

The Process of History Interpreting: Shah Waliullah's Concept of Ayyam Allah

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History is a metaphor for continuity and change. The question arises: is there "a pattern, a plot, a theme, a motif, a frame, a structure, a plan, a scheme, an outline" in history? This question has been tackled in numerous and different ways and terminologies. Historical rationalism claims a pattern of historical monism, one overarching and all-inclusive pattern; and historical pluralism, more than one pattern, each arguing under the concepts of irrationalism or nihilism, that there is no pattern. The claim that one does not know whether there is a pattern, is called historical scepticism. Historical subjectivism claims that a pattern is something which is arbitrarily imposed, one pattern being no more there than any other.¹

There arise accordingly two distinct kinds of controversy. First, about the justification of these views, and a second one which is possible only after historical monism or historical pluralism have been proved. The controversy would be over what the pattern is in the process of history.² The first problem is not the subject matter of our topic. The question what the pattern is, will be dealt with in the following pages. In this respect the mind is assailed so many other questions, and extension to the controversy, such as how the process is going on, what is the role of human being in that system, and if the system imposed by Allah, then how Allah's providence acts in it. With reference to man's role in the system the question of man's freedom or fatalism are more important.

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1. Alburey Casteel, *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, (London: 1936), 433.
2. *Ibid.*, 434.

History as a pattern shows the predominance of theory over historical thought. Jews, Christians and Muslims all have propagated it. In modern thought controversy is apparent within the pattern and most of the leading modern historians have analysed history as a pattern. They have all maintained that the movement of history is subject to some laws. It is not an arbitrary movement, a meaningless conglomeration of events, but an intelligible process guided by an inherent law or a design of divine intelligence.

St. Augustine's "The City of Allah", produced a great new theological interpretation of history. He presented history as one aspect of the true world created by Allah and it is subject to law. A "contemporary Augustine,"³ Toynbee, explains history as a vision of Allah's creation on the move, "from Allah its source to Allah its goal".⁴ Ignoring the role of man, they present man as a mere puppet in the divine system. Boassuet presents the concept of providence by which "Allah overthrows his laws when He pleases"⁵ and in this way tries to prove the superstitious belief in miracles. All these theological opinions were interpreted in modern times by George Santayana (b.1863) in his "Reason in Religion"⁶

From the 18th century there developed a new outlook toward the universe. There began a war of scepticism and reform of religion. It was Vico who first explained the theological views about providence. As against Bossuet, he explained providence in such a way that "nothing remains of the transcendent and miraculous operation". With Vico providence has become as natural, secular and historical as if it did not exist at all.⁷ But Herder and Voltaire totally changed the concept. They developed the view that history was an autonomous process "a purely natural history of human forces, actions and instincts according to time and space."⁸ In the 19th century Hegel and Marx advocated dialectics of historical process.

3. Hans Meyerhoff, *The Philosophy of History in our time*, (New York: 1964), 4.

4. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Vol. I, (London: 1943), chapter I:123.

5. Hans Meyerhoff, 5.

6. Alburey Casteel, 435.

7. Karl Lowith, *Meaning in history*, (Chicago: 1949), 123, quoted by Hans Meyerhoff, 5.

8. Hans Meyerhoff, 5.

