is free will or else all is destiny — it is not so simple as that. This question of free will or determination is the most knotty of all metaphysical questions and nobody has been able to solve it — for a good reason, that both destiny and will exist and even a free will exists somewhere — the difficulty is only how to get at it and make it effective.

Astrology? Many astrological predictions come true, quite a mass of them, if one takes all together. But it does not follow that the stars rule our destiny; the stars merely record a destiny that has been already formed, they are a hieroglyph, not a Force, — or if their action constitutes a force, it is a transmitting energy, not an originating Power. Someone is there who has determined or something is there which is Fate, let us say; the stars are only indicators. The astrologers themselves say that there are two forces, *daiva* and *puruṣārtha*, fate and individual energy, and the individual energy can modify and even frustrate fate. Moreover the stars often indicate several fate-possibilities; for example that one may die in mid-age, but that if that determination can be overcome, one can live to a predictable old age. Finally, cases are seen in which the predictions of the horoscope fulfil themselves with great accuracy up to a certain age, then apply no more. This often happens when the subject turns away from the ordinary to the spiritual life. If the turn is very radical the cessation of predictability may be immediate; otherwise certain results may still last on for a time, but there is no longer the same inevitability. This would seem to show that there is or

can be a higher-power or higher-plane or higher-source spiritual destiny which can, if its hour has come, override the lower-power, lower-plane or lower-source vital and material fate of which the stars are indicators. I say vital because character can also be indicated from the horoscope much more completely and satisfactorily than the events of the life.

The Indian explanation of fate is Karma. We ourselves are our own fate through our actions, but the fate created by us binds us; for what we have sown, we must reap in this life or another. Still we are creating new fate for the future even while undergoing old fate from the past in the present. That gives a meaning to our will and action and does not, as European critics wrongly believe, constitute a rigid and sterilising fatalism. But again our will and action can often annul or modify even the past Karma, it is only certain strong effects, called *utkata karma*, that are non-modifiable. Here too the achievement of the spiritual consciousness and life is supposed to annul or give the power to annul Karma. For we enter into union with the Will Divine, cosmic or transcendent, which can annul what it had sanctioned for certain conditions, new-create what it had created; the narrow fixed lines disappear, there is a more plastic freedom and wideness. Neither Karma nor Astrology therefore points to a rigid and for ever immutable fate.

As for prophecy, I have never met or known of a prophet, however reputed, who was infallible. Some of their predictions come true to the letter, others do not, — they half-fulfil or misfire entirely. It does not follow that the power of prophecy is unreal or the accurate predictions can be all explained by probability, chance or coincidence. The nature and number of those that cannot is too great. The variability of fulfilment may be explained either by an imperfect power in the prophet sometimes active, sometimes failing or by the fact that things are predictable in part only, they are determined in part only or else by different factors or lines of power, different series of potentials and actuals. So long as one is in touch with one line, one predicts accurately, otherwise not — or if the line of power changes, one's prophecy also goes off the rails. All the same, one may say, there must be, if

things are predictable at all, some power or plane through which or on which all is foreseeable; if there is a divine Omniscience and Omnipotence it must be so. Even then what is foreseen has to be worked out, actually is worked out by a play of forces, — spiritual, mental, vital, physical forces — and in that plane of forces there is no absolute rigidity discoverable. Personal will or endeavour is one of those forces — Napoleon when asked why he believed in Fate, yet was always planning and acting, answered, “Because it is fated that I should work and plan” — in other words, his planning and acting were part of Fate, contributed to the results Fate had in view. Even if I foresee an adverse result, I must work for the one that I consider should be; for it keeps alive the force, the principle of Truth which I serve and gives it a possibility to triumph hereafter, so that it becomes part of the working of a future favourable Fate, even if the fate of the hour is adverse. Men do not abandon a cause because they have seen it fail or foresee its failure; and they are spiritually right in their stubborn perseverance. Moreover, we do not live for material result alone, — far more the object of life is the growth of the soul, not outward success of the hour or even of the near future. The soul can grow against or even by a material destiny that is adverse.

Finally, even if all is determined, why say that Life is, in Shakespeare’s phrase or rather Macbeth’s, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”? Life would rather be that if it were all chance and random incertitude. But if it is something foreseen, planned in every detail, does it not rather mean that life does signify something, that there must be a secret Purpose that is being worked up to, powerfully, persistently through the ages, and ourselves are a part of it and fellow-workers in the fulfilment of that invincible Purpose?

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Well, one of the greatest ecstasies possible is to feel oneself carried by the Divine, — not by the stars or Karma, for the latter is a bad business, dry and uncomfortable — like being turned on a machine, “*yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*”.

Astrology and Yoga

Astrology is an occult science — it is not a part of the Yoga except as anything can be made part of the Yoga — if done in the right spirit.

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That is not the question.² The question is what influence has the sadhak on the stars at his birth?

² *The correspondent asked, "Can astrological truths have any influence on a sadhak?"*
—Ed.