

Is this also the “Will of God”? Reflections by Paul Brunton

Source: THE DIGITAL NOTEBOOKS OF PAUL BRUNTON

Published on web-ur.com: 2025-02-24

Date of last update: 2025-02-24

Edited by: JD Arimathea



In this article we have compiled some of the most interesting notes from PB, where the author, with his usual insight, analyzes in depth and sheds new light on a subject that has been as controversial since time immemorial as it continues to be today in our current society.

God's will is only the universal law of consequences...

It is right to say resignedly that it is God's will when we find ourselves in misfortune. But to content ourselves with such a half-truth is dangerous. It blinds our present perceptivity and bars our future advancement. Without perceptivity, we cannot accurately read the situation. Without advancement, we repeat mistakes and duplicate sufferings. A wiser statement would add the second half-truth, whose absence imperils us: that we ourselves often are largely the cause of our misfortune, that God's will is only the universal law of consequences bringing us the results of our own thinking or doing, our own tendencies or nature. Yes, let us submit to the divine will, let us surrender in acquiescence to what it sends us. But what will it profit us if we do so blindly, dumbly, and without comprehension? Is it not better to remember that it sends us what we have earned or what we need, either for self-perfection or self-purification? And, remembering, should we not seek out the lesson behind what is sent us and thus be able to co-operate intelligently with it? Then the Overself's will truly becomes our own. Are we not as aspirants to be distinguished from the multitude in several ways and not least in this, that we must try to learn from our experiences instead of letting them be useless and futile?

It is true that every happening in the outer life can be accepted as being good for the inner life, that the most calamitous situation can be taken as God's will for us. But it is also true that unless we ask—and correctly answer—in what sense it is good and why it is God's will, we may fail to seek out and strive to correct the fault in us which makes it good and providential. For each situation presents not only the need and opportunity of recognizing a higher power at work in our life, but also a problem in self-examination and self-improvement.

Should anyone lazily, passively, quietly, and cowardly accept things as they are? Or should he challenge them, rebel against them and criticize them irreverently, even scornfully? Are they correct, those saints who declare—or even Stoic thinkers like Seneca who accept—all suffering and pain not only as God's will for us but also as our own will? Seneca says, “Take all things as if desired and asked for.” (He referred to tribulations.) But ‘philosophy’ teaches that if you accept life do not accept blindly. Seek the lesson, the instruction, the education, and karmic reason and cause behind it. Add knowledge to your faith.

Before we can do God's will we have to find out what it is.

“Trust your life to God”

“Trust your life to God” is an excellent maxim. But it does not mean, as some seem to believe, “Think foolishly or behave wickedly and trust to God to enable you to escape the painful karmic consequences of your wrong thought or action.” If that were true the educative value of experience would be lost and we would go on repeating the same sins, the same errors. If that were true we would not grow up morally or mentally.

It is easy to ignore the fact that the cause of one's failure is one's own shortcoming, to cover incompetence in the management of earthly life by loud reiteration of trust in Providence—in short, to deceive oneself.

We render much lip service to the theme of doing God's will; hundreds of writers, speakers, and clergymen utter its praise; but how few take a practical opportunity of giving it real expression by giving up the ego.

Why do these religio-mystics worry about anything happening against God's will? Do they not believe that, regardless of what they or others may do, everything will happen in conformity with that will anyway?

This blind abject apathy of many fatalistic Orientals is based, not on real spirituality, but on fallacious thinking. "Because the whole universe is an expression of God's will, and because every event happens within the universe, therefore every calamity must be accepted as expressing God's will." So runs the logic. The best way to expose the fallacy lurking in it is to place it by the side of a countersyllogism: "Because the whole universe is an expression of God's will, and because every individual resistance of calamity happens within the universe, therefore such resistance is the expression of God's will!"

To be truly resigned to the will of God—a demand made on the Muhammedan, the Hindu, and the Christian alike—does not necessarily mean blindly accepting all that happens as perfect, unquestionable, or best. According to the occasion, it may mean one or another of these things. But it may also mean looking with open eyes and intelligent mind at the course of events in order to understand them impersonally and then, this achieved, comprehending that given the factors and persons involved, only this could have happened.

The God's Will and human suffering

Where is the evidence that this trial, this suffering, was really the divine intention towards him, and not the consequences of his own stupidity or his own weakness?

He should calmly recognize that suffering has its allotted function to perform in the divine plan, that other people have their lessons to learn through it when they will learn in no other way, and that the spectacle of its operation should, in such cases, be met with intelligent understanding rather than with neurotic sentimentality. He should face the fact that many people will not learn from reason, intuition, or teaching and that no one can really liberate them from their sufferings except themselves. Every other kind of liberation is a false one. Others may effect it today only to see the same condition return tomorrow. He should not, in certain situations calling for hard decision, for instance, show unjustifiable weakness under the belief that he is showing forbearance, nor submit to antisocial egotism under the thought that he is practising love, nor abandon his highest duties for the sake of making a false and superficial peace with interfering ignorance, nor passibly accept a flagrant wrong because God's will must always be borne.

"Trust in God but keep your powder dry" was as useful a maxim in a recent century as "Trust in God but keep your arrows sharp" might well have been in an earlier one.

He who has sufficiently purified his character, controlled his senses, developed his reason, and unfolded his intuition is always ready to meet what comes and to meet it aright. He need not fear the future. Time is on his side. For he has stopped adding bad karma to his account and every fresh year adds good karma instead. And even where he must still bear the workings of the old adverse karma, he will still remain serene because he understands with Epictetus that "There is only one thing for which God has sent me into the world, and that is to perfect my nature in all sorts of virtue or strength; and there is nothing that I cannot use for that purpose." He knows that each experience which comes to him is what he most needs at the time, even though it be what he likes least. He needs it because it is in part nothing else than his own past thinking, feeling, and doing come back to confront him to enable him to see and study their results in a plain, concrete, unmistakable form. He makes use of every situation to help his ultimate aims, even though it may hinder his immediate ones. Such serenity in the face of adversity must not be mistaken for supine fatalism or a lethargic acceptance of every untoward event as God's will. For although he will seek to understand why it has happened to him and master the lesson behind it, he will also seek to master the event itself and not be content to endure it helplessly. Thus, when all happenings become serviceable to him and when he knows that his own reaction to them will be dictated by wisdom and virtue, the future can no more frighten him than the present can intimidate him. He cannot go amiss whatever happens. For he knows too, whether it be a defeat or a sorrow in the world's eyes, whether it be a triumph or a joy, the experience will leave him better, wiser, and stronger than it found him, more prepared for the next one to come. The philosophic student knows that he is here to face, understand, and master precisely those events, conditions, and situations which others wish to flee and evade, that to make a detour around life's obstacles and to escape meeting its problems is, in the end, unprofitable. He knows that his wisdom must arise out of the fullness and not out of the poverty of experience and that it is no use non-cooperatively shirking the world's struggle, for it is largely through such struggle that he can bring forth his own latent resources. Philosophy does not refuse to face life, however tragic or however frightful it may be, and uses such experiences to profit its own higher purpose.

The thoughts of God must necessarily be expressive of the will of God. It is quite impossible to separate the one from the other. It logically follows that suffering and sickness being present in the world, they must also be the expressions of God's will.

There are great dangers in falling into a supine attitude of supposed submission of our will, an attitude into which so many mystics and religionists often fall. There is a profound difference between the pseudo-surrendered life and the genuine surrendered life. It is easy enough to misinterpret the saying "Thy will be done." Jesus, by his own example, gave this phrase a firm and positive meaning. Hence this is better understood as meaning "Thy will be done by me." A wide experience has revealed how many are those who have degenerated into a degrading fatalism under the illusion that they were thereby co-operating with the will of God; how many are those who have, through their own stupidity, negligence, weakness, and wrong-doing, made no effort to remedy the consequences of their own acts and thus have had to bear the suffering involved to the full; how many are those who have failed to seize the opportunity presented by these sufferings to recognize that they arose out of their own defects or faults and to examine themselves in time to become aware of them and thus avoid making the same mistake twice. The importance of heeding this counsel is immense. For example, many an aspirant has felt that fate has compelled him to work at useless tasks amid uncongenial surroundings, but when his philosophic understanding matures, he begins to see what was before invisible--the inner karmic significance of these tasks, the ultimate educative or punitive meaning of those environments. Once this is done he may rightly, and should for his own self-respect, set to work to free himself from them. Every time he patiently crushes a wrong or foolish thought, he adds to his inner strength. Every time he bravely faces up to a misfortune with calm impersonal appraisal of its lesson, he adds to his inner wisdom. The man who has thus wisely and self-critically surrendered himself may then go forward with a sense of outward security and inward assurance, hopeful and unafraid, because he is now aware of the benign protection of his Overself. If he has taken the trouble to understand intelligently the educative or punitive lessons they hold for him, he may then--and only then--conquer the evils of life, if at the same time of their onset, he turns inward at once and persistently realizes that the divinity within offers him refuge and harmony. This twofold process is always needful and the failures of Christian Science are partially the consequence of its failure to comprehend this.

He may do nothing more than put his mite of cheering truth and softening goodness into the grim world around him, but this will be enough. He cannot contribute more than he has. The ultimate result of this contribution may be little, but he has tried to do God's will on earth.