

THE PROBLEM OF PERSONAL DECISION-MAKING AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN THE WORKS OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHERS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the problem of personal decision-making and social influence in the works of Eastern philosophers. Based on the views of scholars such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Imam Ghazali, Alisher Navoi, Abu Rayhan Beruni, Yusuf Khos Khajib, Jalaluddin Rumi, Ahmad Yassavi, and Ibn Khaldun, the psychological aspects of the relationship between the individual and society are explored. The study examines the mechanisms of social influence, the characteristics of individual freedom of choice, and the interaction between the individual and society.

The findings of the article have scientific and practical significance for understanding the role of social factors in the process of individual decision-making and for enriching modern psychological concepts through Eastern philosophical thought.

Keywords: Person, personal decision-making, social influence, social psychology, individual-society relations, individual freedom, social pressure, asabiyyah, masnavi.

Introduction

The works of Eastern philosophers are considered an invaluable part of the spiritual heritage of the world. Their writings deeply explore the scientific, ethical, and especially the social life of their time, thoroughly examining the relationships between the individual and society. The great scholars of the East expressed their views on human nature, personal choice, freedom, and the individual's role in society. In their works, the individual's ability to make independent decisions and the influence of social pressure are studied, with personal development taking a central place.

In Eastern philosophy and literature, great attention has always been given to the inner world of a person—their thoughts, desires, and the connection with society. In our culture, decision-making is based not only on personal will and aspirations but also on social relationships, moral

values, and communal expectations. A person's social environment influences their thinking, choices, and behavior. Nevertheless, the importance of finding one's own inner truth and making independent decisions is strongly emphasized.

Even today, understanding the connection between decision-making and social pressure remains a relevant issue. In managing one's life, a person must consider social influences while preserving their independence. Therefore, the Eastern approach helps us not only better understand ourselves but also gain deeper insight into the environment around us. In the schools of Eastern thought, the inner world of the individual, freedom of consciousness, and relationships with society have long been analyzed from philosophical, religious, and ethical perspectives. In particular, studying the views of philosophers such as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Imam al-Ghazali, Alisher Navoi, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Yusuf Khash Hajib, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Ahmad Yassawi, and Ibn Khaldun is of great importance in understanding the interaction between the individual and society.

Literature Review and Methodology

Eastern approaches to decision-making are grounded in a person's inner and spiritual world, the values of society, and faith in God. In Eastern philosophy and educational tradition, decision-making is not viewed as a purely individual matter, but as a process embedded within family, community, and religious contexts. The Holy Qur'an includes numerous verses emphasizing human freedom, voluntary choice, and the unacceptability of coercion.

In Eastern culture, decisions are typically made through consultation: *"Their affairs are conducted through mutual consultation..."* (Surah Ash-Shura, 42:38)

Eastern philosophical thought maintains that an individual's wisdom is inherently limited; therefore, collective discussion and advice are promoted as essential components of sound decision-making. This includes not only listening to the opinions of elders within the family but also considering the broader views of the community.

One of the great Eastern philosophers, al-Farabi, in his work *The Virtuous City* (Madinat al-Fadila), states: "A virtuous city is one in which justice and morality are established, and every individual's decisions are shaped in harmony with others." He highlights the importance of establishing moral norms and social regulations and aligning decisions with societal needs. In the same text, al-Farabi asserts: "If societal expectations and demands correspond with an individual's inner moral values, then social pressure will have a beneficial effect. However, if such expectations undermine the individual's dignity and values, the pressure may lead to negative outcomes." These insights call for a deeper examination of how social pressure affects individual decision-making. While decisions should ideally reflect communal interests, they must not violate personal ethics or inner convictions.

In the writings of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), there is also significant discussion about the influence of society on individual psychology and the decision-making process. He notes: "A person makes decisions through reason, and reason guides them to the right path. One who listens to reason will not go astray." Ibn Sina urges individuals to think independently and to seek truth.



In *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* (Remarks and Admonitions), he writes: “The opinion of the majority is not always correct. A wise person seeks the truth and does not simply follow the majority.” This idea aligns with the verse from the Qur’an, Surah Al-An’am, 6:116: “If you follow most of those on the earth, they will lead you away from the path of Allah. They follow nothing but conjecture and lie.”

Ibn Sina emphasizes the importance of relying on reason in decision-making, arguing that truth is not necessarily found with the majority, but rather through knowledge, evidence, and thoughtful reflection.

Likewise, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali discusses related concepts in his influential works such as *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat* (The Alchemy of Happiness), and *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error). In *The Alchemy of Happiness*, al-Ghazali writes: “A person who relies only on reason falls into the trap of dry logic, while one who follows only the heart becomes a victim of satanic whispers. Truth can only be found when the intellect and heart work together.” According to al-Ghazali, one should not rely solely on reason or emotion. Rather, the intellect should lead to truth through evidence, while the heart ensures moral integrity and spiritual direction. Ghazali also explores various forms of social pressure and their psychological impacts. He writes: “Most people confuse social customs with truth. One who seeks true knowledge must first break free from the shell of tradition.” In many cases, prevailing societal norms and beliefs can hinder self-awareness and the pursuit of truth. Without independent thinking, the individual’s mind may be shaped entirely by society, thus preventing the discovery of personal truth.

In Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, there are numerous reflections on the interconnection between personal decision-making and social pressure. He explores issues such as social development, the dependency of human nature on society, and how individual choices are shaped by sociocultural conditions. He states: “Man is by nature a social being. His life and decisions are inherently tied to the society around him.” (*Muqaddimah*, Chapter 1)

Ibn Khaldun identifies the main driving force of societal development as *asabiyyah*—a concept of social solidarity or group cohesion. Since a person must live within a society, their decisions are inevitably influenced by social forces. However, when *asabiyyah* becomes too dominant, individuals may lose the ability to think independently. He writes: “The opinion of the majority often does not correspond to the truth. Most people mistake their own interests for truth.” (*Muqaddimah*, Chapter 2)

Similarly, in the views of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, knowledge is regarded as a tool for moral and social responsibility. He states: “A knowledgeable person fights for the fate of society and avoids all evil. The purpose of knowledge is not to greedily collect gold and silver, but to acquire what is truly necessary for human life.” This suggests that the ability to make correct decisions is closely tied to one’s intellectual and moral development.

In Yusuf Khash Hajib's work *Qutadghu Bilig*, knowledge and wisdom are also praised as essential elements in making sound decisions. In a dialogue between the characters Ogdulmish and Ozgurmish, the value of wise consultation and selfless decision-making is emphasized: “If we are together, our benefit will be greater. But reason does not favor selfishness. Listen, O wise man: do not seek your own benefit. Seek counsel from one who does not twist the outcome



for their own advantage. One who pursues only their own gain may misuse their strength.” The text emphasizes that while consulting others is important, ultimately, the individual must take responsibility for their own decisions. Yusuf Khash Hajib upholds the significance of conscious decision-making and thoughtful dialogue in ensuring moral integrity. Alisher Navoi, in his poetry and prose, encourages individuals to be mindful in their speech, reflect deeply, interpret life events positively, and live with awareness and gratitude for the present moment. His writings urge individuals to cherish life, focus on the current day, and make mindful choices rather than being excessively influenced by past regrets or future uncertainties. These teachings contribute significantly to understanding the individual’s capacity to resist undue social influence and to make autonomous decisions. Navoi emphasizes personal accountability for one’s words and actions, asserting that although one may be influenced by society, independent thought must be preserved. The harmony between personal independence and societal coexistence is a recurring theme in his legacy.

In Jalal al-Din Rumi’s *Masnavi*, several parables are presented that reflect on decision-making and the influence of social pressure. One well-known story is that of “The Elephant and the Blind Men”. In this tale, four blind individuals are brought to an elephant to describe it by touch. One, feeling the trunk, claims it is like a snake; another, touching the legs, says it resembles a pillar; the third feels the belly and says it is like a sack; while the fourth, touching the ears, compares it to a mat. None of them gains a complete understanding of the elephant. This parable illustrates that each person perceives life based on their own experiences and the social perceptions instilled in them. Often, individuals are bound by societal stereotypes, which hinders their ability to make clear personal choices. This story aligns with theories of conformism and cognitive dissonance, showing how individuals form their views under social influence. Nevertheless, the ability to think independently is essential for authentic personal decision-making.

In Ahmad Yassawi’s *Hikmatlar*, we also find verses encouraging continuous reflection, the pursuit of knowledge, and the value of keeping the company of virtuous individuals:

A true believer always reflects,
Chanting remembrance late into the night.
There is not a trace of arrogance in his being—
Would you not grasp such a person’s hem?

Along the path, two destinations arise—
Choose your journey wisely, devote your soul.
A worthy companion leads to a righteous road—
Would you not serve to earn the Garden’s abode?

The Angel of Death will one day arrive—
Befriend death before it takes your life.
Prepare for the long journey—embrace discipline,
Don’t trade your honor for disgrace and strife.



These lines emphasize that one must constantly reflect and choose their own path. The existence of two paths—one righteous, the other not—suggests that sound choices require the support of morally upright companions. Independent reflection is essential for spiritual growth and decision-making. In Nasir al-Din Tusi's *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, a foundational work of ethical philosophy, the relationship between social customs and human behavior is explored in depth. Tusi writes: "People often blindly follow customs and traditions, which obstruct their reason." He distinguishes two foundations that govern human life: the natural (inborn) and the conventional (socially constructed).

According to Tusi, natural principles arise from intellect, experience, and wisdom; they are stable and not subject to change over time or across political shifts. These belong to the domain of practical wisdom. Conventional principles, however, originate from collective agreement and may include cultural traditions, legal norms, and religious decrees. These are influenced by political, temporal, and geographic circumstances, and thus are subject to change. He further categorizes conventional norms into three types:

1. Individual matters, such as personal worship or pilgrimages.
2. Household matters, such as marriage and domestic rituals.
3. Public matters, such as governance, law, and justice, referred to as *fiqh*.

Because conventional norms change with time and authority, Tusi asserts that philosophers should focus on foundational truths that are universal and not subject to temporal shifts. In his view, personal choice is rooted in natural, intellectual, and experiential faculties, while social pressure stems from rules and norms imposed by the collective environment.

Together, these Eastern thinkers present a nuanced understanding of the interplay between individual autonomy and social influence. They consistently stress the importance of wisdom, consultation, inner reflection, and the pursuit of truth over conformity to societal expectations. This philosophical heritage contributes richly to the psychological exploration of how personal choices are shaped—and sometimes constrained—by social structures.

Results

In the works of Eastern philosophers, the balance between personal decision-making and social pressure is considered a central issue. A common idea unifying the perspectives of these scholars is the importance of rational thinking, spiritual aspiration, and the pursuit of knowledge in the decision-making process. Responding to societal expectations and normative pressures requires thoughtful reflection and deliberation.

Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and Ibn Khaldun emphasize the necessity of making decisions based on reason, empirical evidence, and logical analysis. At the same time, they acknowledge the importance of engaging in dialogue with experienced and knowledgeable individuals. This concept also appears in Ahmad Yassawi's *Divan-i Hikmat*, where the scholar stresses the value of companionship with the wise. According to these thinkers, rational intellect and a scholarly approach play a vital role in resisting undue social pressure.

In contrast, Imam al-Ghazali, Jalal al-Din Rumi, and Ahmad Yassawi promote the idea that inner wisdom, spiritual growth, and purification of the soul are essential for making the right



decisions while withstanding external pressures. In this view, the individual's connection with God and spiritual awareness takes precedence.

The works of Alisher Navoi and Yusuf Khass Hajib emphasize the role of national values and cultural heritage. They advocate for the development of individual creativity and social potential in the process of making personal decisions.

In the writings of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, society, its origin, social relations, and historical processes are examined in depth. They explore how society influences individual choices and encourage independent thinking through philosophical inquiry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the works of Eastern scholars show that rational intellect, spiritual independence, and scientific reasoning are key factors in personal decision-making. Despite the presence of social pressure and normative constraints, individuals must strive to make autonomous decisions and live a life rooted in personal conviction.

The rich intellectual and philosophical legacy of Eastern philosophers offers profound insights into the relationship between the individual and society. Their writings advocate for independent thinking, ethical decision-making, and conscious engagement with social influence. Eastern thought acknowledges the importance of individual freedom while simultaneously emphasizing the ethical responsibilities one holds toward society.

In contemporary settings, where the boundaries between personal choice and social pressure are increasingly blurred, the philosophical approaches of Eastern sages can serve as a foundational methodological framework for analyzing these dynamics.

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