

THE UNIVERSALIZABILITY OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Re-examining Kant's Maxim of Duty

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TO

My Late Grandmother

And

The people of Sant Kabir Nagar

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I defend Kantian ethics in terms of the universalizability of moral duties as moral laws against relativistic ethics like traditionalism and communitarianism. The problem I deal with, in special reference to Kant, is whether our actions are or should be judged by local moral determinants like individuality, community, religion or society, or by universal determinants of Kantian spirit. Those who follow local moral determinants, criticize Kantian universalizability. But I consider *universality* to be a strong moral determinant and therefore I defend it, and Kant.

My argument, which I develop comprehensively in this dissertation, is two-fold: *Firstly*, local determinants are based on historicism and therefore limited in scope; they leave room for partiality and discrimination among individuals. They are also dually-standardized – one for the first person (I use the term agent) and another for the second and third agents, all of whom differ from each other. *Secondly*, local determinants considered to be moral criteria are challenging to justify: Their projection of what a person is is not the only or real picture of a person as a moral agent. In other words, local determinants don't affect—or their proponents like MacIntyre and Taylor overlook—our deep sense of moral orientation, which deems every human being as *the same*. Our deep sense of morality has a need for a *common* standard of morality.

With these arguments, I claim that the Kantian model of morality, in contrast, presents a real picture of a *person* and his sense of morality, though it is quite hard to find a person in the real world who acts in accordance with this moral sense. But our failure in following our deep moral sense does not mean that morality is a matter of individual choice or is merely locally-determined. The universal moral law is, after all, supreme and something to be achieved in the realization of what we are as moral and autonomous beings. The concept of local moral determinants is in fact weak in the sense that one can justify a wrong and irresponsible action as a right action, whereas, universal determinants prohibit us from following such a justification of a wrong action as right.

In brief, this dissertation aims to critically evaluate the two kinds of determinants and their link to our practical life from a moral point of view. Another crucial dimension does remain in the debate at hand—the epistemic dimension—but due to the specificity of the project shall remain untouched in this dissertation.

Preface

I am extremely pleased to submit my doctoral research work, *in original*, on the Kantian moral theory of the categorical imperative. Much work has been done on this topic throughout the academic world – some in favor of and some against it – spanning from the early 19th century till the present. Those who favor Kant’s moral theory, favor it as is. Those who are against it find it impractical or unacceptable. I have found no one daring enough to modify Kantian moral theory, particularly the notion of the categorical imperative, to make it workable for the phenomenal world. I do not know why. I can only guess only one reason for this, i.e. perhaps most Kant scholars think that there is no scope for change or modification to the theory and that if we make any change to it, it will lose its soul.

However, I do not completely agree with this thought. I propose that there *is* scope for change and modification to Kant’s account of the categorical imperative as the supreme moral principle in terms of practicing rational capacity, and that without any harm to its soul. For this reason, I dare to critically examine Kant’s moral theory. I provide a number of proposals for the universalizability of the categorical imperative based on the claim that if those proposals are accepted then Kantian moral theory will be, practically speaking, more feasible and stronger. This dissertation is in fact a result of my philosophical endeavor to understand, explain, and correct the role of human reason in terms of the source of ethical decision making in Kant’s moral theory that I began developing at an early stage of my post-graduate studies at the University of Delhi (India). However, my understanding of Kant and his moral theory has been greatly enriched during these last three years while working at the University of Heidelberg.

The aim of this dissertation is not to take any particular philosophical position; rather its aim is to comprehend and convey the essence of Kantian ethics from a different perspective, namely by exploring rational capacity in everyday life. As a Kant scholar, I defend moral universalism and that it is derived from human reason. Most of the chapters of the dissertation attempt to either respond to objections against Kantian ethics or to show why it is superior to any other theory, particularly to moral relativism.

Moreover, the dissertation offers insight useful in understanding Kant's notion of *duty* as moral laws in *daily* life.

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K. M. P.

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Abbreviations

<i>AA</i>	Akademieausgabe
<i>BG.</i>	Bhagavad-Gita
<i>Brh. Upan.</i>	Brhadaranyak Upanishad
<i>GMS</i>	Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten (AA 04)
<i>KrV</i>	Kritik der reinen Vernunft (AA 03)
<i>KpV</i>	Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (AA 05)
<i>KU</i>	Kritik der Urteilskraft (AA 05)
<i>Mahabh.</i>	Mahabharata
<i>MS</i>	Die Metaphysik der Sitten (AA 04)
<i>NE</i>	Nicomachean Ethics
<i>RV</i>	Rig-Veda
<i>SF</i>	Der Streit der Fakultäten (AA 07)
<i>V-Mo/Collins</i>	Moralphilosophie Collins (AA 27)
<i>WDO</i>	Was heißt: Sich im Denken Orientieren? (AA 08)

Kant's texts are cited according to the *gesammelte Schriften* ("Akademieausgabe"). English texts are cited with the *original* page numbers from Kant's original texts, translated and/or edited by Paul Guyer, Peter Smith, Norman K. Smith, and L. W. Beck.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

It is not the business of ethics to arrive at actual rules of conduct, such as: 'Thou shalt not steal'. This is the province of morals.

—————Bertrand Russell¹

1.1 Moral Universalism vs. Moral Relativism: The Problem

There are not one but many problems in ethics. One of them is the problem of morality. The problem can be differentiated into two questions: (1) what is 'morality'? and (2) where does it come from? From classical to contemporary moral philosophy, from Socrates to Peter Singer, these questions have been at the center of philosophical discussions and debates, which have, in turn, resulted in many thoughts and theories. Kant's deontological moral theory is one of them. Other theories are hedonism, virtue ethics, teleological ethics, utilitarianism, consequentialism and so on.² With the exception of deontological moral theory, all other theories have from time to time seen many changes in their original positions and shared many things in common: They are all more or less individualistic, purposive, and relativistic in some sense.

Kant's deontological moral theory, on the other hand, is universalistic and non-purposive. It defines 'morality' in terms of freedom and autonomy of the will, of which human *reason* is the source of origin. It assumes that all rational beings, including men, have the same rational capacity to act freely in accordance with a universal moral law. Its universalistic formulation has posed the biggest challenge to other moral theories of the 17th century and thereafter. Kant's theory has indirectly criticized all kinds of individualistic and purposive ethical theories and has become the central and favorite topic of contemporary moral debate. Because of its universal appeal for the primacy of *reason* or the will over desires and inclinations in determining ethical actions, Kant's

¹ Russell (1996). p. 180.

² The views of those who do not believe in moral values and worth of an action can be excluded from the debate since they deny human ethics as a whole.

moral theory is known as ethical universalism. I prefer to use ‘moral universalism’ in this dissertation because I am primarily dealing with ‘morality’, not ‘ethics’.

Kant’s moral universalism holds that basic ethical principles should be universally correct and applicable to all rational agents. It states that what determines our actions are ethical principles we adopt, not purposes we desire in our lives. The ethical principles that determine our actions are the basis of morality. What are those basic principles of morality? This is the key question that Kant discusses and tries to answer in most of his ethical writings.³ According to Kant, the supreme principle of morality is the categorical imperative, which presents ‘an action as of itself objectively necessary, without regard to any other end’.⁴ Some philosophers, mainly anti-Kantians, criticize Kant’s moral universalism arguing that the theory is too abstract and is not fit for real life. However, I believe that these critics are mistaken in many respects because universalism does not imply absolutism.

In the early 20th century, a modern moral theory based on a new form of historicism and traditionalism emerged which has been competing with Kant’s moral universalism: *moral relativism*. This theory relies on an ethical relativism which holds that (1) ethical principles are subject to the choice of individuals or a group of people, (2) different ethical principles are true in their respective domains, and (3) no ethical principle can be taken as basic moral principle, since there are not one but many principles for evaluating our actions depending on the context and situation.⁵ No doubt, this theory has emerged as a strong competitor to Kant’s moral universalism.

I have taken these two opposing ethical theories for discussion in this dissertation. However, I am primarily concerned with Kant’s moral theory since there is enough content in Kant’s writings on morality to fairly justify his moral universalism to a greater extent. Moral relativism, in contrast to moral universalism, is a weaker ethical concept because it differentiates between persons who are believed to be rational beings and real agents in the real world on the grounds of culture, tradition and history. Its main claim is that actions are relatively good or bad depending upon one’s history of culture and tradition. Time and space are other grounds for saying an action *a* can sometimes be

³ I use the present tense throughout the dissertation because I am not simply talking about Kant but Kantian ethics which is of immense significance in moral orientation.

⁴ “*Der Kategorische Imperativ würde der sein, welcher eine Handlung als für sich selbst, ohne Beziehung auf einen andern Zweck, als objektiv=notwendig vorstellte.*” Kant, I. *GMS*, AA 04:414.

⁵ To go into the details of various forms of moral relativism in recent discussions, see Moser & Carson (2001); Baghrarian (2004), Ch. 9; Foot (2000), Ch. 2 and other available resources.

good and sometimes bad. However, moral relativism does not give any certainty regarding the moral worth of an action since the worth varies from situation to situation and culture to culture. It can only say that any action a is good or bad in situation s_1 at time t_1 , not in another situation s_2 and time t_2 . On the other hand, Kant's moral universalism, based on *a priori* moral laws, claims to be applicable to all rational beings at all times and in all situations.

This debate is known as 'moral universalism vs. moral relativism'. My dissertation intends to defend the former against the latter while taking the ethical decision making capacity of rational beings into account. It is often believed that Kant's moral universalism is applicable to a different world of noumena, not to the world in which agents like us have bodies and relations. I propose that this belief is not completely true: There is moral content in Kantian ethics for generating a way to apply it in the physical world. The question of morality becomes problematic when we fail to seriously take the universalistic dimension of rational human nature into account while evaluating human courses of action. I defend the Kantian view that human beings are in their very essence universalistic, although I realize that in practical life it appears to be just the opposite. Individuals may have many natures, attitudes and life patterns. In the real world, we do not find a person of universalistic nature – so we simply justify what we see. But an empirical justification cannot always be defended. However, it is true that Kantian moral universalism is widely criticized based on an empirical justification of individualism and relativism.

Moral universalism is mainly criticized for two reasons: Firstly, it is criticized for the supremacy of *reason* in determining morality; and secondly, for the universality of ethical principles. Critics argue that the two aspects of Kant's moral theory make it unreal in a real world: (a) People have lives with bodies and it is not possible (even for Kant) to act purely in accordance with principles without taking its connection with the physical world into account, and (b) his moral theory has no practical implication because it brings us, in thought, to an abstract world without telling us how a moral action is to actually be carried out in the real world. How can an agent act in accordance with the categorical imperative in a situation in which she is caught in a moral dilemma? How can she decide her course of action as (*Kantian*) duty if she is faced with either saving her husband or her son in a situation in which both are in danger of drowning in a swimming pool? Kant's critics argue that his moral theory does not provide a solution.

I then ask the critics: Does moral relativism give any answer, and if so, what is it? If the agent saves her son, does that provide any sound reason for why she did not save her husband? Moral relativists might say that she saved her son because she could only save him and not her husband, so there is no question of why she did not save her husband. I agree with them that if she could have saved both, she would have saved her husband too. But they must still answer my other three questions: Based on what principle did she determine her course of action when both her son and husband were in danger? Was it not the principle of *save a life*? If yes, is this principle relativistic or universalistic? I doubt that relativists can give satisfactory answers to these questions.

Those who think that *save a life* is a relativistic maxim cannot give a sound reason for how it is relativistic in a situation when the agent acts not as a mother or wife but as a stranger. What would she do? Would she not act according to the principle of *save a life*? Most of us would agree that she would definitely act according to the principle of *save a life*. Our affirmative answer justifies the Kantian position that (1) only ethical principles can determine our actions, and (2) moral agents should always act according to their highest capacity of *reason*. Where does relativism stand? Of course, there are cases in the real world that justify moral relativism based on the result of an action but they cannot unjustify the universal appeal to and moral worth of an ethical principle, which moral relativism deliberately seems to be ignoring in any given moral space.

For example, a person (a relativist) on the way to his office would not jump into a river to save a drowning boy he didn't know. He can avoid or undermine the principle '*save a life if you can*' based on the logic that if he jumps into the river to save the drowning boy, he will be suspended from his job for coming late to the office. Many real life cases are like this: We give value only to our relationships, attachments, material desires, and purposes, but we fail to give value to persons and principles – we only give value to them in order to fulfill our purposes. We are so used to acting like this – or better – we are so used to our personal periphery, that we forget the worth of a *person* or an *ethical principle* and give priority only to *purposes* and *plans*.

I do not find any sound reason for the justification of moral relativism – but I find many reasons for how and examples with which Kant's moral universalism can be justified. When Kant urges all rational beings to act in accordance with moral principles, he does not mean that infants, the elderly and handicapped people should act like normal, healthy adults with full rational capacity; rather he means that one should

always act based on the ethical principles provided by one's *reason*. Kant strongly believes that all rational beings including humans are definitely able to act from their *reason*. An infant is a rational being, but his capacity is not yet developed; similarly, an elderly person is rational but he has lost his capacity. There is no passage in Kant's writing which suggests that infants and senile adults must act from moral principles despite their incapability. Nor does Kant say that all adults should act from such principles; rather he states that moral worth can only be assigned to those actions which are performed solely based on ethical principles as duties. From this perspective, I put forward that Kantian ethics judges human action, not humans.

The main problem with Kant's moral universalism is that it excludes those actions from the domain of morality that are done from inclinations and desires: Kant does not recognize actions done from desire as moral. This is what disturbs moral relativists because, according to Kant, they cannot be called moral beings, but they do not want to be called immoral. I believe that moral relativists lack a sound foundation for proving themselves moral beings in a strong sense of morality: They can prove their position merely in a loose sense of morality, which only aids a person in realizing his individuality or natural instincts. In this dissertation, my main objective is to show why Kant's moral universalism has greater practical implications than moral relativism and why we should prioritize the former over the latter.

1.2 Immanuel Kant: A Devoted Son of Konigsberg

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was born to a German couple, Johann Georg Kant (1682–1746) and Anna Regina Porter (1697–1737) in the Prussian city of Konigsberg (today it is the town of Kaliningrad in Russia). Kant had a great passion for knowledge and education from his early childhood – a passion that led him to be enrolled in the University of Konigsberg in 1740 at the early age of 16 upon finishing his schooling at the Collegium Fredericianum.

The University of Konigsberg, where he studied and first served as a private lecturer and later as a full professor for many years, was the center of his entire life. As a student, he studied German as well as British philosophy and science, including the theories of Leibniz, Wolff, Martin Knutzen and Newton, and tried to establish a foundation for his own philosophy. The debate between rationalism and empiricism, the issue of certainty in knowledge and truth, the role of science and mathematics, morality,

and the relationship between morality and theology were some of the major areas of his philosophical quest. As a professor, he gave lectures on almost every popular topic from religion, geography and philosophy to science, mathematics and anthropology. Kant was born for Königsberg and the city of Königsberg was built for Kant since he didn't leave the city throughout his entire life; indeed, Kant was an intellectual, a knowledge-seeker and a devoted son of Königsberg.

Kant's major writings include *An Inquiry into the Distinction of the Fundamental Principles of Natural Theology and Morals* (*Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral*) (1764), *What is Enlightenment?* (*Zur Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*) (1784), *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*) (1786), *What is Orientation in Thinking?* (*Was heisst: Sich im Denken Orientieren?*) (1786), *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*) (1787), *Critique of Practical Reason* (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*) (1788), *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) (1790), *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (*Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf*) (1795), *On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives* (*Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*) (1797), *Metaphysics of Morals* (*Metaphysik der Sitten*) (1797) and *The Conflict of the Faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*) (1797).

Although Kant was popular for his intellectual and philosophical expertise in many fields, his metaphysics and ethics must be given credit for raising him to the level of popularity he achieved. More specifically, he was famous for his critical theory of human cognition and for his moral theory of the categorical imperative. It is impossible to deny Kant's philosophical contribution to the world – still the relativists and non-universalists manage to criticize his moral theory in various ways, claiming that his theory of the categorical imperative is impractical when applied to everyday life.

This dissertation aims to investigate, examine and critically evaluate two different positions of relativists and Kant on *morality* and human *duty*, but its main focus is on the universalizability of the categorical imperative. It concludes that Kant's moral theory has greater moral significance than the theories of moral relativists. It also demonstrates how the categorical imperative is universalizable on the basis of the ethical decision-making capacity of rational beings like humans. To defend the universalizability of the categorical imperative from a non-western perspective, I discuss *nishkama karma*, the

moral philosophy of the Bhagavad-Gita (a philosophical text of classical Hinduism), that resembles Kant's account of *duty* in an appendix.

1.3 The Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured into six chapters. Each chapter discusses a specific issue of contemporary moral debate and provides a background sketch for the successive chapter. For example, chapter 1 gives the background for chapter 2, chapter 2 for 3 and so on. In brief, the structural outline of the dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 1 'INTRODUCTION' (the current chapter) gives a general account of the problem that emerges in the philosophical debate on the source of morality and its principles. The chapter gives a brief overview of why moral universalism has greater practical significance as compared to moral relativism. It also gives a brief biographical sketch of Immanuel Kant and the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 'LOCAL DETERMINANTS AND MORAL ORIENTATION: A CRITIQUE OF MORAL RELATIVISM' aims to refute the claim made by the anti-universalizability thesis (hereafter AUT), proposed by many non-Kantian philosophers, that moral judgments are neither universalizable nor are they *prescriptive*⁶. The problem of whether moral judgments are universalizable and to what extent (originally in Kant's writings) is discussed in Hare's scholarly paper 'Universalizability'⁷, in which he strongly represents the view that all moral judgments, (not only *some* as philosophers like MacIntyre seem to be claiming), are essentially and necessarily universalizable. Later, Hare was criticized mainly for his *prescriptivism* and partly for his claim of universalizability by many like MacIntyre who do not find *universalizability* to be an essential element of morality. Since criticism of Hare's universalizability thesis (hereafter UT) is based on Kantian ethics, the criticism of UT by MacIntyre and Taylor can be seen as criticism of Kant's ethics. This chapter will show that MacIntyre and Taylor's criticism of UT is based on their adherence to moral relativism, which does not seem to be a consistent moral theory able to compete with Kantian ethics: For this very reason, this chapter proposes to reject moral relativism for moral universalism arguing that the former should not be prioritized over the latter in the strong sense of morality.

⁶ This is a most favorable term for Hare and his followers. Due to the specific aim of this chapter and since I am not a follower of *prescriptivism*, I will exclude this term from my discussion.

⁷ Hare (1954–55); and Hare (1972).

Chapter 3 ‘AGENT, AUTONOMY AND REASON: THE LOCUS OF MORAL LEGITIMACY’ examines the concept of autonomy and its role in moral decision making but it does not present the historical development of the concept of autonomy; rather it attempts to find out the concrete level of agreement and disagreement throughout the different dimensions involved in the Kantian notion of moral autonomy – of the local and the universal, the moral and the political.⁸ After an examination of Kant’s concept of autonomy, this chapter will discuss the problem of legitimacy—a major issue in the moral debate. To accomplish its task, it focuses on Kant, his critics, and the changing trends of our contemporary world for two reasons: *Firstly*, morality before Kant was nearly a matter of choice between a good and a bad action—in a purely Aristotelian sense, and *secondly*, since Kant, most moral and political theories have somehow followed his legacy of autonomy and his philosophical account of primacy of right over good in terms of ethical decision making.

The basic problem this chapter intends to deal with is how to establish the moral agency in autonomous human *reason*. Assuming (human) *reason* is the locus of the autonomy of the will, this chapter claims that an ordinary *doer* becomes a moral *agent* when he/she performs all his/her actions in accordance with moral principles as given by *reason*. It can be said that only those who always act autonomously are moral agents.⁹ When one’s autonomy is lost by any means, one loses one’s source of moral agency. The Kantian notion of autonomy is of greater importance in recognizing *personhood* in general and *moral agency* in particular. This chapter aims to find a justifiable foundation for why Kant’s notion of autonomy is so significant.

Chapter 4 ‘THE DOCTRINAIRE KANT AND HIS MORAL ABSOLUTISM: FROM PURE PHILOSOPHY TO IMPURE ETHICS’ examines not only the methodological approach the Doctrinaire Kant applies to his formulation of a speculative ethics, but also his philosophical account of the categorical imperative (CI) as an absolute moral principle. This chapter scrutinizes Kant’s universalistic position with criticism from different moralists, some of whom subscribe to relativism, others to anti-universalism, and pinpoints the places where his moral philosophy is problematic, both theoretically and practically. In the first section, it explores the complexity of human *reason*, which for Kant is the only source of morality. *Reason* gives us moral

⁸ Those who are deeply interested in the historical development of autonomy should read Schneewind (1998).

⁹ Schneewind (1998). p. 483; Dodson (1997). p. 94.

principles, produces a will *good-in-itself*, always directs the will to act autonomously, and finally provides the categorical command or imperative – the highest moral principle. The section shows how human *reason* is ontologically a complex unity and difficult to grasp.

The second section is an attempt to unveil the conceptual as well as the practical aspects of ‘law’ (in the first part) and of ‘morality’ and other related terms (in the second part) before deriving the concept and universalistic nature of the categorical imperative from Kant’s moral account. For that purpose, this section will review the historical entry of those terms into Kant’s philosophy and their Kantian implications.

The third section investigates the root and nature of the categorical imperative and tries to focus on hidden flaws that I have discovered while reading Kant. It shows how Kant raises the notion of *morality* from the phenomenal world to the noumenal world while mixing intellectual ingredients only unnecessarily: Though they are necessary for his theoretical exercise, they are not necessary for the practice of morality in everyday life. I suggest that Kant’s moral account focused too much on the systematization of moral concepts and, in doing so, he either overlooked the reality of the phenomenal world or formulated his position overconfidently.

The fourth section investigates Kant’s moral universalism in regard to the global nature of the modern world and its emerging challenges to humanity. There are some conceptual cracks in the Kantian notion of universal morality. This section aims to highlight them so as to present a modified version of moral universalism in the next chapter. The last section of this chapter is a brief summary of the entire discussion.

Chapter 5 ‘DUTY: A MORAL VOCATION OF THE RATIONAL WILL’ contains the above-mentioned modified version of Kantian ethical universalism. This chapter first proposes three modifications to Kantian ethics to reduce it to the phenomenal world from the noumenal and intelligible world of supernatural beings, in an earnest attempt to reduce Kantian ethics to a more concrete level in order to make it practical without losing its moral spirit and the superiority of *reason*, and then gives an explanation of *duty* as a *moral calling* or *vocation*.

Chapter 6 ‘WHY KANTIANISM: A CONCLUDING REMARK’ gives a summary of the entire discussion in this dissertation and contains my own position. It provides an appeal to researchers to further explore the questions related to the universalizability of the categorical imperative from a new perspective.

Appendix 1 'NISHKAMA KARMA AND THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON THE BHAGAVAD-GITA' provides insight as to how Kant's moral theory, in particular his concept of *duty* as from moral laws, can be justified from an Indian philosophical perspective. There is much similarity between Kant's moral principle of *duty for duty's sake* and the Bhagavad-Gita's moral principle of *nishkama karma* (*disinterested or desireless action*). This appendix has been added to the dissertation to present an explanation of the universalizability of a desireless action from *reason* or rational nature.

Local Determinants and Moral Orientation: A Critique of Moral Relativism

[I]n fact reason alone is required for orientation and not some alleged secret truth-sense, nor a transcendent intuition dubbed faith upon which tradition or revelation could be grafted without the agreement of reason.

————— Immanuel Kant¹

2.1 Introduction

Since the early period of the twentieth century, the discussion on morality in the west seems to have taken a *u-turn* to replant teleological ethical theory with a little modification under the name of modern morality. Those who were and are still trying to do so are bound to face the stumbling block of the two most dominating ethical theories of the 17th century and thereafter: Kantian deontological theory and utilitarianism. Their preliminary task was/is to crack the resistance of these theories so that they can reconstruct the notion of something like neo-Aristotelian ethics to which they were and are sympathetic. Elizabeth Anscombe, Martha Nussbaum, Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor are among those names I can cite in this connection.

There are many critics of Kant's deontological moral theory. Two of them are particularly important—Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor. Both critics favor either the idea of local morality or moral orientation in terms of historicity and tradition. MacIntyre criticizes Kant's moral theory in order to defend virtue ethics or neo-Aristotelian ethics, while Taylor criticizes Kant's theory to defend a kind of selfhood in terms of moral orientation. No doubt, the philosophical accounts of MacIntyre and Taylor are some form of moral relativism. I do not find their defense of moral relativism and their criticism of Kant's moral universalism strong enough or acceptable. In this

¹ “Andererseits werde ich zeigen: daß es in der That bloß die Vernunft, nicht ein vorgeblicher geheimer Wahrheitssinn, keine überschwengliche Anschauung unter dem Namen des Glaubens, worauf Tradition oder Offenbarung ohne Einstimmung der Vernunft gepropft werden kann.“ *WDO*, AA 08:134.

chapter, I examine their ethical views and argue against their moral principles prior to my examination and defense of Kant in the subsequent chapters.

2.2 Alasdair MacIntyre (1929-)

MacIntyre is a prominent figure in contemporary political philosophy and is known as a Neo-Aristotelian. He has widely written on various philosophical issues related to metaphysics, ethics, theology, Marxism, and the history of philosophy. His major books are *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (1999), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), *After Virtue* (1981), *Marxism: An Interpretation* (1953), and *Analogy in Metaphysics* (1950). He has also published a number of scholarly papers on all of these issues in various international journals.

MacIntyre seems to defend the anti-universalizability thesis (hereafter AUT) in most of his writings on morality in contrast to the universalizability thesis (hereafter UT) of Kant and neo-Kantians, though it is quite difficult to extract such a thesis from his writings.² There is an obvious problem in MacIntyre's writings on morality, i.e. he does not seem to have a clear view on 'what morality is'. If there is any, it is not systematically presented by him. Most of his writings and lectures produce a kind of amalgam of his thoughts on ethics, history, social sciences, philosophy, and many other disciplines.³ So in order to identify his position on morality as his unified moral theory, one must extract and collate his scattered moral ideas.⁴

I find many weaknesses and defects in MacIntyre's moral writings which provide a strong basis for my criticism of his moral position. For a better understanding of MacIntyrean ethics and my comments on it, I have divided my discussion into two subsections. Subsection I examines MacIntyre's response to Kant, while subsection II examines his response to Hare, who defended Kant's universalizability thesis. My response to MacIntyre can be seen in those arguments I have given in both subsections.

² MacIntyre never claims that he is proposing any thesis of this kind, but his writings and lectures certainly seem to be making a claim for the anti-universalizability thesis.

³ Solomon observes the same difficulty. See Solomon (2003). p. 114.

⁴ I have tried my best to locate his moral position while going through his writings, however it is quite possible that some elements of his moral position have been left unnoticed for which I ask the reader's forgiveness.

MacIntyre on Kant

MacIntyre criticizes Kant making *many* serious allegations against him: *Firstly*, Kant is a representative of the Enlightenment Project,⁵ the attempt of which failed because of its ignorance of human history, tradition, and community.⁶ *Secondly*, Kant belongs to the school of liberalism⁷—the principles of which are *baseless, moral fiction*, and an illusion—that makes morality unintelligible and our moral judgments like primitive taboos.⁸ *Thirdly*, the content of Kant’s morality is conservative.⁹ *Fourthly*, Kant’s moral philosophy is paradoxical.¹⁰ I now propose to respond to MacIntyre in light of those allegations. My aim here is not to defend Kant but to show that MacIntyre’s allegations against Kant are neither convincing nor acceptable and therefore his moral relativism cannot be considered as a good alternative of Kant’s moral universalism. My response to his allegations is as follows:

MacIntyre’s first argument is ambiguous since on the one hand he recognizes that the formulation of the Enlightenment Project is a great achievement in the sense that it provides standards and methods in the public realm of rational justification while on the other hand he says that the Enlightenment Project makes us all blind for the most part.¹¹ He focuses on tradition, culture, and history just as Universalists like Kant and Hare focus on rules. But what we really find in traditions, cultures, and histories is their variations. Indeed, MacIntyre tries to make a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in these three elements. I think such a conception of rational enquiry is not possible. Allow me to explain why.

Suppose there are different communities (could be *societies, cultures, or traditions*) like $c_1, c_2, c_3 \dots c_n$ with different ethical norms according to their histories. For MacIntyre, there is no necessity of a common ethical claim between c_1 and c_2 or c_3 . c_1 is right about its ethical norms within its socio-historical context and the same can be said of the other communities c_2 and c_3 . It can then be asked: What about the case of different members of c_1 or c_2 not having similar moral choices in similar situations? If

⁵ MacIntyre (1967). p. 190.

⁶ MacIntyre (1988). p. 7; MacIntyre (1981). Ch. 10; Knight (1998). p. 7.

⁷ For MacIntyre, “Liberalism in the name of freedom imposes a certain kind of unacknowledged domination, and one which in the long run tends to dissolve traditional humanities and to impoverish social and cultural relationship.” See Knight (ed.) (1988). p. 258.

⁸ MacIntyre (1981). Ch. 10; Knight (1988). pp. 41-42; and Gutting (1999). pp. 72-73.

⁹ MacIntyre (1981). p. 42.

¹⁰ MacIntyre (1982). p. 307.

¹¹ MacIntyre (1988). pp. 6-7.

all the members of c_1 perform similar actions in similar situations, different from the members of c_2 , do all members of c_1 or c_2 not belong to a *commonality* of certain norms or patterns within their communities? There could be at least two possibilities and MacIntyre is bound to accept one of them: Either they belong to a commonality of certain norms or patterns or every member of c_1 and c_2 acts differently in a similar situation. If the second possibility is true, then discussing morality in a social context, as MacIntyre does, is meaningless since there is no society, but only individuals. Since MacIntyre talks about culture and tradition which presuppose an existing society for the practice of moral actions, he is not supposed to accept the second possibility as true.

If the first possibility is true that there is *commonality* within the community or society, then the virtue of *commonality* can also be justified as true on the same grounds within a single class of different societies. In that case *commonality* belongs to *universality* and MacIntyre's moral historicism becomes a weaker claim. If the second possibility is true, then MacIntyre's emphasis on morality in terms of socio-historical context is nothing other than a heap of absurdity and thus nonsensical. I suppose neither MacIntyre nor his supporters will accept the second as true, but then they cannot escape from accepting *commonality within society*, which obviously and indirectly leads them towards *universality*. MacIntyre has to decide where he stands. Kant's moral universalism does not give importance to the existence of different societies; rather it gives importance to the element of *commonality* in ethical decision making by all people regardless of their societal bindings.

In addition, the amalgam of MacIntyre's moral thoughts based on historicism and sociologism does not resolve even a single moral problem in the strict sense of morality and thus leaves us nowhere or leaves us only in a very small moral space, relatively designed.¹² History and social sciences are not the multi-storied buildings in which one of the floors can be reserved for the discussion of philosophical issues. Of course, there can be no theory or concept without history and the social sciences. A history of ethics or a history of philosophy is no doubt a product of human history and sociology. The philosophical elements of moral universalism are also products of human history, the truth of which was discovered by Kant.

MacIntyre seems to believe that Kant's moral universalism is his intellectual design or construction: it has neither historical nor sociological content. In fact MacIntyre

¹² MacIntyre (1981). p. 73.

seems to be justifying that historical and sociological content is always necessary for establishing a truth. If we follow MacIntyre, we must say that Copernicus' heliocentric theory, Newton's gravitational theory and Einstein's relativity theory are intellectual constructions because there is no (empirical) historical content in these theories. Therefore, MacIntyre should revise his moral account based on historicism.

His second allegation against Kant is based on his misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Kant and his morality. Even if Kant is a liberal, though he seems not to be, what's wrong in that?¹³ What makes liberalism inferior to the communitarianism (better to say *individualism*) that MacIntyre seems to be in favor of?¹⁴ In most of his writings against Kant's moral universalism, MacIntyre uses harsh language that shows his condition to be that of a person who, when he finds nothing substantial to say on a particular topic, starts making personal attacks on his opponents: 'primitive taboos', 'nervous cough', 'moral ghosts' and 'Kant led an isolated academic existence' are some of these. Such harsh language does not, of course, prove Kantian universalism to be inferior to MacIntyrean historicism and traditionalism. If MacIntyre finds, as he claims authoritatively, the principles of liberalism baseless, fiction or illusion, it does not mean that liberalism is really baseless or an illusion nor does it mean that everyone is a MacIntyre. As far as I can see, he does not provide any knock-out arguments for his claims.

Since this is not an argument but an allegation, it is not necessary to respond to it; however it can simply be said that not liberalism but the allegation against liberalism is baseless. Of course, it is irritating for MacIntyre since he is so strongly attached to individualism that he cannot cross its boundaries and if he does try knowingly or unknowingly, his individualism will collapse immediately. As a Kantian, I would say that MacIntyre has tried to bulldoze the building of morality that Kant built in the 18th century with the common bricks of *rationality* to accommodate every human being inside not through sound arguments but by using harsh language, and tried to provide *one* brick to *one* person saying, "Take this, this is your part of morality". What happened as a consequence is that everyone has his own piece of morality different to that of the others. His explanation of *morality* in terms of historicism and individualism has left

¹³ I propose to recognize Kant as a *Unitarian* since it was he who recognized everyone as equal on the basis of inherent properties of rational decision making in every human being and he also tried to unite humans.

¹⁴ MacIntyre (1988); also McCann (2004). pp. 8-14.

everyone unsheltered and obviously unsocial. He has failed to pay proper attention to the fact that different notions of morality necessarily presuppose one notion of morality as a standard; he has not presented a sound argument against liberalism, though he claims that he has.

His third allegation is that the content of Kant's morality is conservative, just as the content of Kierkegaard's morality is. His argument claims that Kant is conservative in two respects: *Firstly*, he belongs to Kierkegaard's predecessor culture, and *secondly*, that his project of discovering a rational will distinguishes between maxims of genuine expression and those maxims which are not so. MacIntyre needs to correct himself in his conception of morality because he has built a wall (that must be broken in a wider sense of morality) between *his morality* and the *morality of others*. This is why he does not seem to be coming out from the well (of individualism) into which he has fallen.

All material objects functioned (even today they still do so) in accordance with the natural law of gravitational power and the law of relativity before Newton and Einstein revealed these laws respectively in the 17th and 20th centuries. It can therefore be asked: What is the significance of Newtonian and Einsteinian theories? There is no answer in the MacIntyrean framework of understanding and interpretation of *rationality* as a basis for morality since he gives primacy to *the choice over reason*. Where is *rationality* involved? To justify a choice does not really mean to exercise *rationality* because the justification may be based on desire and irrational. Newton and Einstein only revealed, but did not create, that the world functions in accordance with *such-and-such* hidden natural laws.

Similarly, Kant revealed (and did not create) the fact that it is our rational faculty that governs our actions. There are some other lower faculties like that of inclination, feeling, desire and self-love which disrupt our rational faculty when making a justification for our actions. They (the lower faculties) bring a moral agent into a complex moral dilemma or predicament. This is why Kant says that one should always make decisions with one's rational faculty, but not with the lower faculties, in order to avoid moral dilemmas and predicaments. Since rationality provides a justification, there is nothing like a discrimination of one maxim from other; rather there can only be maxims more justified than others. Two passages of *Groundwork* clearly show that Kant is neither a conservative nor a formalist, but an intellectual, like Newton and Einstein, who revealed the root of morality. One passage tells us that—

[I]f we attend to our experience of the way men act, we meet frequent and, as we ourselves confess, justified complaints that we cannot cite a single sure example of the disposition to act from pure duty. There are also justified complaints that, through much may be done that accords with what duty commands, it is nevertheless always doubtful whether it is done from duty, and thus whether it has moral worth. There have always been philosophers who for this reason have absolutely denied the reality of this disposition in human actions, attributing everything to more or less refined self-love. They have done so without questioning the correctness of the concept of morality.¹⁵

From the allegations made by MacIntyre against Kant and proper understanding of Kant's moral philosophy, we come to the conclusion that MacIntyre belongs to the group of *those philosophers* who have criticized Kant without questioning the correctness of the concept of morality. The second passage tells us that—

To be sure, common human reason does not think it abstractly in such a universal form, but it always has it in view and uses it as the standard of its judgments. It would be easy to show how common human reason, with this compass, knows well how to distinguish what is good, what is bad, and what is consistent and inconsistent with duty. Without in the least teaching common reason anything new, we need only to draw its attention to its own principle, in the manner of Socrates, thus showing that neither science nor philosophy is needed in order to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, and even wise and virtuous.¹⁶

The two passages clearly reflect the idea of morality that was in Kant's mind. In MacIntyre's philosophical writings we can see how mistakenly he understands and

¹⁵ “wenn wir auf die Erfahrung vom Thun und Lassen der Menschen Acht haben, treffen wir häufige und, wie wir selbst einräumen, gerechte Klagen an, daß man von der Gesinnung, aus reiner Pflicht zu handeln, so gar keine sichere Beispiele anführen könne, daß, wenn gleich manches dem, was Pflicht gebietet, gemäß geschehen mag, dennoch es immer noch zweifelhaft sei, ob es eigentlich aus Pflicht geschehe und also einen moralischen Werth habe. Daher es zu aller Zeit Philosophen gegeben hat, welche die Wirklichkeit dieser Gesinnung in den menschlichen Handlungen schlechterdings abgeleugnet und alles der mehr oder weniger verfeinerten Selbstliebe zugeschrieben haben, ohne doch deswegen die Richtigkeit des Begriffs von Sittlichkeit in Zweifel zu ziehen.“ Kant, I. *GMS*, AA 04:406.

¹⁶ “Es wäre hier leicht zu zeigen, wie sie mit diesem Kompass in der Hand in allen vorkommenden Fällen sehr gut Bescheid wisse, zu unterscheiden, was gut, was böse, pflichtmäßig, oder pflichtwidrig sei, wenn man, ohne sie im mindesten etwas Neues zu lehren, sie nur, wie Sokrates that, auf ihr eigenes Princip aufmerksam macht, und daß es also keiner Wissenschaft und Philosophie bedürfe, um zu wissen, was man zu thun habe, um ehrlich und gut, ja sogar um weise und tugendhaft zu sein.“ *Ibid*, AA 04: 404.

criticizes Kant's moral theory. In one place, he claims that Kant failed to provide a psychology to explain human goals and interests.¹⁷ In another place, he claims that Kant's categorical imperative does not give human conduct any direction.¹⁸ These objections against the Kantian form of morality are not sound enough, therefore it can only be said that as an Aristotelian MacIntyre *must* fail in grasping the essence of Kantian morality. Gary Gutting correctly observes this fact in the following lines—

MacIntyre is particularly concerned with modern philosophy as an effort to replace the Aristotelian worldview, which had been successfully challenged by the new sciences of Galileo and Newton.¹⁹

Seyla Benhabib shows a mistake MacIntyre made in his explanation of 'right' in a socio-historical context. She points out that he 'gives voice to a long tradition of skepticism' and that his 'criticisms are based on a mistake which consists in identifying human rights with the social imaginary of early bourgeois thinkers'.²⁰ MacIntyre has made the same mistake in his understanding and explanation of 'morality'.

MacIntyre's Anti-universalizability Thesis

In the first paragraph of 'What Morality is not',²¹ MacIntyre clearly exhibits his goal to reject the claim that all moral valuations are essentially universalizable. He severely criticizes Hare, raising several objections against his exposition of universalizability. In his criticism, he gives explanations for his arguments in order to defend his position. However, his objections and arguments don't seem to be strong enough to stand up against the universalizability thesis: They are not well established and therefore seem to be unsound and defective. I will now respond to his arguments one by one.

His *first* argument against the universalizability thesis, in favor of the anti-universalizability thesis, is based on the example borrowed from Sartre's *L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme*.²² The argument goes as follows:

¹⁷ MacIntyre (1990). p. 187.

¹⁸ MacIntyre (1967) p. 197.

¹⁹ Gutting (1999). p. 69.

²⁰ Benhabib (2007). p. 13.

²¹ MacIntyre (1957).

²² In Sartre's famous example, one of his pupils was confronted during the war with the alternatives of leaving France to join de Gaulle or staying to look after his mother. His brother had been killed in the German offensive in 1940 and his father was a collaborator. These circumstances had left him with a

In several cases of moral dilemma like that of Sartre's pupil's case, there is not any objective criteria to decide which of the two alternative actions one ought to perform leaving the second alternative action either less valued or morally irrelevant or empty. In such cases 'ought' can be used purely in a performative and many other senses without making any appeal for universalizability.²³

Well! MacIntyre shows his strong inclination towards the phenomenological way of dealing with philosophical issues. He easily borrows an example from Sartre to show a moral dilemma (*perplexity* for MacIntyre) and comes to the conclusion that the choice made by the agent is not in accordance with any objective criterion as assumed by the Universalists. I then ask MacIntyre: Is it true that there is no objective criterion for making a choice for someone like Sartre's pupil in a situation of either escaping to England or staying with his mother? I propose an alternate solution to this moral dilemma. The solution is based on a Kantian application of a maxim that can be universalized. After comparing Sartre's example and another puzzling case of a moral dilemma I have constructed I will show that what seems to be a dilemma for Sartre and MacIntyre is not a dilemma at all.

Suppose any person *a*, maybe you or I, leaves his office to visit one of his relatives, say *b*, who is hospitalized in the emergency room after a serious road accident just a few hours before. The *b*'s condition is critical: He is struggling for his life. The chances to survive or to die are equal. After a few minutes of driving, person *a* witnesses a serious accident by a stranger hit by a speeding city bus in the middle of the road. The stranger's condition is the same as that of *a*'s relative – a 50–50 chance. The bus driver sped away after the accident. There are people around but no one willing to take a risk (due to the police investigation and legal procedure in court), or better, no one wants to go out of his or her way to help the stranger. The question is: What *ought a* to do at this moment of time: Help the stranger lying in blood on the road or go to the hospital to see his relative?

If we apply what MacIntyre seems to claim in his first argument, in both cases, whether *a* stays with the stranger or goes to the hospital to see *b*, he seems to feel

strong feeling that he was responsible as a patriot and that they had left his mother in a state of almost complete dependence upon him. What should he do? Stay with his mother or escape to England? *Ibid*, p. 326.

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 326-327.

satisfied since according to him, *ought* in this case bears a performative sense and does not appear to be universalizable. But this is not an answer rather a result of some sort of arbitrariness in understanding morality. So if MacIntyre thinks that what he said is a good answer, he is mistaken. There must be (or should be) a definitive solution for these kinds of moral dilemmas so that other persons, even *a* too, can emerge from any confusion in determining his/her course of action. This is how we can resolve the issues of morality, politics or religion which arise in the social sphere of relationships where two or more people are living together at one time. Of course, an individual choice does matter, but it only matters to a certain extent in a certain place and time: It does not and should not play any role in moral matters.

In his thoughts person *a* confronts at least two maxims at this critical point in time: (1) he should stay with the stranger who is dying on the road, or (2) he should go to the relative who is dying in the hospital. This is the real dilemma in the above example, which many of us have already faced in our lives or will face sooner or later at some point in our lives since we are all bound to continue on our life's journey. Obviously, *a* confronts the two maxims even if he does not have any pre-notion of morality. So what should he do? Should he act according to maxim 1 or maxim 2? MacIntyre would say that person *a* may choose any of the two alternatives. What is the basis for his answer? Is it not a suggestion for making arbitrary choices of action?

Now suppose that *a* decided to stay with the stranger. His decision (possibly) came from a third maxim, associated with the first two: *one should always save a life* (*a* is used in universal form). Person *a* was in that place (on the road) to fulfill this moral duty and it was principally sufficient for his decision. MacIntyre may leave the stranger on the road to see his relative *b*, but I (Krishna), like *a*, cannot because the basis for deciding to go to hospital to see *b* is nothing other than giving it the value of individual relationship. Some, even MacIntyre, may contradict me here by claiming that this is not a convincing argument since person *a* is losing another person (his relative) after all, and therefore, *a*'s stay with the stranger has no greater moral value than leaving his relative to die.

The objection is natural but quite general: It does not stand well since the third maxim 'one should always save a life' does not presuppose any condition of choice from inclinations and desires of any kind. We cannot say that the case of *a* deciding to stay with the stranger and not to go to see his relative is similar to the case of *a* visiting

his relative in the hospital and leaving the stranger on the road: There is a clear difference based on the reason of temporality on the one hand and of relationships on the other. Since Kant's moral theory does not presuppose conditionality on temporality of space, *a*'s decision to stay with the stranger from his sense of duty is justified – there is no dilemma between the two cases. What happens if there are five relatives fighting for their lives in different hospitals at the same time when *a* leaves his office and sees *b* on the road covered with blood? In fact, a dilemma can neither refute universal application of *duty* as *duty* nor does it justify the arbitrary decision making of a moral agent based on individuality.

Let me come back to Sartre's example. Both MacIntyre and Sartre are wrong in their denial of an objective criterion (better to say *maxim*) in a case of moral dilemma. Of course, there is a maxim to decide that the pupil should stay with his mother. This choice has greater moral value and has an appeal to be universalized. The maxim is: 'Always help (better to say 'save the life of') a needy person both as a civilian and as a soldier'. Can this maxim not be universalized?

Yes, it can be universalized, irrespective of whether the person in need is someone's mother, father, or a stranger.²⁴ What really matters is the agent's duty of a particular kind. In the above example, his duty is to help the elderly woman. The agent is on the spot at that particular moment in time to fulfill his moral duty. MacIntyre could be right in denying the existence of an objective criterion (OT) of morality in the particular sense of *morality* he has in mind but a particular sense of morality is not the real sense of morality.

Discussing *morality* inside or outside the academic domain in an individual context is nothing more than a waste of time since the very idea of morality cannot presuppose individual preferences as its foundation. My moral actions on the Earth should not be different from my moral actions on Venus (if human life happens to be there). MacIntyre has mistakenly assumed that both morality and the role of moral agency can be assigned to individuals on the basis of their personal preferences. This is certainly not acceptable because a moral duty should be performed by all moral agents in all similar situations regardless of their personal circumstances: They can do this by following

²⁴ Some may object that my position here seems extremely implausible based on a difference in our criteria: They seem to be determining the plausibility of an action in terms of *what one can do*, while I determine the plausibility of an action in terms of *what one ought to do*. Let's let the readers decide which criterion is more appealing.

moral laws, not by following their personal desires or life patterns. Therefore, MacIntyre's first argument must fail.

MacIntyre's second argument is more theoretical. It requires a linguistic discussion in the philosophical domain. The argument is as follows:

For to adopt Hare's use of "moral" would be to permit only one way of settling conflicts of principles (that of formulating a new principle or reformulating an old one) to be counted as genuinely a moral solution to a moral problem, while another way—that of the non-universalizable decision à la Sartre—would be ruled out from the sphere of morality. [...], not all, but only some, moral valuations are universalizable. What leads Hare to insist that all are is his exclusive concentration on moral rules. For rules, whether moral or non-moral, are normally universal in scope anyway, just because they are rules.²⁵

MacIntyre uses this argument against Hare, but it also goes against Kant. I doubt that this argument really helps him defend the anti-universalizability thesis. The objections MacIntyre has made against the Kantian use of the term 'moral'²⁶ can also backfire at him and his favorites, the Existentialists, if the argument is turned around. If Kant was unable to understand the sense of 'moral', the existentialists weren't getting the sense implied by the Kantian use of 'moral'. And if they did, indeed, understand what Kant meant by 'moral', they badly manipulated its meaning in accordance with the requirements for their own claim. In fact, it is the existentialist use of 'moral' that cannot resolve moral problems and rules out the human need for *one and common moral rule* or a *universal rule*. Their use of 'moral' is based on individual interests and arbitrariness whereas Kant is using 'moral' in the *universal* sense (and this is the real problem for MacIntyre).

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 327.

²⁶ The debate is based on the imaginary construction of a dialogue between a 'Kantian' and an 'Existentialist' that runs as follows:

E: "You ought not to do that."

K: "So you think that one ought not to do that kind of thing?"

E: "I think nothing of this kind; I say only that *you* ought not to do *that*."

K: "Aren't you implying that a person like me in circumstances of this kind ought not to do that kind of thing when the other people involved are the sort of people that they are?"

E: "No; I say only that *you* ought not to do *that*."

K: "Are you making a moral judgement?"

E: "Yes."

K: "In that case I fail to understand your use of the word 'moral'." See Hare (1972). p. 21; also MacIntyre (1957). p. 325.

Let's suppose for a moment that MacIntyre is right in claiming that in some cases of moral dilemma, the individual choice of a moral agent matters and she may perform an action of her choice. What would happen if everyone behaved differently in the same situation at different moments in time? Consider this case: A person *p*, going along on his way, finds a wheel-chaired woman at the bus stop from which he regularly takes a bus to the university. On his first day to the university, *p* helps her enter the bus. *p* does the same thing the next day as well since the pick-up time is the same both for *p* and the woman. After a few days, it becomes a daily ritual that *p* helps her everyday. But what if *p* one day makes a choice not to help her anymore? Can *p*'s choice be said to be moral? Will the woman be left un-helped at the bus stop?

These are questions which lead us to think that we have a *common* choice since we all are or ought to be moral agents in certain cases. Kant is right in claiming that we must treat every person as an end and not as a means. A moral agent cannot be categorized by her different social, religious, cultural, or geographical identity. One's *non-moral* (social or cultural) identity can be categorized on the basis of his place and relationship but one's *moral* identity cannot be. We can see this in everyday life. Kant, too, discusses the similar notion of one's moral identity in his classification of duty as *perfect* and *imperfect*, and *duty towards oneself* and *duty toward others*. It is not *p*'s duty, as an Indian, to help a person like the old woman on the streets of Heidelberg, but since *p* is a moral agent, he is obligated to do the same at all times and in all places: And that is the real difference between the MacIntyrean and Kantian senses of morality.

Morality is not to be used on a particular basis, but on a universal one since particularity involves arbitrariness and leaves all human actions open to dispute, partiality, and bias. Particularity can even prevent the possibility of basic questions of morality (what is *good* or *bad*?) being asked in the public domain. Secondly, MacIntyre concludes that only *some*, not *all*, moral valuations are universalizable. Why not *all*? MacIntyre may find this question easy to answer since he has already provided a list of how the word 'ought to' can be used in different senses.²⁷ For me, it is irrational to claim that a rational person should behave differently in similar situations. *p* cannot morally ignore the old woman looking for help to enter the bus in Germany, because *p* would help her in India – there cannot be two or more standards of morality like *Indian*, *German* or *Australian*. Indian laws and lifestyle may be different from those in Germany

²⁷ MacIntyre (1957).

and Australia, but the motive to have respect for laws, whether *p* is in India, Germany or Australia cannot differ: *p* must follow the law in all countries, or everywhere. The same can be said of *the* morality: MacIntyre and his ideals, the existentialists, didn't think much about this sense of 'ought to' as deeply rooted in all moral judgments.

Further, MacIntyre claims that Hare focuses too much on rules. It can then be asked: What kind of scale is it that measures the acceptance of a rule of a moral (or social) being in numerical form? Is it commensurable that *such-and-such* a rule is accepted by *such-and-such* a person to *such-and-such* a degree? The commensurability of a rule in numerical form cannot be possible if it belongs to morality. In contrast, there are rules on the other side of the humanities and social sciences, for example in natural science, mathematics, and information technology, where it is easy to recognize that a particular rule is used to a particular degree in a particular case. This is not an argument against MacIntyre; rather this is only to show that it is not commensurable that Hare focuses too much on rules—and MacIntyre does not—when he talks about morality in terms of individual choice.

The third of MacIntyre's arguments against Hare's universalizability thesis that seems to be very close to the second argument runs as follows:

The fact that a man might on moral grounds refuse to legislate for anyone other than himself (perhaps on the grounds that to do so would be moral arrogance) would by itself be enough to show that not all moral valuation is universalizable [...]. In other words, a man might conduct his moral life without the concept of "duty" and substitute for it the concept of "my duty". But such a private morality would still be a morality.²⁸

And,

It is possible that a man, who is not guilty of any weakness of will, may have two sets of principles – one to guide his own conduct and the other to appraise (better to say guide) other's actions.²⁹

²⁸ MacIntyre (1957). p. 328.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 332.

MacIntyre's above argument has already been well challenged by Anne MacLean.³⁰ MacLean argues that since MacIntyre drops the notion of *duty* from his concept of *my duty*, he can say nothing about the way that other people act. She further argues that MacIntyre cannot morally approve or disapprove the actions of others since from his *my duty* concept, he 'must regard all such actions as morally indifferent'.³¹ No doubt, MacIntyre seems to be talking about two types of morality in terms of duty: *private* and *public*. A short comment on his dual morality is also necessary here:

Firstly, since we also find two sets of duty in Kant's moral theory—*duty to oneself* and *duty to others*—the idea of the multiplicity of duty is not new. What is problematic in the above example is that MacIntyre either fails to regard the concept of duty in his concept of *my duty* or he does not explain what his concept of duty really implies when he makes a distinction between *my duty* and *the duty of others*: It is quite difficult for a moral agent to distinguish between *his* duty and the duty of *others* without having a prior concept of duty applicable to both.

Secondly, we can ask MacIntyre: What is the criterion to decide that a particular act is *my* duty, not the duty of *others*? If there is any such criterion, is that criterion objective or subjective? If it is objective, what is it? If it is subjective, is it self-love, desire, feeling; if none of these then what? MacIntyre seems to not say even a single word on this aspect of the problem related to the concept of duty.

Thirdly, it is possible that a particular kind of *my duty* at a certain time t_1 could be a duty of p_2 at t_2 , of p_3 at t_3 and of p_n at t_n . If this is so, 'my duty' becomes 'duty of others' but then a notion of *one duty for many people* whatever that notion is arises. Further, this *one duty for many people* does or can become *one duty for everyone* in a particular time and space. Therefore, Kant's appeal to universal moral principles should be understood in this way of understanding moral duty, not in MacIntyre's way.

In addition, MacIntyre's speaking of *my duty* is like saying *my politics*, but one cannot understand what *politics* means in *my politics* without having a common notion of *politics*. It also seems to me that his socio-historical definition of morality is self-contradictory. A MacIntyrean agent would say at a certain point: "I'm a *moral/social being* and 'this' is *my morality/society*." Here, the agent's acceptance of being a moral/social being on the one hand and his acceptance of *my morality/society* on the

³⁰ MacLean (1984).

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 23-24.

other seems to be contradictory since he seems to be claiming that he belongs to a general class/category of a moral/social space and at the same time denying it based on the claim to his *personalized* moral/social space. His fourth argument runs as follows:

More commonly, however, non-universalisable judgments occur when a man finds that the concept of “duty” has limits which render it useless in certain situations of moral perplexity. Such is the example of Sartre’s pupil. And such are the cases at the other end of our scale where moral valuations must be non-universalizable, where it is logically impossible to universalize. This is the case with what the theologians call ‘works of supererogation.’³²

This argument implies that the need for moral universalizability is a logical impossibility and that the exercise to make a claim for the universalizability of moral judgments is not different from the works of supererogation or an effort beyond the call of duty. The second implication of the argument reminds me of Marcia A. Baron who deals with similar criticism of Kantian morality and defends Kant’s ethics in her own philosophical manner arguing against the supererogationist thesis. The supererogationist thesis holds that ‘any ethical theory that does not leave room for the supererogatory is *ipso facto* flawed’.³³ The supererogationists may argue that Kant’s theory is also flawed since it does not leave room for supererogation. Baron’s response comes as a recommendation to the supporters of the supererogationist theory: ‘Kant’s classification of imperfect duties offers a promising approach to the moral phenomena that are usually thought to require the category of the supererogatory’.³⁴

My response to MacIntyre’s criticism of Kant’s moral theory in terms of supererogation is in question form: What type of scale is it that finds moral universalizability to be a logical impossibility? It is the exclusion of the common concept of ‘duty’ from the domain of morality that brings us to the conclusion that moral universalizability is logically impossible. In addition, we can ask MacIntyre: What criterion has he used to make a sharp distinction between what morality *is* and what it *is not*? As far as I can see, no answer has been given by MacIntyre.

³² MacIntyre (1957). p. 328.

³³ Baron (1995). p. 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

MacIntyre's criticism of the universalizability thesis in general and Kant's account of duty in particular do not pose any harm to Kant's ethical theory since in all his writings on morality, Kant talks about the moral perplexities of ordinary human life. Are 'keeping one's promise', 'paying one's debt', and 'not committing suicide' not examples of normal human life? Do these actions not manifest our moral and social conduct? Such actions as duties are, of course, part of everyday life. I do not see how 'keeping a promise' or 'paying one's debt' belong to supererogation. If someone cannot keep a promise, it is his moral weakness or his failure of acting from his rational capacity: One cannot simply categorize this act as supererogation just because one cannot keep one's promise or pay one's debt.

Many people commit suicide everyday in different parts of the world not because they are in great trouble but because they are too weak, in terms of their will, to fulfill their duty towards their own life. This weakness is not physical but psychological, or better, moral. Since MacIntyre's argument is based on the misunderstanding of the term 'moral', it cannot be counted as a credible argument against Kant's moral theory: There is no place for supererogation in Kant's concept of duty.

MacIntyre's next argument states that the universalizability thesis of moral judgments is a product of liberal morality, which seems to be claiming that everyone should be judged and treated according to the same moral standard. MacIntyre argues—

It is not part of the meaning of "morality" *tout court* that moral valuations are universalizable, but liberals tend to use the word "morality" in such a way that this is made part of its meaning.³⁵

This is in fact a different version of his second argument under the name of *liberal morality*. My response to this argument is that it is not liberal morality but common human life that requires a universal form of morality. We live in a society where everyone is equally important and only common rules can help us settle the problems that emerge in the moral, social and political spheres. My dreams in sound sleep at night do not affect and attract people, but my actions performed in a wakened state, whether consciously or unconsciously, certainly do. Common people as well as rational moral

³⁵ MacIntyre (1957). p. 332.

agents observe and evaluate not only the actions of others but also of themselves – and that is universal.

Morality does not involve attributes. There is no such thing of *good morality*, *bad morality*, *liberal morality*, or *strict morality*. Categorization of morality like this has no meaning in itself. However, the essence of morality should be universal in order to make people realize that they belong to the same realm of morality. *Morality* cannot be classified on the basis of one's culture, caste and creed: That mistaken argument is the work of those who fight at a linguistic level to define 'morality' in the socio-historical context – they ignore the inherent element of *universalizability* that belongs to morality.

MacIntyre's next argument against the universalizability thesis is more easily shown to be mistaken in its interpretation of Kantian morality. Most likely MacIntyre assumes that a universal moral judgment is impersonal because of its objective status. With this assumption, he argues that an impersonal moral judgment can neither be approved nor disapproved.³⁶

This argument has been discussed and criticized by W. K. Frankena, so I will refrain from commenting on it. Frankena states that like other contemporary philosophers MacIntyre has made "a mistake of thinking that to define "moral" is also to define "ought to". Frankena rightly argues that 'when we speak of moral action (as versus immoral action) we mean action which is right or obligatory' and that 'what is in question is the meaning of "moral" as applied to judgments, and here "moral" is not equivalent to "right" or "obligatory".'³⁷ Thus MacIntyre's account of morality is of no help in a broader sense of moral space – his arguments are simply weak and loaded with conceptual defects.

2.3 Charles Taylor (1931-)

Charles Taylor is a popular political philosopher and a Prominent Hegelian scholar of our time. His expertise includes political theory, philosophy of culture and social science, German idealism, moral philosophy, modernity and the philosophy of language. His most famous publications in English include *Philosophical Arguments* (1995), *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (1992), *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991), *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), *Philosophy and*

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 333.

³⁷ Frankena (1958). p. 158.

the Human Sciences (1985), *Human Agency and Language* (1985), *Social Theory as Practice* (1985), *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979), and *Hegel* (1975).

Like MacIntyre's, Taylor's moral theory is also (softly) relativistic and Aristotelian.³⁸ What is not MacIntyrean in his theory is the moral orientation of the self in terms of 'a good life' since he has defined self and morality as mutually inseparable themes. Because he is an Aristotelian and is against Kantian moral universalism, his moral theory faces conceptual and practical problems very similar to those of MacIntyre.

This section critically examines Taylor's moral philosophy and makes three claims: (1) his usage and interpretation of 'morality' is grounded upon his weak presuppositions, (2) he overlooks or pays less attention to our sense of *moral culture*,³⁹ strongly rooted in human history and civilization: He gives more value to *cultural morality*, and (3) his moral theory seems to be a kind of *moral web* that he has created as a model of modern morality in anthropocentric style. In the subsequent sections I will demonstrate why his model is more complicated and weaker than Kant's morality.

The Notion of Morality

I. The Concept of Modern Identity⁴⁰

The Taylolean notion of morality is based on his three presuppositions: I) there is an essential link between human identity and moral orientation, II) selfhood and morality are intertwined themes, and III) the questions of our moral orientation cannot all be solved in universal terms. In the very beginning of *Sources of the Self*, he writes:

I want to explore various facets of what I will call the 'modern identity'. To give a good first approximation of what this means would be to say that it involves tracing various strands of our modern notion of what it is to be a human agent, a person, or a self [...].

³⁸ McNeil (2005); Asly (2000).

³⁹ The phrase I have discovered as a concept to match the communitarian and individual form of morality which philosophers like MacIntyre and Taylor belong to. The concept of moral culture, compared to cultural or communitarian morality, seems wider in scope. One can easily observe in Taylor's writings how he overlooks the inherent elements of moral culture when talking about cultural morality. I find the sense of our moral culture more worthy and significant, in present context, compared to cultural morality.

⁴⁰ I don't understand in what sense his notion of modern identity is modern since it is constituted by all the old and often discussed qualities of the self, which have nothing to do with being new. It seems that with "modern" he presumably means post 17th century Europe. If this is so, I still do not see anything morally new in *modern identity* that was not present in so-called *old identity*, particularly in moral matters.

Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes.⁴¹

Taylor has explained ‘morality’ in terms of ‘human identity’ and ‘the good life’, making an attempt to create something like modern identity. By ‘modern identity’ he means ‘what it is to be a human agent, a person, or a self’, and by ‘good life’ he means ‘to live the best possible life’. According to Taylor, these two dimensions of morality have been overlooked in most of the discussions in contemporary moral philosophy.⁴² This is the reason he gives us to explain why he has defined morality in terms of modern identity from moral historicism. So to understand his moral theory, we need to know what he really means by modern identity.

The term ‘identity’ has been used, historically, in two different senses: In the *first* sense, that can be called the *metaphysical sense*, the term is used to understand whether there is any substantive body, entity, or ‘humanness’, to be attributed to every individual human being as a ‘person’ and which possesses certain inseparable characteristics to remain the same, irrespective of his or her physical or psychological changes over time. Those who believe in the existence of such a substantive entity claim ‘self’ is that entity which possesses personhood and so has identity.

In the *second* sense, the term is used to clarify what it really means to be a person in the physical world we are living in and to clarify how a person is related to his own actions and at the same time is related to the actions performed by others. Our social, historical, political, and anthropological understanding of being a person and of his identity is of this kind. Let me call it the *non-metaphysical sense*. The non-metaphysical sense of ‘identity’ presupposes for all its claims the essentiality of the existence of a

⁴¹ Taylor (1989). p. 3.

⁴² This can be considered as an objection by Taylor against Kant, who gives primacy to *right* over *good* as opposed to Taylor and likeminded philosophers who give primacy to *good* over *right*. His argument can be seen in this passage: “Much contemporary moral philosophy, particularly but not only in the English-speaking world, has given a narrow focus to morality that some of the crucial connections I want to draw here are incomprehensible in its terms. This moral philosophy has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance [...]. This philosophy has accredited a cramped and truncated view of morality in a narrow sense, as well as of the whole range of issues involved in the attempt to live the best possible life...” See Taylor (1989). p. 3. His argument against Kant can be easily reversed and it can be asked why Taylor prioritizes ‘good’ over ‘right’. The argument provides a quite different picture if we rephrase it from the point of the notion of right. We can say that the Taylolean and contemporary moral philosophy of the same kind has left no place for the notion of *right* that we all feel, though surprisingly do not follow in our actions. In fact, a *right* action is better in a broader sense of “good” than merely a *good* action.

substantive self. However, the metaphysical sense of the term is quite different to its non-metaphysical sense because for the former the substantive self is the reality of being a person, while for the latter it is a necessary presupposition for the explanation of human actions.

Taylor's concept of modern identity, based on my observation, belongs to the second sense of the term, not to the first. This I can say on the basis of what he has written in the following lines:

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.⁴³

Taylor seems to be defining 'person' in the socio-anthropological perspective, referring to his identity as somewhat oriented or determined by one's own demands and life patterns. One's identity of this kind I would like to call *the second-order identity*.⁴⁴ For Taylor, identity-framework of this kind is the crucial set of qualitative distinction in which there is something incomparably higher than other things.⁴⁵ It is moral and can be fixed only by qualitative distinction and strong evaluation. We can see how as a neo-Aristotelian, Taylor defines the identity of a person in terms of something possessed through purely intrinsic and worthy ends.⁴⁶

II. Strong Evaluation

Following H. G. Frankfurt's distinction between *the first-order* and *the second-order* desires, Taylor seems to be arguing that it is the second-order desires that the modern identity of a person consists in.⁴⁷ Taylor calls it 'strong evaluation'. Frankfurt's first-order desire is considered 'weak evaluation' by Taylor. Making a distinction between

⁴³ Taylor (1989). p. 27.

⁴⁴ By 'the second-order identity', I mean identity we possess in a fixed social context and which plays a significant role for a certain purpose. For example, my identity as 'a customer' works only when I desire to purchase something from someone. After I finish purchasing, I am no longer a customer. In contrast, what I will call 'the first-order identity' is something that manifests inherent elements of our nature for example, rationality, consciousness and moral sense.

⁴⁵ Taylor (1989). p. 19.

⁴⁶ Ladwig (2004).

⁴⁷ Frankfurt (1988). p. 12.

the strong evaluation and the weak evaluation, Taylor argues that the framework constituted by the qualitative distinction and strong evaluation makes our modern identity.⁴⁸ Like Frankfurt, he seems to be maintaining that a human being is distinct from an animal being in the sense that the former, compared to the latter, has the self-evaluating power to regard some of his desires as desirable and others undesirable. The self-evaluating power could be realized in the formation of what Taylor calls 'strong evaluation' and which, as he maintains, seems to be an essential feature of human agency.

The weak and strong evaluations are two qualitatively distinct categories of something like lower and higher or vicious and virtuous. They are two different modes of life. The weak evaluation can be said to be quantitatively valuable, whereas the strong evaluation is valuable in its qualities: The former is concerned with results while the latter is concerned with the quality of motivation.⁴⁹

And the question arises here: Why is Taylor so intent on establishing a notion of strong evaluation for the identification of human agency? Before I answer this question, it is necessary to shed light on the Taylolean notion of strong evaluation in order to estimate the role it plays for the modern identity of a person. Taylor contends that for strong evaluation a certain kind of language, capable of making qualitative contrast between two different desires such as noble or base, courageous or cowardly, is a requirement. He argues that to know what courage is, one needs to know what cowardice is. Similarly, a person cannot know a particular color unless he has some other contrasting colors.⁵⁰ In other words, the strong evaluation presupposes grounds of qualitative contrasts.

We can understand his account of the strong evaluation, compared to that of the weak evaluation, through an example from daily life. Suppose I have a strong desire to watch a movie this evening. When I make my plan, I face two different desires: to go for a Bollywood movie or for a Hollywood movie. My choice of one of these two desires can be viewed as weak evaluation in the sense of their desirability and not in the sense of qualitative contrast since qualitative contrast between a Bollywood and a Hollywood movie is negligible. Let's suppose I only have two incommensurable alternatives: to

⁴⁸ In the III part of this chapter I will discuss how Taylor creates, with the help of such terms as 'moral framework', 'qualitative distinction' and 'strong evaluation', a web of morality in which every person seems to be like a trapped insect thinking only of his basic needs.

⁴⁹ Taylor (1989). p. 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 19.

watch a violent movie in a nearby theatre or to see a classical Indian dance organized at the university auditorium. My choice to go for a classical Indian dance is qualitatively distinct from my choice to go for a violent movie. This very act of making a contrast between two different desires is known as strong evaluation. The strong evaluation, from this perspective, is an assessment of the qualities of our action. Further, a person who deploys language of evaluative contrasts has been called 'a strong evaluator' by Taylor, while one who evaluates his desires weakly is a 'simple weigher of alternatives'.⁵¹

Projecting strong evaluation as human agency, Taylor seems to maintain that a strong evaluator is a kind of a subject (or a self) which characterizes his or her motivations and inclinations as more or less valuable in terms of the quality of the life he or she is engaged in.⁵² According to him, it is essential to the notion of human agency to have the capacity for strong evaluation. Those who do not have this kind of capacity lack an essential feature of humanhood. In other words, to be a human being means to be a strong evaluator. In carrying out strong evaluation, the other important feature of our modern notion of the self is its strong sense of responsibility for making such evaluations. In Taylor's own words:

In at least our modern notion of the self, responsibility has a stronger sense. We think of the agent not only as partly responsible for what he does, for the degree to which he acts in line with his evaluations, but also as responsible in some sense for these evaluations.⁵³

In another place, he writes something similar:

[T]he claim is that living such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.⁵⁴

The strong evaluating power and the responsibility of the self are closely connected to the process of one's orientation of modern identity: Together they provide the horizon on which one's identity takes its shape. According to Taylor, the *self*, as an interlocutor,

⁵¹ Taylor (1985b). p. 23.

⁵² *Ibid.* pp. 23-26.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 28.

⁵⁴ Taylor (1989). p. 27.

plays the main character in designing modern identity. Here we should remember that Taylor relies on *the self* just as Kant relies on *reason* (Vernunft).

III. Self As an Interlocutor

Like Habermas, Taylor tries to discover something like a moral self as an interlocutor to fix his notion of modern identity.⁵⁵ The main feature of the self is its orientation to the good through a language of interpretation:

We are not selves in the way that we are organisms, or we don't have selves in the way we have hearts and livers...But we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good.⁵⁶

And:

I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding – and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'web of interlocution'.⁵⁷

The two passages show that human identity can be developed and defined in terms of self-reflection, the notion of which gives meaning to an agent's life. I agree with Taylor on this point, namely that every human being finds meaning of his/her life only in what kind of self he/she has: It is one's self-reflexive quality through which one forms one's identity because, as Taylor claims, human beings are self-interpreting animals.⁵⁸ Each self interprets itself in certain moral frameworks which Taylor defines as *hypergoods* such as 'respect for and obligation to others', the affirmation of 'a meaningful life' and 'human dignity'.⁵⁹ These frameworks are understood as fundamentally social and in this sense, Taylor suggests, we are embedded in webs of interlocution.

⁵⁵ Dews (1999). p. 186

⁵⁶ Taylor (1989). p. 34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 36.

⁵⁸ Taylor (1985b). p. 45.

⁵⁹ Mok (2007). p. 60.

The multifaceted notion of the Taylolean self is not a part of our natural physiological constitution. It is quite unique in respect to some value-properties that it holds to constitute personhood in the context of its own present and future plans. This is a modern self that holds values, makes choices and life-plans: It is a moral subject which strongly evaluates himself to determine its course of actions towards hypergoods and a full life. Thus, a moral self (better to call it *a social self*) emerges as well as its modern identity.⁶⁰

Taylor maintains that there are three main aspects of the modern self to be inquired about: inwardness, the affirmation of ordinary life, and the inner voice of nature. Making a strong contrast between the modern self and the pre-modern self, Taylor explains 'inwardness' of the self in terms of the process of internalization or individual identity and argues that the pre-modern notion of the self lacks this important aspect in most of the discussions of pre-modern philosophers.⁶¹ But surprisingly Taylor tries to justify the inwardness of the self within the Christian ontological framework of Augustine and Descartes.⁶² He also tries to locate the moral source of the self in its reflexive quality just as Kant tries to locate the source of moral laws in autonomy and freedom of reason, though their moral views are quite different in terms of their understanding of morality and moral agency. Taylor writes:

[I]n contrast to the domain of objects, which is public and common, the activity of knowing is particularized; each of us is engaged in ours. To look towards this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflexive stance.⁶³

Explaining the moral sources of the self, Taylor extends his discussion to the affirmation of ordinary life in a moral framework of respect for and obligation to others, a meaningful life, and dignity. His affirmation of an ordinary life implies an affirmation of equal access to the moral life. In ordinary life, an individual agent decides, through self-reflection (in Taylolean sense through *moral articulation*), what is good, valuable and helpful to him. I observe a serious problem in Taylor's explanation of moral orientation. On the one hand, he overturns the ladder of moral values to give the

⁶⁰ Since Taylor defines self-identity in a socio-anthropological context, his notion of self seems to be social, not moral.

⁶¹ Calhoun (1991). pp. 243-245.

⁶² Gutting (1999). pp. 116-118.

⁶³ Taylor (1989). p. 130.

ordinary life more or at least the same weight he gives to the strongly evaluated life; while on the other hand, he defines moral life in terms of *hypergoods*, related to a life that seems to be more and above the ordinary life. How is this possible?

The duality of ‘ordinary moral life’ and ‘moral life associated with hyper-goods’ seems to be problematic. The problem can be observed in his assertion of an ordinary life as *lower* and a life based on hypergoods as *higher*. It is not clear whether morality is related to the lower form of life or the higher form of life because Taylor seems to be defining morality sometimes in terms of the former and sometimes in terms of the latter. In fact, he seems to be selling old wine in new bottles. Under his notion of modern identity he offers the same products of Aristotelian morality in a new style of interpretation. Aristotle distinguishes between an ordinary life and a good life and subordinates the former to the latter. Taylor too distinguishes between a weakly-evaluated life and a strongly-evaluated life, but at the same time makes ordinary life a matter of essential moral concern. In one place, he argues that it is not a matter of which actions “are special to the good person”; rather what matters is the way everyone acts.⁶⁴ Does the qualitative distinction not become meaningless in light of the passage just quoted?

Another characteristic of the modern self is that it is a source of a version of inwardness through which it locates its place in it (self), though this idea of the modern self is very close to the Romantic conception of nature. The romantic conception of nature as a source of the modern self is quite different in the sense that it does not follow the way that naturalism and Kantianism seem to claim. Taylor attacks naturalism and Kantianism because he misunderstands these two theories and thus manipulates them while discussing what *it* is good to be. His arguments seem to be merely verbal and therefore rather weak for two reasons: *Firstly*, ‘right’ action, which is the main focus of Kantianism and naturalism as well, is certainly good in a broader sense of ‘good’, and *secondly*, the Taylorean source of ‘good’ is religious and hence it leaves room for two-way clash not only between right and good but also between ‘good’ in one religion and ‘good’ in other religions.⁶⁵ § Certainly, his search for a moral source of modernity and his picture of the modern self is a version of traditional Christian ethics.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 279.

⁶⁵ Larmore (1991). p.160. § This argument paints quite a different picture if we rephrase it from the perspective of the notion of *right*. We can say that Taylorean and contemporary moral philosophy of the same kind leave no place for the notion of *right* that we all feel, though surprisingly do not follow, in our

One more problem can be seen in his notion of the modern self: It can be asked whether the modern self is self-sufficient in making moral judgments and determining its courses of action or if it depends on *reason*. If the self is self-sufficient then what is the sense of *reason* having all kinds of power of judgments and decision making? If the self depends on *reason* for the justification of all its moral and non-moral actions, there is no doubt that the self only becomes subordinate to reason and in that case the Kantian notion of *practical reason* becomes a strong foundation for all moral judgements. In this point Taylor seems helpless: He is helpless because merely giving a meaning to the self or life in a certain framework does not mean justifying it. The self at least needs a justification or endorsement for its course of action from another source, certainly from the rational faculty. The self cannot strongly evaluate the judgment 'X is meaningful' in a given moral situation without the help of *reason* that possesses decision making capacity.

What is wrong with Taylor's Notion of Morality?

The above descriptive analysis tells us about Taylor's philosophizing to make a new notion of identity. One objection can be raised against the way he fixes modern self-identity: The Taylorean way of moral articulation seems to be hard to accept and also cannot be observed in our public moral spheres. Everything in Taylor's account of morality whether it is our identity, self, hypergoods, moral frameworks, or strong evaluation seems to be a new construction.⁶⁷ No moral agent goes through all of these constructed blocks. There is also a kind of circle involved in Taylor's explanation of morality in terms of modern identity: Our 'identity' presupposes 'the self', the self presupposes 'the good', and the 'good' comes from 'strong evaluation' which can be understood only in terms of 'qualitative distinction' that again goes to 'the self'. It is not clear which of them is the real source of morality.

actions. Indeed, a *right* action is better in a broader sense of *good* than merely a good action that may not be right.

⁶⁶ Shapiro (1986). p. 313.

⁶⁷ When I say *construction*, I mean Taylor's requirement that we search for what we are as a person or self. The question here is that if we still need to search for who we are, it follows that the self is a matter of our discovery. The question is what it is that plays the role of the discoverer. In this point, I observe that Taylor either lacks the metaphysical sense of the self or is a *sceptic* like Hume, who denied the existence of a substantive self while at the same time faced the necessity of a subject to give his theory consistency. See Hume (1739); Perry (1975). pp. 162-163; also Jenkins (1992). pp. 113-114.

The qualitative distinction first requires moral frameworks ‘to provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgments, intuitions, or reactions in any of the three dimensions’: *respect for and obligation to others, understanding of a good life, and notion of dignity*.⁶⁸ Then the self gets its place in ‘moral space’ through ‘orientation’. The circularity emerges in his claim that knowing ourselves implies an orientation in moral space: ‘a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary’.⁶⁹ Sometimes he seems to be constructing his notion of modern identity in ‘a moral space’ while sometimes he seems to be constructing ‘a moral space’ through his notion of ‘modern identity’. Although he is right in his observation that there is an essential link between modern identity and moral orientation but he fails to observe that the link is infected by the problem of circularity. It is also not clear whether it is one’s own self that makes one’s identity or whether it is one’s identity that can be fixed only in a necessary presupposition of such a self. Taylor tries hard to present a consistent moral theory by constructing a modern notion of human identity but fails to provide anything foundational for his explanation.

Moreover, his notion of the self seems to be fictitious in the sense that in one way it seems to be a primary moral subject whose task is to provide qualitative distinction, moral articulation and interlocution while in another way it is an imagined body that plays an important role in defining what morality is. What is not clear is whether the self gets any support from our *reason* (rationality); nor is it clear from his description of morality what role our *reason* plays and whether *reason* has any relationship with the self and, if so, of what kind. Does the self find itself competent to make strong evaluation without looking towards *reason*?

If the answer is affirmative, then the self must be a substantive entity in order to have moral frameworks within itself for its primary task of qualitative distinction. Taylor doesn’t seem to accept this. If the answer is negative, then his notion of modern identity of a person or self is like a fictitious story and he is like a story-teller. It is not clear why he defines morality in association with the self and not with our rationality or why he overlooks the role of our rational capacity to be played in our moral narratives and judgments. One more objection, in a Flanaganian tone, can be raised, namely that his

⁶⁸ Taylor (1989). p. 28.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

view of the self looks more intellectualist in the sense that those who lack moral articulation and strong evaluation suffer from an *identity crisis* and therefore lack the compulsory components of personhood.⁷⁰

Taylor's claim that the self and morality are intertwined is also weak since it lacks a foundation for justification and the foundation for justification lacks the clear notion of 'the self' and 'morality'. *A* and *B*, for instance, cannot be called intertwined unless it is clear what *A* and *B* are separately and how they are mutually associated. We get no clear notion of morality because we get no clear notion of selfhood and moral orientation. Taylor has neither explained 'morality' nor 'the self': He has only explained that morality and the self are intertwined and participate in one's orientation of modern identity.

Taylor's account of morality that can be extracted from his writings is also weak based on the contrary claims that he makes: In one place he seems to be claiming that our modern notion of identity in terms of moral orientation cannot be solved simply in universal terms, while in another place he claims that in moral orientation we deal with moral intuitions that are 'uncommonly deep, powerful and universal'.⁷¹ If our moral intuitions are so deep, powerful and universal then they must have something common in quality and in the act of articulation. If this is so, then no question of individual moral identity as Taylor seems to be talking about can emerge.

In fact his argument is even ambiguous: In one of his arguments, he claims that everyone feels the most urgent and powerful cluster of moral demands such as the respect for life, integrity, and well-being and these moral demands are acknowledged in all human societies.⁷² He fails to clarify what will happen or what one should do if these demands on one person in one society clash with the same demands on another person in another society. An example can help us to understand the problem I'm indicating: The Naxalites and other separatist groups in different Indian states and other countries are fighting hard with security forces and government agencies in the name of preserving their self-respect and meaning of life, their dignity and well-being. Are they right and justified in their actions and demands? Or are the governments that are trying to crush them right and justified? These questions cannot be answered within the

⁷⁰ Flanagan (1990). pp. 53-54; Smith (2002). pp. 95-96.

⁷¹ Taylor (1989). p. 28, pp. 4-5.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 4

Taylor's model of morality and modern identity⁷³: Taylor's moral account cannot solve conflicts between different *goods* of the members of the same group, community, or society.

Taylor's moral theory does not seem to work in cases of conflict. We have seen that on the one hand he favors individual goods and cultural diversity, whereas on the other hand he talks about some universal moral frameworks such as respect for and obligation to others and human dignity.⁷⁴ The problem of his theory can be highlighted by asking the question of how useful our individual sense of good and cultural diversity is for our sense of respect for and obligation to others. How can a person consistently follow the sense of moral responsibility and obligation in both cases – for his own good and good of others? If any action, say *a*, gives a meaning to my sense of full life and dignity but it goes against the similar sense of other people in a given situation, then what should I do? Should I go ahead and perform *a* in accordance with my individual meaning of life, fixed through qualitative distinction, or should I stop myself and not do *a* because it goes against the sense of full life and dignity of others?

Another example can help us. Many people in the modern world find smoking to be part of a meaningful lifestyle. But other people, those who are non-smokers, find the habit of smoking a reflection of bad character. In this point, the meaning of a 'meaningful or full life', which Taylor often takes as a moral space or moral background, does not work: One cannot claim that another's meaning of a full life is less meaningful than one's own and vice-versa. In this situation, there is room for conflict between individuals' different moral senses and meanings of a full life. How should this situation be handled? Isn't it clear or necessary that to settle the problem in a humane manner we need a common standard? Since the requirement of a common standard to settle moral problems does not allow for individualism, Taylor's defense of individual good in the Neo-Aristotelian sense seems to be incompatible and hence unacceptable. Even if it is compatible, his theory is no doubt an explication of the Aristotelian *eudaimonic theory* in terms of 'what it is good to be' but his explication is objectionable

⁷³ This example indicates why we need, if not in Kantian form, a common criterion of moral judgements.

⁷⁴ Shapiro observes this problem from a different angle. He observes that "although the argumentation aspires to an interpretive analytic influenced by a Heideggerian ontology, Taylor's philosophical discourse remains primarily Kantian." See Shapiro (1986). p. 312.

in the sense that it ‘prioritize(s) not so much the good over the right as the ‘Self’ over the ‘Other’’.⁷⁵

*Taylor’s SIM-theory As a Moral Web*⁷⁶

The picture we are getting from the above examination of the Taylolean model of morality is no doubt a moral web in which every self is like a spider, which moves in a self-made web for the survival and enjoyment of its own life. The moral web I am talking about in Taylor’s moral theory can be discovered in the web of interlocutions, the diversity and hierarchy of individual goods, different backgrounds for moral frameworks, moral articulation in terms of a full and meaningful life, and the subjective role of a person in his or her likes and dislikes, and so forth. Following John Mackie, we can say that Taylor seems to have a projectionist view of morality.⁷⁷

His projectionist view is grounded in his assertion that ethical values are not absolutely objective; rather they are our subjective projections in terms of a purposeful life. To defend his claim that ‘there are virtue terms which apply to features of our lives as individuals’, he argues against naturalism according to which ethical values must be objective in another sense.⁷⁸ He seems to have asserted in one place that ethical values ‘are not part of reality, but in some form our projection’:⁷⁹ His projectionist view seems to be claiming that the best sense of gaining moral orientation is to make sense of the good, the actions and feelings of both ourselves and others, by projecting our moral values.⁸⁰

Taylor sets out some standards of moral judgments that sometimes seem to be of a Kantian approach. For Kant, universal moral laws or a universal maxim could be a standard to determine which action is morally worthy and which is not. For Taylor, strong evaluation, moral frameworks, qualitative distinction are like those standards by which we judge our actions in terms of value and meaningfulness. In Taylor’s own words—

⁷⁵ Smith (2002). p. 112.

⁷⁶ I have constructed this term to show that Taylor’s ethical theory is based on three elements of his philosophical account: *Self, Identity and Morality* (SIM).

⁷⁷ Taylor (1989). pp. 53-54; also Mackie (1977). p. 42.

⁷⁸ Taylor (1989). p. 55; also Gutting (1999). p. 148.

⁷⁹ Taylor (1989). p. 56.

⁸⁰ Taylor (1989). pp. 56-57.

[T]hey all involve what I have called elsewhere ‘strong evaluation’, that is, they involve discriminations of right and wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged.⁸¹

While establishing his moral theory, Taylor tries to subsume everything good for individual life under morality, as he claims that our moral world must be understood not only in terms of the ideas and pictures that underlie ‘our sense of respect for others but also those which underpin our notions of a full life’.⁸² There may be a discretionary role of every individual if he or she compares ‘a valuable life’ with ‘a life’. A modern life (*modern* in the sense of westernized lifestyle) can be judged only on the grounds of how much a particular kind of life is luxurious.⁸³ One can find his life more valuable if he has millions of dollars in his bank account, owns a big palace-like house with all kinds of modern equipment, cars, servants and many other valuable things. Is this form of life valuable in the real sense of morality? Does the concept of morality depend upon those things an individual finds valuable in respect to his articulation of a comfortable life, without having a sense of moral worth?

In contrast, a person might find his life more meaningful and valuable either in form of sainthood, *loksamgraha*⁸⁴ (well-being of all), or being a peacemaker, being religious, aboriginal etc. Are these forms of life morally valuable? There is one serious predicament in answering these questions and that is of finding out a reason to decide what kind of life is worth living. If it is individual, as Taylor says, and not a common moral norm, and if everyone determines on his own discretion that *such and such* a kind of life is worth living, then every individual being could be said to be living a worthy life and everyone and his/her actions could be said to be moral. For me, it is more problematic since ‘worthy life in general’ and ‘worthy life in a purely moral sense’ is not the same. A terrorist finds his life worthy in terror-related activities, but I think no one, except other terrorists, will recognize his life as a moral life.

Some may argue that if we define ‘morality’ in terms of the higher form of life, we will be trapped into a theoretical quandary because ‘morality’ then will be linked to one

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 14.

⁸³ Perhaps he elaborates morality in this sense of modernity. See also fn. 40.

⁸⁴ This is a moral concept of the Bhagavad-Gita, according to which one should work for the well-being of other people.

dimension of life and the other dimension of the lower life will be marginalized or less valued. This argument isn't very convincing: We find many honored and famous people to be morally corrupt. Contrary to them, many people among us, unknown to the public eye, morally have a sound character, though they do not even have proper means to survive. Thus 'the sense of hypergoods' is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a broader concept of morality.

One more problem in Taylor's moral web is that if we change our approach in explaining the link between our identity and moral orientation, the claim Taylor seems to be making becomes a false claim. One's identity as a Catholic or a Hindu or a Buddhist has little to do with one's sense of moral orientation. Of course, these identities cannot be ignored in the social context but they play only a limited role for fixing our deep moral sense that we all have in ourselves. Our moral identity is independent of other (given) identities such as religious, political or social.

A sense of moral identity is in fact a sense of acting from our pure nature. We can claim that every human being is a moral being by his nature, though this claim seems to be polemical; but from the perspective of the inherent rational capacity that every human being is presumed to have, the claim is true. In other words, the concept of moral identity cannot be understood in terms of one's life style or religion or caste or nation. It can be or should be understood in terms of one's rational nature. Those like Taylor who believe that moral values are relative to one's historical orientation indeed seem to be undermining human rationality.

When a person is believed to possess non-moral identities (better to call them *social identities*), he/she is believed to have evaluated himself/herself as a rational human being in orienting his/her identity on various grounds of appearance, relationship, citizenship etc. For example, some of us are Americans, some Africans, and some Asians. Similarly, some are teachers, some Hindus, and some Christians. More precisely, we can say that our social identity is constructed but our moral identity is not. The sense of our moral identity is prior to the sense of our social identity. If someone is asked who he or she is, the answer will not be that 'I am a human being' or 'I am a moral being' or 'I am a social being'; rather one will say 'I am Krishna' or 'I am the chancellor of Germany' or 'I am Mr. or Ms. X from the University of Heidelberg' and so on.

Questions like this always inquire about our social identity, not moral identity because moral identity is a pre-understood notion. The reason is obvious: Being a human means being a moral agent. In other words, as I strongly believe, every human being is psychologically connected with a deep sense of morality in terms of his conscious capacity of decision making. Taylor claims that one's *actual identity*⁸⁵ in terms of a full life is more important than his or her *self-represented identity*⁸⁶ but he does not give a justificatory explanation why this is so.

Taylor also puts the plurality of goods and values in connection with his notion of the modern self. It can be asked whether there is a plurality of moral standards for the justification of every single good and value or whether there is only one. In the case of plurality, his moral web becomes thicker and more problematic since the plurality of standards may require a plurality of justifications. In the case of one standard, it must be something that can be applied in each and every case of moral justification. What can that be? Is it not the rational morality of the Kantian model that is highly appealing to all in every time and space? My answer is certainly affirmative.

I would like to point out some more objections in support of my claim against Taylor's account of morality. One objection is that his evaluation of modern ethics is not justified and his argument seems to be merely a verbal one.⁸⁷ Taylor holds the view that modern ethics is mistaken in dealing with the questions of what is right and what it is good to be. According to him, it emphasizes and gives primacy to the former over the latter or to 'right' over 'good'. As we have seen that Taylor's emphasis on what it is good to be seems problematic, we do not need to answer why 'a right action' should be prioritized over 'a good action'. Indeed, the foundation of his moral account in terms of hypergoods or goods in the sense of a full life seems to be a product of his reformed version of Christianity.

Following Shapiro again, I must say that Taylor's projection of the modern self on the one hand and his denial of 'absolute understanding of what we are as persons' on the other seems to be rather contradictory and his argument seems to be unconvincing since

⁸⁵ *Actual identity* refers to one's life traits in his/her own eyes and reflects "the whole structure of her character, the traits that are central to her capacities for agency." See Flanagan & Rorty (1990). p. 3. I think one's actual identity refers to one's life traits that are inherent, but not that are socially and historically constructed because what is constructed is not always justified. Taylor's account of actual identity seems constructed, therefore it is morally inadequate.

⁸⁶ Flanagan gives a clear picture of the distinction between *actual full identity* and *self-represented identity*. See Flanagan (1991). p. 198.

⁸⁷ Larmore (1991). p. 160.

the self, which he is projecting through strong evaluation 'is smuggled into a form of facticity'.⁸⁸ It can also be said that the way Taylor sometimes narrates the self in the sense of 'growth and becoming' and sometimes as a 'narrator' doesn't give a clear picture of what exactly he wants to convey. Even if it is clear to others, it looks more procedural.⁸⁹ Thus, the link he makes between the three elements of self, identity, and morality and recognizes as *modern identity* is not conceptually appealing.

2.4 Cultural Morality vs. Moral Culture

Both MacIntyre and Taylor have tried to defend a kind of cultural morality. We can call it cultural moral relativism, which implies that moral truth is relative to a culture. Since MacIntyre's account of morality entails that the truth of moral judgments depends upon cultural tradition, his theory no doubt entails cultural moral relativism. Relativism is an attractive idea that can help us to explain cultural differences but it does not explain similarities that we do or can see in the idea of moral culture. Both MacIntyre and Taylor do not think that there is moral culture before cultural morality in human history.

MacIntyre seems to claim that the criterion for determining morality is tradition or history dependent. He cannot escape from the trap of traditional relativism that is, in fact, a kind of cultural relativism since traditions vary from culture to culture and time to time. Even his concept of rationality within the boundaries of tradition is subject to change. In *After Virtue*, he seems to assert that morality is tradition-bound and argues that the concept of morality can be assessed and evaluated in the culture in which the concept has been developed. This assertion implies the priority of cultural morality over moral culture. In fact in his writings and arguments he has promoted culturalism and traditionalism against universalism and Kantianism. However, he tries to universalize his theory of cultural moral relativism on the grounds of some rational justifications but since 'rationality' for him is also tradition-bound and hence relative, his attempt has failed.

⁸⁸ Shapiro (1986) pp. 317-318.

⁸⁹ Taylor (and many likeminded philosophers) criticizes Kant arguing that his moral theory is procedural. I think if one goes through Taylor's own writing: One can easily conclude that the Taylolean approach is more procedural than the approach of any other philosopher, including Kant.

Like MacIntyre, Taylor also seems to be defending cultural morality.⁹⁰ Cultural morality should be understood in the sense that different cultures practice different moral norms inside their cultural boundaries (language, religion, history etc.). This is the hidden but problematic characteristic of Taylor's notion of morality that appears while recognizing 'others': "Culture and upbringing may help to define the boundaries of the relevant 'others'".⁹¹ Taylor recognizes 'others' in terms of cultural variation to justify the individual meaning of what the term 'morality' is exactly. It can be asked: Why does he talk about cultural morality in the sense of culture as a horizon of moral frameworks but not about our moral culture that reflects our deep and universal moral sense?

By 'moral culture' I mean the sense of responsibility and obligation that we all have in connection with the actions we perform for ourselves and for others. This sense of moral responsibility and obligation does not come from a culture, though it flourishes in it; rather it comes from our rational capacity to judge which action is right and which is not. This sense grows within us when we evaluate ourselves from the perspective of the rational capacity we are believed to have, irrespective of our cultural and social norms, and categorize our actions already performed as good or bad, right or wrong. A child, when once burnt by a flame, views 'fire' and similar objects as a dangerous thing and never goes near them again. He also makes other children aware of this characteristic of fire. Similarly, when we evaluate our actions as morally right or wrong, we make people aware of performing a particular action in a particular situation whatever the case it is. The evaluation of actions presupposes our deep sense of morality. When one continuously acts from one's moral nature, one's actions gradually develop a trend of moral acting or in another sense, moral culture. Unlike the idea of cultural morality, the idea of moral culture implies that it is our morality which determines our culture: It is not the case that our cultures determine our morality.

Taylor's account of morality seems to be culture-oriented and individually determined in terms of what it is good to be. His account seems to be ignoring the natural and most significant dimension of our sense of moral orientation. If I accept, as Taylor claims, that *morality* is a topic of discussion only within cultural boundaries and individual goodness, I must accept that the culture which the agent comes from can be

⁹⁰ Both MacIntyre and Taylor might object to my claims on the basis of the three dimensions of the self and argue that they were not talking about cultural morality; but their moral writings reflect that they are no doubt cultural moralists.

⁹¹ Taylor (1989). p. 5.

criticized or appreciated more than the agent for a certain action that is performed in a certain situation. The agent becomes a cultural slave and lacks his or her freedom and autonomy which Taylor sometimes talks about but fails to give a proper place in his writings.

One might be confused that cultural morality and moral culture are not two different things, but one. This, however, is not the case. Cultural morality is distinct from moral culture or I can say that the former has less moral value and more limited moral space than the latter, which has greater moral value and greater space. In cultural morality, standards for our moral judgments grow, flourish and can be practiced only inside the boundaries of a particular culture. In other words, one's culture itself plays a role as a standard of what is good and bad. Moral norms are the direct product of one's culture.

In contrast, moral culture is a category where everyone is moral. Here morality gets primacy over culture, though the question of what morality is still remains. I believe the question of 'what morality is' can be answered by Kantian ethics, not by MacIntyrean and Tayloreal ethics, since the Kantian notion of morality based on the idea of freedom, autonomy and human dignity focuses on humans' inherent nature of being capable of decision making and acting upon moral laws that we miss in the ethical accounts of MacIntyre and Taylor.

Taylor sometimes seems to be trying to link the two contrary views of teleological and deontological ethics through his notion of modern identity and moral frameworks but as we have seen, in this chapter, he does not succeed in accomplishing this objective. This may, in fact, be considered the main drawback of his moral view. His focus on the ethical feature of strong evaluation through qualitative distinction doesn't seem justified either. The reason is that a person also identifies himself or herself at different points in time in non-ethical frameworks which Taylor either overlooks or gives no proper value to.

2.5 The Foundation of Moral Orientation: *Reason or Tradition?*

The term 'moral orientation' is generally applied to children's behavior in terms of their overall development and value perceptions. In ethical discussions, it seems to be a new theme of the 20th century that we find in the writings of philosophers like MacIntyre and Taylor. Ethically, the term implies the ability to locate oneself as a moral agent in a given space in terms of determining a course of action. In one definition, the term—

[F]ocuses on mutual obligations, rights and entitlements of the people involved in the relationship. It implies that in a relationship you and the other(s) mutually perceive the obligations you have to one another and mutually respect the framework of social norms that define what is fair or unfair in the interactions and outcomes of everyone involved.⁹²

It can be asked: What is the foundation of moral orientation? MacIntyre seems to be moving between the concepts of traditionalism and historicism in order to make use of their respective accounts of ‘moral orientation’ and its determining reasons.⁹³ He has developed his idea of moral orientation on the basis of traditionalism, which he has tried to justify in his overall account of rationality and morality. As a neo-Aristotelian, he has found traditionalism an easy vehicle to carry virtue ethics and the dominating elements of western tradition. But as expected, his traditionalism has been severely criticized. Susan Moller Okin has criticized him for defending traditions such as Aristotelianism and Thomism.⁹⁴ Lisa Bellantoni has criticized him for not being clear in his position since, as she has observed, he sometimes seems to be a realist while defending Aristotelianism and sometimes a constructivist while arguing for other traditions.⁹⁵

Taylor seems to be defining ‘moral orientation’ through his account of historicism and communitarianism with a claim that moral frameworks are the product of history and culture in terms of moral identity orientation. As we have seen in this chapter, he has given a narrative of how the modern moral identity of a person is grounded in historical concepts and meanings. In other words, Taylor’s approach is historicist in moral orientation.⁹⁶

The question is whether history or tradition can provide the foundation for moral orientation. If we apply a general notion of ‘moral orientation’, our answer will be affirmative since a child learns morality and moral practices from family, culture, and tradition. MacIntyre and Taylor seem to be treating everyone like a child and justifying their historical orientation as fully rational. Interestingly, they seem to forget that moral agents are not children. They have their own cognitive faculties to take ethical decisions. A tradition can characterize an action as moral on historical grounds, but it cannot

⁹² Sandy, Boardman, & Deutsch (2006). p. 343.

⁹³ See Lutz (2004); Allen (1997).

⁹⁴ Okin (1989). Ch. 3.

⁹⁵ Bellantoni (2000). p. 33; also Myers (2001). p. 253.

⁹⁶ Neville (1995). p. 112.

justify that action as moral with sound arguments because a justification comes from the cognitive faculty, not from tradition or history. Of course the practice of a particular action may be good for the growth of a tradition but the growth and goodness of tradition do not justify that action as moral either.

More precisely, we can learn lessons in morality from traditions and histories and also act according to them to the satisfaction of the tradition and community to which we individually belong. We can satisfy our desires and feelings through those actions that are determined as moral by orientation in MacIntyre's and Taylor's sense but we certainly cannot satisfy our *reason* since *reason* does not take decisions from desires and feelings; rather it takes decisions from principles that are given to itself by itself and for itself. Can slavery be justified as moral even if slaves are fairly treated? Of course not, but was it not once justified by the Greeks in ancient times?

What is the foundation that determines moral orientation? In Kant's reply, it is human *reason* since tradition and revelation cannot be grafted without the agreement of *reason*. He considers 'reason' as the only source of orientation in thinking and does not say anything directly about moral orientation. However, his account of reason-based orientation in thinking is also the foundation for orientation in acting or, so to speak, moral orientation. He is of the opinion that reason-based orientation determines one's assent according to a subjective principle on which to act.⁹⁷ Orientation through thinking means to find out truth in one's self. It is a kind of self-inquiry one makes in search of the basis for one's own beliefs and assumptions. Kant seems to be claiming that one who has rational capacity can definitely question oneself in terms of determining one's courses of action.⁹⁸

When one's reason participates in moral orientation, one knows who he *is* and what he *ought to* do in moral matters. He does not need a justification from his tradition or history. Kant rightly claims that reason is the basis for orientation not only for a speculative thinker but also for the ordinary man who has morally sound *reason*. Through his reason-based orientation, an ordinary man can realize the end to which he is

⁹⁷ "Sich im Denken überhaupt orientieren, heißt also: sich bei der Unzulänglichkeit der objectiven Principien der Vernunft im Fürwahrhalten nach einem subjectiven Princip derselben bestimmen." Kant, I., *WDO*, AA 08:136

⁹⁸ "Selbstdenken heißt den obersten Probirstein der Wahrheit in sich selbst (d. i. in seiner eigenen Vernunft) suchen, [...].Sich seiner eigenen Vernunft bedienen, will nichts weiter sagen, als bei allem dem, was man annehmen soll, sich selbst fragen: ob man es wohl thunlich finde, den Grund, warum man etwas annimmt, oder auch die Regel, [...]. Diese Probe kann ein jeder mit sich selbst anstellen." *Ibid*, AA 08:146-147.

destined and determine his course of moral action which may lead towards that end. In this process, not his tradition or history but his reason plays a major role. John Rawls correctly observed the Kantian idea of reason-based orientation as an idea which ‘belongs to reason and reflection (both theoretical and practical) to orient us in the (conceptual) space, say, of all possible ends, individual and associational, political and social.’⁹⁹

Traditional and historical orientation is based on beliefs that people generally have. It can be asked whether those beliefs are reason-oriented. If they are not then how can they help people who possess reason as determining a foundation to orient themselves on? Once a person orients himself in his reason, he can realize his autonomy, will, freedom, and his moral identity different to *cultural identity* which I regard as identity based on cultural norms. How can traditionalism and historicism provide a foundation for moral orientation?

MacIntyre and Taylor have provided mistaken accounts of moral orientation to the public. They mistakenly thought that historical beliefs are the same as rational beliefs. And they seem to be claiming that what is based on historical belief can be fully justified. This is not true. In Kant’s own words—

[T]he situation with respect to a rational belief is different from that of a historical belief, for in the latter it is always possible that proofs to the contrary may be found, and we must always hold ourself in readiness to change our opinion when our knowledge of the objects if extended.¹⁰⁰

No doubt, the foundation for moral orientation is one’s own reason and autonomy. A person can have many traditional and historical identities, for instance of being a father, mother, Indian, German, professor, singer and so forth. But he cannot have several identities as a moral agent. He can realize his moral agency only through his own reason. Since MacIntyre, Taylor and other relativists do not consider reason to be a primary basis for moral orientation: Their moral accounts seem to be flawed. On the

⁹⁹ Rawls (2001). p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ “Also ist es mit dem Vernunftglauben nicht so, wie mit dem historischen bewandt, bei dem es immer noch möglich ist, daß Beweise zum Gegentheil aufgefunden würden, und wo man sich immer noch vorbehalten muß, seine Meinung zu ändern, wenn sich unsere Kenntniß der Sachen erweitern sollte.“ Kant, I., *WDO*, AA 08:142.

other hand, Kant's proposal for reason-based moral orientation is strong enough for acceptance.

Interestingly enough, in one place, Taylor has accepted the Kantian claim to reason as the foundation for moral orientation. He correctly observes that the Kantian personal autonomy 'offers a set of objective ends to help agents to orient themselves both personally and morally when they construct their plans of life'.¹⁰¹ But Taylor, being an Aristotelian, does not give full value to human reason in moral orientation. This is why his acceptance of the role of human reason in moral orientation cannot be said to be Kantian.

2.6 Summary

I have presented in brief an account of moral relativism in general and the positions of MacIntyre and Taylor in particular. I have argued that both philosophers follow Aristotelian ethics and do not accept moral judgments as universal. They defend a kind of moral relativism, hard or soft, and cultural morality. In the sections related to MacIntyre, I have explained why MacIntyre's objections against Kant's theory are not scholarly. Most of his objections are of the same kind. I have also shown that MacIntyre's claim against the universalizability thesis to defend the anti-universalizability thesis is not acceptable either because of its many conceptual flaws.

Like MacIntyre's Taylor's notion of modern moral identity is also Aristotelian and Augustinian. He has fabricated this theory from a diversified language in accordance with his needs. In the section on Taylor, I have shortly explored his notion of self-identity, explained the contrast between cultural morality and moral culture, and concluded that the Taylolean model of morality is like a moral web. Taylor seems to be right in some places but his 'right' position benefits him very little since his entire concept of modern identity lacks the real rational dimension of our moral sense. And some of his contradictory claims weaken his model of morality. For this reason, the Taylolean model of morality is hard to accept since he has weaker arguments than Kant. Instead of giving priority to reason-based orientation, he gives priority to desire-based orientation.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, 2005, p. 618.

Agent, Autonomy, and Reason: The Locus of Moral Legitimacy

Acting autonomously is acting from principles that we would consent to as free and equal rational beings.

————— John Rawls¹

3.1 Introduction

In the preface to *The Invention of Autonomy*, Schneewind makes two claims: *One* that great moral philosophy is a result of serious engagement with problems related to ‘personal, social, political and religious life’ and *two* that the conception of morality as autonomy given by Kant ‘provides a better place to start working out a contemporary philosophical understanding of morality than anything we can get from other past philosophers’.² I agree with Schneewind, but unlike him I do not intend to discuss, in the chapter, the historical development of the concept of autonomy. Instead, I intend to discover the concrete level of agreement and disagreement throughout the different dimensions emerging from the Kantian account of autonomy as well as its role in determining our actions, local and universal, moral and political.

3.2. What is the Source of Moral Agency?

Allow me to ask a fundamental question of morality: What is meant by an ‘agent’ in the moral domain? The answer to this question is important in the context of our usage of another term: ‘doer’. Is a doer an agent or is an agent a doer? What are the differences between *a doer* and *an agent* when discussing the question of morality in all its respects? Etymologically, a ‘doer’ is a very general term which simply refers to a person ‘who acts or does something’. The ‘something’ could be anything, for instance, acting in a play, swimming in the Neckar, cooking, painting, writing and so fourth.

¹ Rawls (1971). p. 516

² Schneewind (1998). p. xiv.

When we say ‘ x is a doer of anything y ’, we only mean that x has done something y and y can be anything irrespective of any claim to morality. On the other hand, an ‘agent’ is a more specific term which denotes a certain kind of ‘authority’ or ‘power’ of a person when doing y . In this sense, the term implies one’s responsibility and accountability for that particular action which is in accord with or violates a particular rule or law, or concerns a person or a community. When we say ‘ x is an agent of anything y ’, we not only mean that x is a doer of y but also that x is responsible for the result r that y produces. Let me explain both terms more clearly through the help of an example.

Suppose x is Krishna and Krishna is a doer/*writer* of book b . Suppose again that either nobody reads b or b does not contain anything to be considered a matter of responsibility. No problem will emerge if this is the case. Suppose b results in a communal riot c . Is b responsible for c ? Of course b is responsible for c and since b was produced by Krishna, there is no doubt that Krishna is responsible for c . Then the next question emerges: Why did Krishna write a book b that caused a violent communal riot? He would probably tell us certain obvious things, contexts and motives that led him to write b . He might say that he wrote it just for selfish reasons without having any motive to cause a riot. We can say that as an author of b , he didn’t have a sense of what could happen in the public domain: What he thinks about after the riot was believed to have been thought about before he wrote it. The content of his book might be good as a story or novel but the outbreak of a riot shows that it was not morally good in the sense of ‘right’. To judge something as right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust means to (morally) scan and evaluate our actions through the help of our individual reasoning capacity that we are believed to have by nature. On this basis one can simply assume that human *reason*, which directs all our actions, is therefore the primary source of moral agency and moral laws.

Aristotle once claimed that only a certain kind of doer is called to be a moral agent and must be subjected to ascriptions of responsibility.³ But Aristotle’s explanation of ‘responsibility’ in terms of one’s capacity to make a decision of what it is good to be, or better his *teleology*, has been ‘displaced quite generally during the modern period’, probably after many of the major developments in science.⁴ However, his observation of

³ Aristotle. *NE* III, 1111b5-1113b3

⁴ Schneewind (1998). p. 286.

‘one’s capacity to make a decision’ is widely accepted as significant in determining the source of moral agency. The Kantian notion of pure practical *reason* could be seen in the same sense of one’s decision-making capacity, the theory of which excludes children, as well as abnormal and mentally challenged people from the category of so-called moral agents.

The debate among moral and political philosophers revolves around where exactly decision-making capacity lies since apart from *reason* we seem to have various other faculties like will, soul, or ego, which are other feasible sources of moral agency. The problem puzzles not only the scholars of moral and political philosophy but also common practitioners and socially-engaged people (*if any group is to be blamed for making morality perplexed, it is the group of philosophers, particularly those members who write more but produce less in terms of quality of thought*). Although a large number of philosophers, known as neo-Kantians, seem to recognize *reason* as the source of autonomy and autonomy as the source of morality, its members find the concept and role of autonomy in moral and political theories a bit controversial. The controversy involves their disagreement over the theorizing and conceptualizing of the concept ‘autonomy’ and its practical implications in the public domain.

3.3 Kant on the Concept of Autonomy

Autonomy has been used differently in moral, social and political discussions in the post-Kantian contemporary world. It is often understood as some form of self-legislation or self-governance as the term ‘autonomy’ etymologically refers to the capacity of a person to act according to his/her own laws (*auto*=self and *nomos*=laws). Since only human beings are believed to be the bearers of this capacity, the term ‘autonomy’ can therefore only refer to humans and can be taken as *human autonomy*.⁵ § Historically, it is quite difficult to determine how and when this concept entered into the philosophical discussion on morality since Greek thinkers often used the term for and in regard to a political state. However, from the perspective of modern philosophy we can say that it was Kant who discovered ‘autonomy’ as a key aspect of morality – it was he who

⁵ Haworth makes it quite clear that “the beginnings of autonomy are to be traced back to one’s first signs of competence as an agent. The underlying reason for this is that without competence there is no self, and without a self there can be no self-rule” and that “becoming competent is a process of gaining self-control.” See Haworth (1986). p. 16 & 18. § There might be other beings like aliens and angels in the universe having rational capacity but until it is proven, there are only humans to be considered as rational beings and thus moral agents.

developed the concept of autonomy in its modern form in the 18th century and gave contemplation on morality a new direction through his critical philosophy.⁶

Kant's moral philosophy has different features that make him a revolutionary thinker, though not easy to understand. In order to better grasp those features, it is necessary to go through his major writings on metaphysics and moral philosophy and then connect his theories and explanations. His concept of autonomy, said to be based on human *reason*, can only be apprehended by making a serious effort to understand what he is really implying with the term in respect to ethical decision making. Kant's definition of autonomy is as follows—

Autonomy of the will is that property of it by which it is a law to itself independently of any property of objects of volition. Hence the principle of autonomy is: Never choose except in such a way that the maxims of the choice are comprehended in the same volition as a universal law.⁷

Kant seems to be claiming that we as rational beings are autonomous agents and all our actions are or should be governed by our own individual will. We need no external source of our actions since we are believed to be capable of being fully self-governed. A rational being knows what he ought to do and what he ought not to do in moral matters. The study of Kant's metaphysics, within this context, could be of even greater help in understanding human beings as *rational*. In *Critique of Pure Reason* he writes—

Reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own, and that it must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature's leading-strings, but must itself show the way with principles of judgment based upon fixed laws, constraining nature to give answer to questions of reason's own determining.⁸

⁶ Schneewind (1992). p. 315.

⁷ "Autonomie des Willens ist die Beschaffenheit des Willens, dadurch derselbe ihm selbst (unabhängig von aller Beschaffenheit der Gegenstände des Wollens) ein Gesetz ist. Das Princip der Autonomie ist also: nicht anders zu wählen als so, daß die Maximen seiner Wahl in demselben Wollen zugleich als allgemeines Gesetz mit Begriffen seien." Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:440.

⁸ "[D]ie Vernunft nur das einsieht, was sie selbst nach ihrem Entwurfe hervorbringt, daß sie mit Principien ihrer Urtheile nach beständigen Gesetzen vorangehen und die Natur nöthigen müsse auf ihre Fragen zu antworten, nicht aber sich von ihr allein gleichsam am Leitbände gängelnd lassen müsse; denn sonst hängen zufällige, nach keinem vorher entworfenen Plane gemachte Beobachtungen gar nicht in einem nothwendigen Gesetze zusammen, welches doch die Vernunft sucht und bedarf." Kant, I., *KrV*, AA, 03:010.

As autonomous moral agents, we rational beings possess two basic characteristics: the capacity to know what morality demands in a particular situation and the will power to act according to our own laws. However, one should understand that not every self-given law is a moral law and therefore not every self-governed being is a moral agent if such a self-governed agent's maxims cannot be universalized, though they can be said to be autonomous. Kant rightly claims that man 'was seen to be bound to laws by his duty, but it was not seen that he is subject only to his own, yet universal, legislation, and that he is only bound to act in accordance with his own will.'⁹

For Kant, autonomy lies in pure practical *reason* from which moral laws come into expression and practice. Moral laws are the product of human reason, which according to Kant is 'the power to judge autonomously—that is, freely'.¹⁰ Kant's psychology behind his account of autonomy as the power of judgment of human reason is that an action based on a desire, feeling, or fixed objective needs some sort of *reasoning* after all for why the action should be carried out by the agent. It is not always the case that the agent performs an action just because he wishes to do that. Most of the time, he analyzes, evaluates, and changes a pre-planned course of action. This shows that human *reasoning* is capable of giving directives to itself, making a new law, and evaluating and legitimizing other laws as well. This is not an assumption; rather it is a real fact Kant discovered through his continuous philosophical meditation.¹¹

Human reason as it appears in Kant's philosophy is of two sorts: theoretical and practical. Theoretical reason is believed to seek knowledge of the phenomenal and possibly of the noumenal world, though the latter is said to be completely unknowable. Practical reason, on the other hand, deals with the human actions and the moral and political conditions of their legitimization. Since one performs an action only when one wills to perform that action, the primary motive of practical reason is to determine one's will so that one can act autonomously. This is why Kant describes the *autonomy* of the

⁹ "Man sah den Menschen durch seine Pflicht an Gesetze gebunden, man ließ es sich aber nicht einfallen, daß er nur seiner eigenen und dennoch allgemeinen Gesetzgebung unterworfen sei, und daß er nur verbunden sei, seinem eigenen, dem Naturzwecke nach aber allgemein gesetzgebende Willen gemäß zu handeln." Kant, I., *GMS*, AA, 04:432.

¹⁰ "Nun nennt man das Vermögen, nach der Autonomie, d.i. frei (Principien des Denkens überhaupt gemäß), zu urtheilen, die Vernunft." Kant, I., *SF*, AA 07: 027.

¹¹ Hannah Arendt observes, "We know how Kant's own testimony that the turning point in his life was his discovery (in 1770) of the human mind's cognitive faculties and their limitations, a discovery that took him more than ten years to elaborate and to publish as the *Critique of Pure Reason*." See Arendt (1982). p. 10.

will as the supreme principle of morality in the third formulation of the categorical imperative.¹² He regards autonomy as the essential property of one's will.

One's autonomy comes into public expression through the unity of one's *reason* and *will*. The unity of reason and the will forms some sort of functioning relationship between what one rightly knows and what one rightly ought to do. The agent imposes certain kinds of moral laws on himself that later give rise to certain kinds of necessary moral obligation in a social space. Since the *rightness* and *wrongness* of an action performed in a moral space could only be judged from an existing common criterion, a common moral law for human society is a requirement for considering and deciding which actions are morally justified and which are not. Autonomous moral agents, thus, can be said to be the moral lawgivers in one sense and moral agents in another.¹³ A relevant question can be asked: How could one's autonomy be realized and preserved in a larger moral space, tied to social rules, directives and laws?

The Role of Freedom

Kant finds the concept of freedom in this connection of greater moral value, which is of dual characteristics. Firstly, it consists in one's ability to be independent of his passions, desires, and inclinations. Secondly, it helps one to self-legislate. The concept of autonomy is therefore different (though the difference between the two is very thin and thus difficult to explain) from the concept of freedom in the sense that the former is the capacity of acting independently of internal and external domination by human instincts and tendencies, while the latter is the capacity of being self-governed or the power to determine actions without restraint. Kant thus offers a new conception of freedom which allows one's autonomy to be actualized in its actual form of freedom.

We find two kinds of freedom in Kant's writings. One is a sort of transcendental freedom, based on his transcendental idealism, and the other is practical freedom. Since transcendental freedom is of less value in our discussion of moral agency and its autonomy because of its connection with the super-sensuous world, I therefore do not intend to discuss it in the dissertation. What I would like to say is that transcendental

¹² Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04: 445-463.

¹³ There is a distinction between moral and pragmatic (non-moral) laws. Kant says that "in a moral law it is dispositions that are referred to; in a pragmatic law it is actions" and that "anyone who declares that a law in conformity with his will obliges others to obey it, is giving a law". See Kant, *V-Mo/Collins*, AA 27:282/283.

freedom provides a foundation for practical freedom (or to say that practical freedom leads the agent towards transcendental freedom), which is of greater value. Practical freedom, according to Kant, ‘is the independence of the power of choice from necessitation by impulses of sensibility’.¹⁴ In *GMS*, Kant gives a holistic explanation of the concept of freedom. In his own words—

As Will is a kind of causality of living beings so far as they are rational, freedom would be that property of this causality by which it can be effective independently of foreign causes determining it, just as natural necessity is the property of the causality of all irrational beings by which they are determined to activity by the influence of foreign causes. The preceding definition of freedom is negative and therefore affords no insight into its essence. But a positive concept of freedom flows from it which is so much the richer and more fruitful. Since the concept of a causality entails that of laws according to which something, i.e., the effect, must be established through something else which we call cause, it follows that freedom is by no means lawless even though it is not a property of the will according to laws of nature. Rather, it must be a causality according to immutable laws, but of a particular kind. Otherwise a free will would be an absurdity.¹⁵

There are two opposite dimensions of human freedom: *negative* and *positive*.¹⁶ Negative freedom is the power of one’s will to act without being causally determined by his or her sensuous impulses. Positive freedom, on the other hand, is the power of one’s will to act in accordance with the principles of one’s own *reason*. A moral agent utilizes his own rational power for determining and endorsing his choices and actions. Since the ultimate source of decision making is one’s own reason, Kant is right in fixing moral decisions in the faculty of *reason* by giving up desires and inclinations. The question why one needs to be liberated from the domination of one’s own inclinations and those

¹⁴ Kant, I., *KrV*, A534/B562.

¹⁵ “Der Wille ist eine Art von Causalität lebender Wesen, so fern sie vernünftig sind, und Freiheit würde diejenige Eigenschaft dieser Causalität sein, da sie unabhängig von fremden sie bestimmenden Ursachen wirkend sein kann: so wie Naturnothwendigkeit die Eigenschaft der Causalität aller vernunftlosen Wesen, durch den Einfluß fremder Ursachen zur Thätigkeit bestimmt zu werden. Die angeführte Erklärung der Freiheit ist negativ und daher, um ihr Wesen einzusehen, unfruchtbar; allein es fließt aus ihr ein positiver Begriff derselben, der desto reichhaltiger und fruchtbarer ist. Da der Begriff einer Causalität den von Gesetzen bei sich führt, nach welchen durch etwas, was wir Ursache nennen, etwas anderes, nämlich die Folge, gesetzt werden muß: so ist die Freiheit, ob sie zwar nicht eine Eigenschaft des Willens nach Naturgesetzen ist, darum doch nicht gar gesetzlos, sondern muß vielmehr eine Causalität nach unwandelbaren Gesetzen, aber von besonderer Art sein; denn sonst wäre ein freier Wille ein Unding.“ Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:446.

¹⁶ See Schneewind (1997). Part IV.

of others may be answered in this way: Since human inclinations and desires are goal-oriented, subject to partiality, and do not provide any universal basis for morality, an agent is therefore supposed to be free from them so that he or she can judge which action is in accordance with universal (moral) principles or, so to speak, principles that can be universalized.¹⁷

Human *reason* cannot fairly evaluate and judge an action on the basis of its subordinate sensuous impulses. It can fairly judge an action as moral on certain moral principles, given by it to itself. Kant, however, does not tell us how one can acquire freedom of this kind since our impulses are also linked, in one or the other way, with human reasoning. What he might say is that ‘inclinations are to be regulated, not abolished’.¹⁸ But for obvious reasons, they are to be regulated by universal moral laws.¹⁹

Kant probably believes that human *reason* is capable of thinking in at least two ways: dependently and independently. When it thinks independently, it regulates its action universally. Independent reasoning is not free of content or is empty as it often appears to be; rather its work is to explore the moral strength of the human will and to search for a common moral law applicable to all moral agents. Schneewind correctly observes the strength of Kant’s moral theory, free from traditional and relative input. In Schneewind’s own words—

Kant did not deny the moral importance of beneficent action, but his theoretical emphasis on the importance of obligation or moral necessity reflects his rejection of benevolent paternalism and the servility that goes with it, just as the centrality of autonomy in his theory shows his aim of limiting religious and political control of our lives.²⁰

Kant’s autonomy-oriented moral account faces a number of objections: Is autonomy a necessary condition of freedom of the human will or is it freedom of the will that makes an agent autonomous? How realistically is common moral law possible? Kant

¹⁷ It seems to me, though I may be wrong, that Kant’s idea of liberation from one’s sensuous impulses is based on his phenomenological approach, because such liberation is possible only through the practice of eliminating and bracketing those impulses on the one hand and strengthening the power of will on the other.

¹⁸ Guyer (2003). p. 75; also Guyer (2005). p. 120.

¹⁹ Some might allege that Kant focuses on the normative dimension of moral laws more than on human emotions, feelings, and sentiments. I find this to be true, but what is important to know is that when Kant insists on moral laws, he does not mean that morality should be based on laws; rather what he means is that laws should be based on morality. Kant’s morality is, of course, based on principles, not on emotions and feelings.

²⁰ Schneewind (1992). p. 311.

does not seem to have any clear answer to the first question. We can simply assume from his writings that autonomy is prior to freedom and that it is not the case that freedom of the will ascribes autonomy to a moral agent. In fact, every agent is autonomous by nature insofar as he maintains rational capacity: He loses this inherent natural capacity after being trapped by sensuous impulses. Being free from external causes and sensuous impulses is freedom of the will. But Kant scholars like Henry Sidgwick and Paul Guyer seem to observe that (practical) freedom of the will is nothing other than its autonomy.²¹

Kant might respond to the second objection by saying that we impose a certain kind of moral law on ourselves in a certain situation from which it can be assumed that we feel the worthiness of that law. His answer might imply that we can also have the feeling of the worthiness of a moral law in common interest. So from this perspective, we can at least say that common moral law is not impossible in a society where people share mutual feelings and interests.²² Similarly, universal moral law is not impossible for those who share their rational capacity in ethical decision making.

The Nature of an Autonomous Agent

There only appears to be a hierarchy in Kant's account of 'personhood' in terms of autonomy and freedom in the phenomenal world. At the bottom could have been those who are satisfied in always acting according to the decisions of other individuals. A loyal servant, for example, might be satisfied in following his master's words at all time. Above them could have been those who are satisfied in sometimes acting from the desires and directives of other individuals and sometimes on their own desires, inclinations and purposes. An actor on stage, for example, sometimes performs what his audience demands and sometimes what he himself desires when playing a role. A bit higher could have been those who always act according to their own choices, desires and feelings. And at the top could have been those who always act in accordance with their reason, not according to their sensuous inclinations. Such persons at the very top of the hierarchy would then be believed to act autonomously or from the unconditioned command of their free will.

²¹ Sidgwick (1988); Guyer (2003). p. 77.

²² One should not assume that Kantian morality is purposive. Kant only talks about a reason-based morality which would necessarily be in common human interest.

Kant probably would then have wanted to show that every normal adult belongs to the higher level. Each person in the hierarchy gives values to all of his actions to a certain extent. For instance, a person *p* may find the domination of his own inclination morally more worthy than the domination of the inclinations of others. Imagine *p* wants to have an ice cream cone with vanilla flavor but his friends persuade him to have strawberry instead. In this case, if *p* orders vanilla, he finds his own desire sufficiently worthy. If he orders strawberry, he values the wish of his friends more and his own desire to have vanilla seems to be of lesser value. Even those who are dominated by their own desires and inclinations sometimes give priority to one over the other. Similarly, an action commanded by one's reason has greater moral value than an action performed from one's desire. If so, it would be difficult to attribute autonomy to ordinary people who are believed have not yet fully realized their moral capacity.

Kant, however, does not in fact adhere to any hierarchy of personhood since according to him everyone is a rational being and has the capacity to realize his autonomy and freedom of his will, though some believe that one can realize one's rational capacity only 'through the course of an extended process of maturation and education'.²³ One can avoid the domination of his own inclinations in the same way one avoids the domination of others' and can fully realize one's freedom of activity governed by the laws of *reason* which are universally valid. This is said to be empirically true about all moral agents in the phenomenal world. In reality, every human will is autonomous and free to choose any course of action but such an autonomous moral agent is hard to find in the real world. This is why scholars like Schneewind believe that 'Kant's attribution of autonomy to every normal rational adult was a radical break with prevailing views of the moral capacity of ordinary people'.²⁴

Certainly, Kant is looking for some sort of self-mastery in excluding our inclinations in order to realize and develop our autonomous status.²⁵ Here we can ask a very relevant question: Is the complete exclusion of inclinations possible in human life since human actions generally require certain ends to be attained? If it is possible, can it be a moral ideal of human life? Kant does not seem to give a clear answer to these valid questions. Rather he seems to be suggesting that we regulate our actions rationally to avoid mutual

²³ Guyer (2003). p. 80.

²⁴ Schneewind (1992). p. 311.

²⁵ Guyer has provided a good elucidation on how one can develop his action purely in the Kantian sense. See Guyer (2003). pp. 92-94.

conflicts and disagreements so that a better (moral) world can be established.²⁶ In a looser sense, what he probably means is that we have a common inclination or will rationally-speaking to perform a right action since the rightness of an action can produce higher moral worth. This is why he believes in the primacy of right over good, though the issue of primacy is debatable.

If a judge in court intends to acquit the real criminal because he is a friend or neighbor, he would not hear the case fairly. If he intends to hear the case fairly, he would certainly listen to the law and stick to the evidence. It is natural that when the judge intends to respect his relationship with a criminal friend, he cannot act according to the law: He will only produce a small amount of good for his friend by making his judgment in his friend's favor, however, because his criminal friend may in the future still be seen as having been involved in those punishable activities due to his connections with his judge friend. In fact, in acquitting him, the judge will have encouraged criminals and promoted their corrupt attitudes.

Contrary to this, if he respects the law, which he can only do if he ignores personal ties to the criminal, he will produce a higher amount of moral worth. For example, his fair hearing will give other people a reason to have faith in the court and its verdicts, and at the same time it will discourage criminals and law-violators from continuing their illegal and immoral activities. Similarly, one can produce greater moral worth only if he performs all of his actions independently of his links to his own inclinations and desires. Kant is therefore justified in arguing that the realization of the autonomy of reason is the only source of the highest moral worth: The ideal of autonomy provides us with a common moral law to guide our actions and increases our motivation to act rationally.²⁷

The psychological basis for Kant's appeal for freeing ourselves from the domination of our own inclinations and the inclinations of others is that every normal human being has a natural capacity for self-inquiry, self-control, self-legislation, and 'a natural disposition to moral feelings, which can make the moral law efficacious in the regulation of our conduct'.²⁸ We *can* regulate our actions to make them more effective.

²⁶ This could be considered an answer to the last two of Kant's famous three questions: What ought I to do; and what may I hope? (The first question was: What can I know?). Perhaps Kant thought about a completely moral world, free from conflict, violence and war caused by differences in society and dominated by our selfish inclinations and interests.

²⁷ Rawls correctly observes that "a person is acting autonomously when the principles of his actions are chosen by him as the most adequate possible expression of his nature as a free and equal rational being". Rawls (1999). p. 222.

²⁸ Guyer (2005). p. 138.

Kant encourages all human beings to realize their natural capacities of this kind and to act accordingly. He does not offer us anything foreign to our nature. So the criticism that his moral philosophy is procedural is not acceptable since what he discovers and explores is in fact inherent and implicit in our rational nature.²⁹

Kant seems to be rejecting teleological ethics on these grounds, arguing that it makes our autonomy impossible and enslaves us to our individual inclinations. He argues that even the ‘goodness’ and ‘evilness’ of an action can only be determined after knowing what exactly a right action is. Teleological ethics, in the sense of *rightness*, sometimes seems to be logically unacceptable. For example, the claim that ‘ x is good’ is determined at any time t_1 by the goodness of the result y produced by x . It is also possible that y may produce something evil z at t_2 . If the result is the criterion for goodness, then y could not be considered good if it produces z which is not good, and if y based on this result is not good, then how could x be considered good? From the logical principle of *hypothetical syllogism*, we must affirm that as a cause of z , x is not good. [Symbolically, the logical formulation can be expressed as: $(z \rightarrow y) \wedge (y \rightarrow x) \vdash (z \rightarrow x)$.]

Sometimes the goodness of x appears to be contingent when x produces something good g at t_1 and something evil e at t_2 . Kant’s deontological ethics is free from such kinds of logical inconsistency – and that is the precise reason why he claims that the law is more important and effective than the result of our actions.³⁰ Something x is right because of its righteousness as a law or as a universalizable maxim, determined by certain principles of human rationality. For example, it is always right, and also good, to travel by public transport with a valid ticket. Those who manage to travel *without ticket* (WT) and obviously save the required amount of fare clearly cannot universalize their very act of travelling-without-ticket (TWT) since they are certainly prone to be caught by the ticket-checkers in the future. Thus, we can say that only right acts by moral agents provide good states of affairs.³¹

²⁹ Many Kant critics like Hegel believe that the Kantian principle of morality is useless because it is too formal and therefore cannot guide our actions. Onora Nell describes this problem in Kant’s theory as “the problem of relevant description”. See Nell (1975).

³⁰ Explaining the reason why moral laws should be prioritized over the concept of good and evil, Kant once wrote: “... the concept of good and evil is not defined prior to the moral law, to which, it would seem, the former would have to serve as a foundation; rather the concept of good and evil must be defined after and by means of the law.” [der Begriff des Guten und Bösen nicht vor dem moralischen Gesetze (dem er dem Anschein nach sogar zum Grunde gelegt werden müßte), sondern nur (wie hier auch geschieht) nach demselben und durch dasselbe bestimmt werden müsse.] Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:62/63.

³¹ Schneewind (1992). p. 316.

3.4 Three Accounts of Personal Autonomy³²

Kant's rational moral philosophy, based on the concept of autonomy and freedom of the will, creates a strained relationship or tension between human reason and desire, between one desire and the other, and between local and global autonomy. How can this tension be removed, or at least reduced to the level of a common agreement? This question cannot be answered and the determinants of autonomy cannot be discovered locally and globally unless and until we come to know the essential features and shared framework of individual or personal autonomy and its involvement in self-legislation.³³

As for Kant, a perfect moral agent is one who always acts in accordance with his rational will with a motive of necessary moral obligation. How does one of one's various motives dominate his other motives or desires and give a moral push to the agent to perform an action of a certain kind? How could individual or personal autonomy be realized and practiced if there is a hierarchy of desires and motives? What will happen if every rational being claims his motive to be a standard of morality? Who will decide and on what basis that someone *a*'s action is a moral law for others say *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*...*n*? This is the problem of how personal autonomy can be stored and later be transformed into a common autonomy. If there is no need for such a type of transformation, the problem will then be how conflicts can be resolved. In other words, it is to ask: How much should we value our individual autonomy in order to avoid the tension that emerges at the local level on the one hand and at the global level on the other?

The philosophical account of personal autonomy is often believed to be tied in with one's self-integration. To be an autonomous agent means to have full control over actions and directives of actions. All of one's actions must be governed by one's own rational laws, qualified to be moral laws. Here there are some relevant questions to be asked: What are those conditions which determine and preserve one's autonomy? What

³² It is difficult to discover how many independent accounts of autonomy have been developed in the post-Kantian discussion since all available accounts are either interlinked or modified versions of previous theories. My consideration of three accounts is only an attempt to make a sketch of the problem of personal autonomy, discussed from different points of view to give a better insight into the Kantian notion of a moral agent and moral agency, though all three are interlinked at the core of the problem.

³³ There is a definite feature of personal autonomy distinct from those of local and global autonomy. For the clear notion of autonomy in a wider sense, I have categorized 'autonomy' in three parts: individual, local and global. Individual autonomy can be considered to be personal autonomy, which is basic, whereas local and global autonomies are its extended forms in the sense that they are a comparatively bigger moral space.

are those factors which give one a moral push to realize his individual accountability for all of his actions? What happens if a person doesn't realize his autonomous status or if he is unable to regulate his activity by his reason? It can be observed that when a child asks his parents not to interfere with him at a time when he is making a decision based on his own choice, or when a man asks his wife not to lecture him on certain family issues, or when a community or state asks other communities or states to not interfere in its lives, laws, social and geographic boundaries, all three—the child, the person and the state—show their individual autonomous will.

No one wants to be governed by someone whose will does not exhibit a resemblance to his own will. The child wants to play in accordance with his own will, the man wants to treat his wife (and the wives of *others*, for that matter) according to his own knowledge and understanding of relationships, and the state wants to govern according to its own laws and customs. They all perform their actions differently: What is *common* in them is that they all want to act autonomously – they are authorities in themselves.

The authoritative character of a person or a (governing) body is indeed tied in with his power of judging and decision-making regarding how to act or what is worth doing in a given moral space. The power of judgment does not come from the desires and sensuous inclinations of a person; rather it comes from his reason. The desires and sensuous inclinations of a person can be considered the subject or the content of the judgment by his reason. It then comes to expression through actions a person performs. If the agent fails to perform what he wills in a particular situation, it can be said that either he didn't act according to his reason or he had no choice to perform differently. His failure may be caused either by the domination of his own (internal) impulses or by the domination of the impulses of the others. If he is free from the domination of both the internal and external impulses, he will definitely do what he rationally wills. So the choices of action, freedom of the will, and the motive to act rationally are those necessary conditions which ascribe, express, and preserve one's personal autonomy.³⁴ The Kantian notion of autonomy, when applied to a person, can be expressed in this very sense.

³⁴ Some may think that there is a duality involved in the above explanation of moral agency. They may think that the governing agency (reason) and the governed agency (agent) are two different entities or forces as they seem to be. However, this is not true. A duality can be seen only in explanation. In reality, both reason as a law giver and reason as a moral agent are the same.

As far as the general account of personal autonomy is concerned, there seems to be, *prima facie*, a divergence between the actions governed by one's reason and those governed by one's desires and inclinations. It is often believed that actions governed by reason have only theoretical importance since they are governed theoretically by one's reason and lack practicality, whereas actions governed by desires and inclinations have practical implications in the sense that they produce those results the agent wills during a certain period of his life. If this is so, two problematic questions emerge: (1) Can the *desire-based* actions not be willed and reasoned by a moral agent, and (2) can the *reason-based* actions not be considered as a specific kind of desire to act in the way one's reason demands? The objective of these questions is to inquire how the Kantian notion of autonomy could be defended in terms of human reason and whether human reason can play its subjective role, and to which extent, in ethical decision making, free from sensuous desires or unreasoned-desires.

Three views emerge in response to these problematic questions. One is known as *the hierarchical view*, which attempts to elucidate 'autonomy' in terms of a hierarchical order of human desires. The other view can be recognized as *the reason-responsive view*, which holds that an agent should will to perform or cease to perform a certain kind of action only after getting an affirming or a refusing nod for that action from his reason. In other words, when one's reason justifies or backs-up his action based on a particular motive or will, he moves forward to perform it. The third view is known as *the coherentist view*, which tries to show how an agent performs his actions for his authorized preference after being coherently harmonized with his reasoning-capacity. I will now focus on these three different accounts in more detail.

*The Hierarchical View*³⁵

The hierarchical account of personal autonomy holds that every (moral) agent directs and governs his actions from his *higher-order desire*, motivated by a *second-order desire*.³⁶ The *higher* or *first-order desire* is a desire to act freely and autonomously whereas the *second-order desire* is a kind of 'volition' or 'the desire of willing'. The second-order desire or volition plays a motivational role and endorses one's action. This

³⁵ I am only concerned with the basic approach of the Hierarchical View due to the fixed scope of this chapter.

³⁶ This account is proposed and widely discussed by Gerald Dworkin and Harry G. Frankfurt. See Dworkin (1970, 1981, and 1988); Frankfurt (1988, 1999); Buss & Overton (2002); also Haworth (1991).

account was strongly proposed by Gerald Dworkin and Harry G. Frankfurt during the 1970s and the 1980s. Dworkin seems to hold that there is an inseparable relation between one's motive to do something and one's attitude, backed by his reason, toward such a motivation. He argues that it is the 'attitude' in human personality that determines 'the conduct of the agent'.³⁷ He explains his views in the following words—

It is characteristic of persons that they are able to reflect on their decisions, motives, desires, emotions, habits, and so forth. In doing so they may form preferences concerning these. Thus, a person may not only desire to smoke. He can also desire that he desire to smoke. He may not simply be motivated by jealousy and anger. He can also desire that his motivations be different (or the same).³⁸

According to Dworkin, an agent is autonomous in respect to his desires that motivate him if he endorses or repudiates his being so moved. Autonomy is a desirable quality that we are supposed to have in terms of our own interests, as he argues in another place—

It [*autonomy*] is equated with dignity, integrity, individuality, independence, responsibility, and self-knowledge. It is identified with qualities of self-assertion, with critical reflection, with freedom from obligation, with absence of external causation, with knowledge of one's own interests. [...]. It is related to actions, to beliefs, to reasons for acting, to rules, to the will of other persons, to thoughts, and to principles. About the only features held constant from one author to another are that autonomy is a feature of persons and that it is a desirable quality to have.³⁹

One year later, Harry Frankfurt presented a similar view at greater length. He is of the opinion that an agent is autonomous in respect to his first-order desire that motivates and moves him to act if he volitionally endorses or repudiates that desire—

To identify an agent's will is either to identify the desire (or desires) by which he is motivated in some action he performs or to identify the desire (or desires) by which he will or would be motivated when or if he acts. An agent's will, then, is identical with one

³⁷ Dworkin (1970). p. 378.

³⁸ Dworkin (1976). p. 24.

³⁹ Dworkin (1988). p. 6. [italics added]

or more of his first-order desires. But the notion of the will, as I am employing it, is not coextensive with the notion of first-order desires. It is not the notion of something that merely inclines an agent in some degree to act in a certain way. Rather, it is the notion of an *effective* desire—one that moves (or will or would move) a person all the way to action. Thus the notion of the will is not coextensive with the notion of what an agent intends to do. For even though someone may have a settled intention to do X, he may nonetheless do something else instead of doing X because, despite his intention, his desire to do X proves to be weaker or less effective than some conflicting desire.⁴⁰

Dworkin and Frankfurt's accounts were later recognized by philosophers as the '*Hierarchy-thesis* or *view*' of autonomy.⁴¹ The view reflects the psychic unity between one's reason and his desire and claims that an autonomous agent faces a number of desires in a hierarchical order, one of which stands at the top and is irresistible for him. This is the *first-order desire* and can be expressed as '*p* desires to perform such-and-such an action *a* in such-and-such a situation *s*'.

The *first-order desire* gets endorsing appeal from a *second-order desire* or volition and can be expressed as '*p* desires or does not desire that *p* desires to perform such-and-such an action *a* in such-and-such a situation *s*'. Frankfurt explains this dichotomy of the top two desires—first and second—in the following way:

Someone has a desire of second-order either when he wants simply to have a certain desire or when he wants a certain desire to be his will. In situations of the latter kind, I shall call his second-order desires "second-order volitions" or "volitions of the second order desire".⁴²

He argues that those who have first-order desires and second-order volitions are persons; they act according to their will. On the other hand, there are 'wantons' who do not care about their will, since they only have second-order desires, not second-order volitions; they do not care about what their second-order desires have to do with their will.⁴³ A particular desire of a person presupposes another desire to be his will for achieving the objective set by the first order desire. The wantons do not distinguish

⁴⁰ Frankfurt (1971). p. 8.

⁴¹ Taylor (2003). p. 127.

⁴² Frankfurt (1971). p. 10.

⁴³ Cuypers finds Frankfurt's idea of will problematic. According to him, Frankfurt's answer to the question 'what is the will?' is inconsistent and self-contradictory. See Cuypers (1988).

among their desires: That is why they are different from persons who have not only the first-order desires but also the second-order volitions as their will.

The hierarchical view was later criticized by philosophers like Irvin Thalberg and Lawrence Haworth. Thalberg's first objection is that the hierarchical view seems to be counterintuitive when a person is forced to perform a certain kind of action under duress or coercion. Thalberg infers that because of this problem, the agent suffers from impaired autonomy in the hierarchical view.⁴⁴ He also accuses Dworkin and Frankfurt of exaggerating the thesis, pointing out the fact that both Dworkin and Frankfurt 'are mistaken or anyway guilty of exaggeration, when they suppose that what a constrained person "doesn't want" is for some desire of other to move him'.⁴⁵ What Thalberg means to say is that the proponents of the hierarchical view give privilege to only the higher level aspects of one's self based on an explanatory structure that is recursive and excessive. With these objections, Thalberg claims that the hierarchical view fails due to the inadequacy in its position.⁴⁶

Haworth, on the other hand, proposes three necessary traits for one's autonomy: (a) competence, (b) procedural independence, and (c) self-control. The first trait is one's ability to realize his goals, the second trait is to be free from the objectives of the others, and the third trait necessary for one's autonomy is to be free from his own passions and impulses. When all three traits are possessed and put into practice by a person when he acts, he is then called an autonomous agent. In the case that these traits are not fully acquired or developed, 'they (*individuals*) remain creatures of others or of their own impulses'.⁴⁷

Instead, the hierarchical view faces a number of other problems: It faces a problem of *regress-infinitum* in the sense that the first-order desire is endorsed by a second-order desire; the second-order desire is possibly endorsed by another (third-order) desire and so on. If this is so, the hierarchical view seems to be facing a serious problem of incompleteness because it is not certain that one's first-order desire is always endorsed by one's second-order desire. It is quite possible that one's first-order desire is endorsed by a desire that one would have experienced two years back in his life. For example, a prominent lawyer, who has been working in court for ten years, may suddenly change

⁴⁴ Thalberg (1978); also Taylor (2003). pp. 130-32.

⁴⁵ Thalberg (1978). p. 216.

⁴⁶ Taylor attempts to defend *the hierarchical view* of free will and argues that Thalberg's objections are based on his misunderstanding of the view. See Taylor (2003).

⁴⁷ Haworth (1986). pp. 42-46.

his profession to become an artist based on the desire he had during his college time. If that is true, the hierarchical view seems to be inadequate because a person can have many desires, more than just two. In that case, it is not predictable which one of one's many desires endorses one's first-order desire. The hierarchical view also faces the problem of *authority*, observed by Gary Watson and Waddell Ekstrom. The problem of authority could be expressed in question form: 'How do the higher-order desires of a person play an authoritative role over his subordinate desires?'⁴⁸ The hierarchical view does not seem to give any satisfactory answer.

Proponents of the hierarchical view later modified and tried to correct their theory but it still appears to be subject to those problems together with another problem—the Problem of Manipulation.⁴⁹ To avoid a lengthy chapter, I would like to switch off the debate on the hierarchical view and would like to only bring forward the notion of autonomy as reflected in it.

It is true that the idea of autonomy is closely linked to the idea of the will, which in Frankfurt's view can be ascribed to the second-order volition and in Dworkin's to the reason for which one acts. Dworkin's modified account, followed by Frankfurt's account of free will, is that 'it is not the identification or the lack of identification that is crucial to being autonomous, but the capacity to raise the question of whether I will identify with or reject the reasons for which I now act'.⁵⁰ Although they both seem to believe that exercise of the free will preserves one's autonomy, it is quite clear that the hierarchical view does not reflect Kantian insight into the concept of autonomy; still, it definitely helps us to come closer to Kant's concept of autonomy in one or another way.

The Reason-responsive View

The reason-responsive view, developed by philosophers like Gary Watson, Susan Wolf, J. M. Fisher, M. Ravizza, Paul Benson and many others, holds that the capacity of being responsive to *reason* is the necessary condition of moral obligation. Watson comes to this view after criticizing Frankfurt's hierarchical conception of motivation. He criticizes Frankfurt arguing that 'the "structural" feature to which Frankfurt appeals is not the fundamental feature for either free agency or personhood; it is simply

⁴⁸ Watson (1975); Ekstrom (1999); also Frankfurt (2002). pp. 124-128.

⁴⁹ To explore this problem, see Friedman (1986).

⁵⁰ Dworkin (1988). p. 15.

insufficient to the task he wants it to perform' since the 'second order volitions are themselves simply desires, to add them to the context of conflict is just to increase the number of contenders; it is not to give a special place to any of those in contention' and that 'the notion of orders of desires or volitions does not do the work that Frankfurt wants it to do. It does not tell us why or how a particular want can have, among all of a person's "desires," the special property of being peculiarly his "own"'.⁵¹

It should be noted that Watson distinguishes between *valuational* and *motivational* systems, and claims that free agency acts after being motivated by the valuational system since 'the free agent has the capacity to translate his values into action: his actions flow from his evaluational system'.⁵² For this reason, he concludes that agents 'do not ask themselves which of their desires they want to be effective in action; they ask themselves which course of action is most worth pursuing'.⁵³

Following the Strawsonian model of moral responsibility in one or another sense, Watson defends that there is a moral community to which we, with our moral attitudes, belong and that we share our ends within 'a shared framework for practical reasoning'; he concludes that 'the boundaries of moral responsibility are the boundaries of intelligible moral address'⁵⁴ and that 'to regard another as morally responsible is to react to him or her as a moral self'.⁵⁵ The question is whether Watson's notion of free agency is appropriate for one's autonomy. My answer is negative in the sense that to claim a person to be autonomous is not necessarily based on the claim that he is performing a *good* action. Watson's evaluational system does not reflect the notion of autonomy in its purest form since the *free agency* and the *agency acting for good* is not the same.

An autonomous agent, according to Wolf, 'must be in a position that allows her reasons to be governed by what reasons there are...' and that we 'have reason to hope, that is, that the metaphysical truth about the world and our relation to it is not such as to imply that we are not responsible beings'.⁵⁶ For Wolf, both *reason* and a sense of *responsibility to that reason* are the conditions that must be satisfied prior to governing oneself; the agent is responsible for those of his actions which are done from his own self-force and not from any other external thing: She explains that we 'hold an agent

⁵¹ Watson (1975). pp. 217-119.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 216.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 219.

⁵⁴ See Strawson (1982); Watson (2004). p. 258.

⁵⁵ Watson (1987). p. 267 & 286.

⁵⁶ Wolf (1990). p. 117; Wolf (2005). p. 259.

responsible for an action when, and only when, his actions originate from within himself, when nothing beyond or behind his self is forcing him to act as he does.’⁵⁷

On this basis, she argues that an autonomous agent is one whose actions ‘are governed by his self, and there is nothing behind or beyond his self, making it govern actions the way he does’.⁵⁸ Wolf calls her view ‘the Reason View’ and argues that what a free agent requires is ‘the ability to do the right thing for the right reason’.⁵⁹ § Wolf’s view seems to be closer to the Kantian notion of autonomy in the sense that when a person is morally responsible, his autonomous status is a natural requirement.

Like Wolf, Fisher correlates free agency with moral responsibility in terms of what it means to be rationally accessible to moral praise and blame and claims that ‘it is very natural and reasonable to think that the difference between morally responsible agents and those who are not consists in the “reasons-responsiveness” of the agents’.⁶⁰ What Fisher really means is that every moral agent, in some clear cases, can be held morally responsible for his actions even if he could not have acted otherwise. An example will help us to better understand this view.

Suppose that I and one of my friends who is cognitively impotent in remembering information appear at the final examination 2010, where the text he writes on the answer-sheet has somehow come to his mind from me through an electronic device. Imagine that in his routine checks, the proctor caught him writing the same text I wrote on my own answer sheet. The question is whether my friend is or isn’t morally responsible for cheating on the test: Fisher’s answer is affirmative. Fisher seems to be claiming that my friend is morally responsible for the text he writes on his answer sheet even though writing the same text is not of his own doing, rather of mine. The reason is that, he argues, ‘when an unresponsive mechanism actually operates, it is true that the agent is not free to do otherwise; but an agent who is unable to do otherwise may act from a responsive mechanism and can thus be held morally responsible for what he does’.⁶¹ Some may think that my friend is not an agent at all because he is free to do otherwise: For example, he could have submitted his answer sheet blank. I would say that my friend is definitely a moral agent if we consider that his cognitive impotency is

⁵⁷ Wolf (2005). p. 261

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Wolf (1990). p. 71. § Berofsky observes that Wolf offers a trichotomy of the autonomy view, the real-self view and the reason view. See Berofsky (1992). p. 202.

⁶⁰ Fisher (1987). p. 84

⁶¹ Fisher (2006). p. 66

an unresponsive mechanism and his cognitive potency to make cheating possible through an electronic device is a responsive mechanism.

Thus, the reason-responsive view of personal autonomy reflects the agent's inherent capacity for rational assessment, not purely for laws but for preferences. This is what Haworth seems to be claiming when he writes that a fully rational person 'will need to think critically about his preferences. Failure to do so will diminish his autonomy'.⁶² Having a different approach but a similar view, some philosophers like Berofsky argue that autonomy 'is essentially constituted by the manner in which an agent is engaged in her world rather than the metaphysical origin of her motivations'.⁶³ However, I propose that the *reason-responsive view* does not give the same explanation of autonomy as provided by Kant: In fact, the reason-responsive view seems to be searching for the reasons to perform a preferable action in terms of something good or desirable.

The Coherentist View

The coherentist view seems to be a combination of the previous two theories—the hierarchical view and the reason-responsive view—though some philosophers may not agree with what I assume here, since *prima facie* it does not show any link to the later view. However, the view is grounded mainly in the following two factors: (a) persons have preferences regarding their desires, beliefs and attitudes, and (b) they have capacities to reflect on them. Those who defend this view in fact want to show some sort of coherence between the two factors. They try to find out the manner in which the agents' capacities reflect on their different preferences. Ekstrom, a coherentist, claims that 'preferences are the *results of* the higher-order states, since they are, by definition, the output of reflection about first-order desires, reflection that occurs as the agent evaluates those first-level desires with respect to the standard of goodness'.⁶⁴

No doubt, an agent is capable of forming preferences in accordance with his goals and plans of life and is capable of evaluating what he wants or does not want to act. Criticizing Frankfurt for his failure in capturing the real notion of the self, Ekstrom argues that an agent does not form the first or second order desire; rather he evaluates and restructures one preference over the other in which *reasoning* plays a crucial role –

⁶² Haworth (1986). p. 37

⁶³ Berofsky (1995). p. 1

⁶⁴ Ekstrom (1993). pp. 604-605.

and this very feature is the nature of a moral agent. The capacity for reasoning belongs to a faculty which ‘performs the evaluation of desires and beliefs with respect to standards’.⁶⁵ On this basis, she believes that the evaluative faculty of reasoning is internal in one’s own self and that only through this faculty we all have to reflect on our preferences.

How does coherence take place when a person has several preferences of different kinds at the same time? Ekstrom gives an answer in the following way: An agent belongs to a character system in which he forms and reforms his desires, makes preferences, authorizes one by challenging preferences, and later either approves or disapproves a preference for a certain sort of action. ‘A preference’, she writes, ‘is authorized for an agent at a time if and only if it is coherent with the character system of that agent at that time’ and that ‘one acts in a way that is autonomous when one acts on a first-level desire because one has a personally authorized preference for that desire to be one’s effective desire’.⁶⁶

Ekstrom thus concludes that on the basis of his own authorized preference, an agent can provide a reason for his action and a reason for his character to realize his autonomy or self-rule. She argues that—

When I act on an authorized preference, I act in a way that is autonomous because I can give many reasons for my act, reasons that support each other in a coherent structure. These are the reasons of my self. Hence, in acting on these reasons, I am self-governed. In acting autonomously, I act in a way that is characteristic of me – a way that coheres and is not at odds with the ways I should behave, given what I prefer and accept.⁶⁷

It seems to me that the *coherentist view* also fails to give the real picture of the autonomy of the will that we can call Kantian since the Kantian account of autonomy does not presuppose any coherence or mutual cooperation with any other internal or external body.

Thus, we can say that neither the *hierarchical view* nor the *reason-responsive view* nor the *coherentist view* succeeds in capturing the Kantian insight into the autonomy of reason, though each theory tries quite hard to explain it.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 606.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 613-614.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 614-15.

3.5 The Kantian Account of Personal Autonomy Re-examined

All of the accounts of personal autonomy as discussed above reflect one common feature: That a free agent acts and wills to act under self-rule whatsoever it is. It may be a first-order desire or second-order volition or a sense of being reason-responsible or a will which forms the rule. The other common factor is that all such theories work based on a common assumption that there is a self, may it be metaphysical or moral, in each person that acts and practices certain laws which, it thinks, are its own. No doubt, there is a psychological connection between one's thinking and acting. Here the following questions arise: How can we define this connection in the Kantian sense of personhood? How can we show reconciliation between what to think and how to act in a moral space? Does the Kantian theory need modification to do so? I suggest that all problematic issues will disappear as soon as we come to know the general process of how the mental faculty of an agent, concerning his capacity for judging an action, generally acts in a given moral space. There seem to be two processes of mental faculty in regard to how it makes decisions.

One, the agent first desires something *c*, then he generates/realizes a will to have *c*, then he undertakes reasoning why *c* is more justified to be attained compared to some other thing *d* and/or *e*. His reasoning seems to be following certain principles or laws as a criterion for determining which course of action is morally good for achieving *c*, as compared with the other possible course of actions that he could also take. Let's imagine that he makes a decision either to perform action *a* or *b* from many other alternative actions, and finally decides to perform *a*, not *b*. In both cases – his decision to act and not to act to achieve *c* – he appears to be an autonomous being. Suppose that the agent performs action *a* for *c*. Here, it is not the question of why he desires *c*; rather the question is whether *a* is rationally justified or not. If *a* is rationally justified then the desire *c* is morally not important for action *a*; if *a* is not rationally justified, it cannot be considered to be a moral action regardless of whether it achieves *c* or produces maximum good for the agent. The agent's autonomy in that case seems to be overpowered by his inclinations during decision making. The same is true about action *b* if the agent finally decides to perform *b* for *c*. *c* is a personal desire and *a* or *b* a personal course of action, determined by the sensuous inclinations of the agent. In other words, *a* and *b* seem to be a means to *c*. Therefore, neither the desire *c* nor action *a* or *b* has any

moral worth if they are not solely determined by *reason* of the agent, since morality is something impersonal.

It can then be asked: Why is one's *reason* so important in ethical decision making? The answer is because one's reason does not evaluate human actions on the basis of desires and purposes; rather it evaluates them on the basis of certain common or universal moral norms that are said to be applicable to all. Since *reason* treats everyone equally, no discriminating elements can be found in its ethical decisions. One's *reason* forms a certain type of non-discriminating relationship with other moral agents who are also governed by their own *reason*. A moral agent can manifest this inherent nature of his *reason* in public moral space if he realizes his being capable of treating himself independently of his own desires and inclinations.⁶⁸

Two, mental activities can also be explained in the context of when an agent performs an action from an objective moral principle, rather than from any desire or feeling: When he acts from a principle, he does not desire anything else. Kant seems to hold a very clear position that a desire-inclined agent overlooks his capacity for reasoning at the time he determines his particular course of action. He respects neither his higher authority (reason) nor moral laws, which, as Kant believes, link our actions to a common moral space. This is why Kant excludes inclinations from the autonomous activity of the will and considers moral laws as the criterion for determining our course of moral action. Kant writes—

Duty is the necessity of an action done from respect for the law. I can certainly have an inclination to the object as an effect of the proposed action, but I can never have respect for it precisely because it is a mere effect and not an activity of a will. Similarly, I can have no respect for any inclination whatsoever, whether my own or that of another; in the former case I can at most approve of it and in the latter I can even love it, i.e., see it as favourable to my own advantage. But that which is connected with my will merely as ground and not as consequence, that which does not serve my inclination but overpowers

⁶⁸ I do not claim that human reason desires or the Kantian notion of reason is reducible to a human desire. Nor do I claim that there is a necessary causal connection between desiring and reasoning. I would just like to emphasize how human desires generally emerge internally with a necessary link to the (phenomenal) world and how they come into practice in our ordinary lives. Kant does not seem to be against human desires; rather he is against actions that are inclined to them, when making an ethical decision: He is concerned with the purity and universality of a right action from a set of possible actions in the moral domain.

it or at least excludes it from being considered in making a choice—in a word, the law itself—can be an object of respect and thus a command.⁶⁹

It is human reason, Kant believes, which forms a link between autonomous agency and its responsiveness to all its actions. It seems to me that Kant insists on global autonomy for which the realization of personal autonomy is the starting point.⁷⁰ His three formulations of the categorical imperative clearly show his intention. I will discuss these three formulations of the categorical imperative in the next chapter. Here I wish to discuss the current issue of autonomy a bit more from the different perspectives of local and global.

Kant seems to be insisting that we have an urge to act according to our will and not according to our desires or inclinations. How can one actively involve his will if there is no content of action? A law, for example, cannot be implemented without content of a certain kind. No one would stop his car at the crossing if there was no red light or if the signal was not functioning due to some technical problems or any other similar failure. Similarly, one cannot act autonomously if there is no content regarding what and how to act, if there is no content of moral laws to guide one's course of action in a given moral space. By 'content' I mean something that gives an objective foundation to laws to be practiced in a given moral space.

Kant seems to be aware of this difficulty which he tries to resolve through his notion of 'maxim'. A maxim is not a desire or inclination; rather it is a subjective plan of action prepared by our reason.⁷¹ It is the content of our actions in the sense that it motivates us to judge what we really ought to do under particular circumstances. Our sensuous

⁶⁹ "Pflicht ist die Nothwendigkeit einer Handlung aus Achtung fürs Gesetz. Zum Objecte als Wirkung meiner vorhabenden Handlung kann ich zwar Neigung haben, aber niemals Achtung, eben darum, weil sie bloß eine Wirkung und nicht Thätigkeit eines Willens ist. Eben so kann ich für Neigung überhaupt, sie mag nun meine oder eines andern seine sein, nicht Achtung haben, ich kann sie höchstens im ersten Falle billigen, im zweiten bisweilen selbst lieben, d. i. sie als meinem eigenen Vortheile günstig ansehen. Nur das, was bloß als Grund, niemals aber als Wirkung mit meinem Willen verknüpft ist, was nicht meiner Neigung dient, sondern sie überwiegt, wenigstens diese von deren Überschlage bei der Wahl ganz ausschließt, mithin das bloße Gesetz für sich kann ein Gegenstand der Achtung und hiemit ein Gebot sein." Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:400.

⁷⁰ Taylor points out that Kant has a clear notion of personal autonomy as a foundation of moral agency: "Kant implicitly offers us a conception of personal autonomy in his Doctrine of Virtue in the form of two imperfect duties of virtue: natural perfection of oneself and beneficence toward others." See Taylor (2005). p. 614.

⁷¹ "[E]inem Maxime ist das subjective Princip des Wollens; das objective Princip (d. i. dasjenige, was allen vernünftigen Wesen auch subjectiv zum praktischen Princip dienen würde, wenn Vernunft volle Gewalt über das Begehrungsvermögen hätte) ist das praktische Gesetz." Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04: 400. See also Schneewind (1992). pp. 318-19.

desires, on the one hand, compel us to work for a certain cause in contrast to a maxim, which compels us to always act according to the (moral) law. This is the obligatory role of maxims, which motivate every rational agent to follow the voice of his will in determining a better course of action, obviously *rational* in the Kantian sense. A maxim for Kant is a subjective principle which qualifies to be a universal law. A maxim is not a desire; rather it is a law of one's rational will.

The term "ought to" has two different implications: (i) for what it is to be rationally 'right', and (ii) for what it is to be 'good'. We can say that anyone *p* ought to perform an action *x* only because *x* is rationally right or rationally commanded. We can also say that *p* ought to do *x* if *x* can produce any good for him or others. This seems to create a dilemma because we are not quite sure what exactly 'ought to' implies. It is true that we do not always perform our actions only for the good. Often, in ordinary situations, we follow and act exactly according to what is believed to be morally right and also advise others to do the same in the same situation. This indicates our rational ability to evaluate an action as right or wrong.

For example, we help physically challenged people (PCP) in our society only because the very act of helping is morally right – one cannot get anything 'good' for himself by helping such people. When you help a blind person, you don't think that he will help you one day if you unfortunately lose your eyesight or that he will help others in the same way. I don't see any good reason behind our motive for helping physically challenged people other than this: That 'helping needy people' is always morally right. We help them because we respect them; and we respect them because we think of them as similar (rational) to us. That is what Kant wants to establish in his notion of 'the kingdom of ends'—a notion of why people should be treated as ends and not merely as means.

3.6 Local vs. Global Autonomy

I have already mentioned that there are three levels of autonomy: individual or personal, local and global (see fn. 33). In previous sections, I discussed different accounts of personal autonomy, revising Kantian personal autonomy with the claim that Kant not only invented the notion of personal autonomy, but also that he clearly explained that autonomy plays a key role in ethical decision making in the broader perspective of global society. It can be asked: How can persons be autonomous at the global level?

Before coming to this question, let me explain what I mean by ‘local autonomy’ and ‘global autonomy’.

By ‘local autonomy’, I mean a moral space (bigger than personal and smaller than global) where every individual realizes his place of being governed by common moral laws as a free moral agent. Such a moral space could be religious, cultural, or social. All members of a particular moral space share their interests and act according to its set of rules and moral principles. This implies that every individual belonging to that space is an active member of it. He/she realizes that the life pattern of that space is his/her own. No one feels any threat to his/her freedom from other members of that space because everyone realizes that the moral space is exactly in the same form as his/her own reason freely manifests. No one needs to go voluntarily against the common life pattern of that space because the pattern is the same for all in a sense that *reason* or *the will* of many individuals manifests the same life pattern, laws, common goals and course of actions.

In other words, local autonomy refers to a larger moral space where one’s personal autonomy becomes the autonomy of a community or group. A social community, for example, might fix certain rules to fulfill the demands of its members and to preserve their dignity, self-respect and life-plans in a sense that those rules are willed autonomously by all its members. There are many tribal communities which do not allow others belonging to another community to interfere in their social and cultural ways of living. We find the same approach in different religions.

The moral space of local autonomy is not the autonomy of one member but of all members of a group or community. No tension can be seen between two members of a single moral space because the space is regulated by common moral laws, determined by all members of that space who are autonomous beings. It is like merging personal moral spaces into one to form a single but local moral space that is bit larger than a personal moral space and smaller than a global moral space. The local but larger moral space can be considered a border of local autonomy – it is a kind of transformation of personal autonomy into a higher level of autonomy. However, tension can be found between two local but different moral spaces (or between two local autonomies) if the two are not governed by the same moral laws. How can harmony be established between two local communities or autonomies? To avoid this problem, personal autonomy should go a few steps further to form a global moral space, merging all local moral

spaces in one.⁷² If that happened, every autonomous person would become a member of the single moral space—a space of global autonomy. A question arises at this point: How can a global moral space be formed?

There is no direct mechanism for forming a global community for realizing a global moral space where all individuals can realize their freedom and autonomy. However, it can be confidently said that a global autonomous space can also be formed in the same manner in which a local autonomous space is formed. The first important thing for realizing us as being globally autonomous agents is to abolish our local boundaries and come under one umbrella; we should free ourselves from local bindings. Global autonomy, in this sense, is a single moral world or the kingdom of morals of which we all are members irrespective of our religion, culture, race, caste and profession.

The general view on global autonomy is quite different. Most scholars often think that *global autonomy* refers to the extension of one's personal autonomy at the global level and implies that a person can be said to be globally autonomous when no external elements/factors restrict his individual will and choice of acting at any time in any part of the globe.⁷³ Oshana, for example, defines personal autonomy as a global phenomenon of one person's life. She writes that—

[P]ersonal autonomy as I construe it is a “global” phenomenon, a property of a person's life that expresses and unifies the will and choices of the person. By contrast, the “local”

⁷² From the perspective of a common morality it is not difficult to assume such a global moral space as a reality because moral norms are related to one's nature, similar to the nature of others, and not to one's desires, religions, and cultures. Relativists like MacIntyre and Taylor may argue that in the end I promote localization when I propose to merge two local moral spaces to form one moral space. They may argue that they do not have any problem if no conflicts between the two local autonomies in a global moral space emerge. I would say two things: Firstly, when I propose to form a global moral space by merging two local moral spaces, I mean to show that localization is destined to universalization. Secondly, there would not be any conflict on moral grounds if all members of a global moral space acted according to their reason and not desire. Since the relativists give priority to the social, cultural and historical over the moral, a global moral space for them seems to be impossible because the social, cultural and the historical presuppose discrimination.

⁷³ There are not many references on the topic of Global Autonomy. Those which are available deal with the issue of global autonomy mainly in terms of 'one's unlimited freedom and autonomy'. I would like to call this 'the traditional account of Global Autonomy' because it applies 'global' to one's 'personal autonomy' in terms of a space indicator. Opposite to this, I use 'global' as an organic individual or unity, not merely a space, to introduce the thought that global autonomy can be realized when the globe is governed by those universal maxims that are willed by all its members. One can call it 'the non-traditional account of global autonomy'. When all members of the globe autonomously will the same maxim of a certain kind and act accordingly, global autonomy will be realized by all of them.

or occurrent sense of autonomy is a property of a person's acts or desires considered individually, and pertains to the manner in which a person acts in particular situations.⁷⁴

Another scholar Hyun defines local autonomy and distinguishes it from global autonomy in a similar manner. He writes that—

[U]nlike local autonomy, which refers to a person's specific actions in particular situations, global autonomy is a richer, broader notion that expresses a person's ability to make important decisions about his life according to his own values and goals, while local autonomy is a characteristic of actions, global autonomy is a characteristic of persons⁷⁵

Oshana's notion of 'global' seems to be very narrow – in the sense that it does not reflect the harmony between the wills and desires of two persons. Her meaning of 'global' denotes a kind of *personal universalism* which is contradictory in nature: What is *personal* cannot be said to be *universal* and what is *universal* cannot be said to be *personal*. It is not the unity between one's will and the course of his actions that can be considered global; rather it is the harmony and unity between the will and actions of one person and that of others. If Oshana is right, every person is global as far as his/her unrestricted freedom is concerned; but it would be absurd to say that there are numerous global persons. 'Global' thus denotes a common characteristic or a common way of living. I think Oshana's view needs a little change in its approach.

My account of global autonomy seems to be in stark contrast to that of Oshana and Hyun. Both Oshana and Hyun describe global autonomy as one's capacity and freedom to form, reform, and follow his own plans in life. No doubt, their descriptions are fascinating and acceptable by the general public that more or less describes the concept of global autonomy in a similar way. Here some questions arise: How is personal autonomy then different from global autonomy? Are the two identical? If we follow Oshana and Hyun, they seem to be identical. I doubt that this is really the case. 'Global' is not a property to be ascribed to persons; rather it pertains to the whole world – a single space in which we are supposed to practice our actions without ignoring autonomies of others. I think they have misused the term. The Kantian notion of the *Kingdom of Ends* could be considered a global moral world where every human being is

⁷⁴ Oshana (2003). p. 100.

⁷⁵ Hyun (2001). pp. 195-196.

equally autonomous, dignified, and respected. However, it is not, of course, as simple as it looks. The difficulty is that we do not know how much we should value our individual autonomy in regards to realizing our global autonomy in terms of then realizing a global moral space.

Kant seems to be aware of the multiplicity in human nature, diversity in culture, in religion, and in life goals, when considering how the kingdom of ends could be established and how a global moral world could be formed without doing any harm to individuals and their autonomy. The kingdom of ends should not be taken as an externally constructed world; rather it should be taken as an inherent, but unrealized, part of our rational nature – that is to say that *global autonomy* must be the autonomy of something like a ‘global self’ which is none other than the unity of different human selves (See figure 1). Kant seems to have realized that personal autonomy is crucial not only for moral assessment but also for realizing the kingdom of ends.

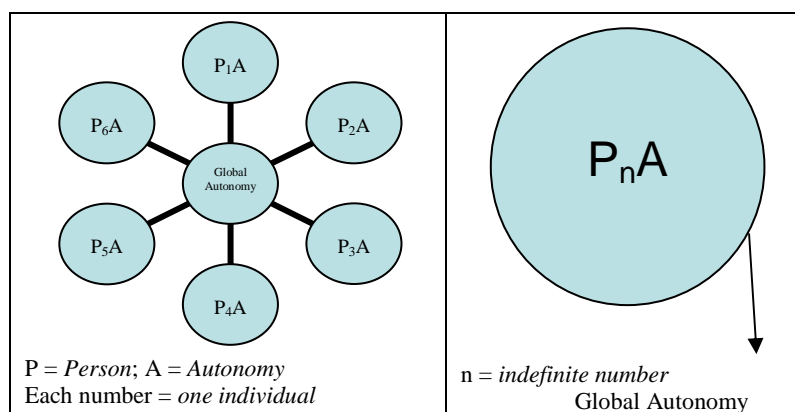


Figure 1: *The Relationship between Personal and Global Autonomy*

In the figure one can see how personal autonomy forms global autonomy. The left diagram shows that global autonomy is a shared notion. All six persons in the diagram on the left can imagine a common way of living, a common goal in life, and a common course of action. They can also then decide on common moral laws to guide their courses of actions. If they did so, those laws would then be called ‘local moral laws’ or, in a *loose sense* of global, ‘global moral laws’ since there might be some other persons, **P₇** and **P₈** for example, who are possibly not governed by those moral laws.

The diagram on the right shows a complete global moral space or autonomy where each human being is integrated. It is the *strict sense* of global autonomy where all *n* persons mutually share their interest and course of action. Each member in the diagram

on the right is determined by the common moral laws given by all of its members. Thus we can say that the diagram *on the left* presents, in one sense, the notion of ‘local autonomy’ and the diagram *on the right* represents the notion of ‘global autonomy’. Global autonomy, depicted in the diagram *on the right*, may be claimed to be the *kingdom of ends*.

Since the philosophical issue related to global autonomy is not easy to solve and cannot be discussed in a dissertation like this that is of limited length/scope, I would like to simply propose to end this discussion here, if abruptly.

3.7 The Problem of Moral Legitimacy

The term ‘legitimacy’ is often understood in a normative sense as a foundation for determining what a right and just action is in a given moral and political space.⁷⁶ The term reflects the state of being lawful either by virtue or authority. And it presents a challenge to autonomy at all three levels – individual, local, and global.

Based on our discussion in previous sections, we have a notion of moral agency and of the psycho-philosophical features of personal autonomy which is subject to transformation into local and global autonomy. In a general and very weak sense, each individual is believed to be autonomous; however, when we go through the complex web of human psychology and of human society, one’s autonomy becomes a problematic issue. How can individual autonomy be preserved, maintaining a respect for others’ autonomy in a world as multicultural as the one we live in? From one point of view it is a question of legitimizing ordinary human actions, whereas from another it is a question of legitimizing morality on the one hand and politics on the other.

The problem of legitimacy becomes hard to resolve when it becomes apparent that some laws determined socially and politically harm our individual autonomy. The other side of the problem is that one’s individual autonomy sometimes violates a law that is morally preferred or obligatory. The first problem could be considered a crisis in the socio-political domain, whereas the second a crisis in the moral domain. My focus in this section is on the second problem, i.e., the problem related to moral legitimacy.

⁷⁶ Suchman defines ‘Legitimacy’ as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” See Suchman (1995). p. 574.

The problem of moral legitimacy can be explained in terms of conflict between (a) moral and immoral, (b) private and public, and (c) an action governed by moral laws and an action governed by one's desire. Prior to these emerging conflicts, philosophers have the challenge of determining the criterion and conditions for legitimization that are acceptable to all – the crisis could not be resolved without legitimization of 'moral legitimacy'.

Moral legitimacy involves normative evaluation that may be based on a value system or a system of justice. It may be consequential or based on objective principles, personal or public. The consequential and personal legitimization of morality leaves room for conflict and partiality; it is helpful only in preserving personal autonomy and rules out the possibility of global autonomy. Objective principles and public legitimization, on the other hand, overlook human desires, feelings and emotions, and stand for what it is the right thing to do. Objective principles are also in a sense consequential because they direct human actions to realize certain objectives, for example, global autonomy or the kingdom of morals. The problem of moral legitimacy should be dealt with in this respect: We should value 'legitimacy' in the same proportion we value our 'autonomy'. The question is in which direction our actions should be directed: towards a good life, a just life, an equal and dignified life, or something else. The role of local determinants in a good life is of course historically appealing for the growth and preservation of local cultures. However, moral universalism in contrast to local relativism is of greater moral, social and political value because it assumes that everyone should belong to the global moral space.

I see good reason for defending objective principles of moral legitimacy since global autonomy or the universalization of morality appears much worthier than the localization of moral laws. I can give four reasons for my claim: global determinants (1) are free from bias and are applicable across cultures and borders, (2) reduce the possibility of conflict and disagreement, (3) are helpful in uniting local bodies or autonomies, and (4) are helpful in achieving the goal of the kingdom of ends.

There is a very constructive idea of equality in Kant's moral philosophy. His notion of autonomy and freedom recognize every human as being naturally the same and provide everyone with a moral space. Those who seem to be incompetent in reasoning and acquiring their autonomy may transform their mind from one state to another following the *reason-governed* agents. Kant's idea encourages people to think about

their dignity and respect as well as to develop their hidden and undeveloped potential in a more constructive way: It is to transform oneself in order to reach the highest level of personhood. Some anti-Kantians and communitarians may argue that the Kantian notion of autonomy has very little to do with contemporary moral debate. I do not agree with them because they give moral value to personal autonomy over global autonomy: They follow the consequentialist and personal form of legitimacy which, as I have shown, may cause conflict both at the local and global level. Moral universalism appeals to having objective moral principles for fair evaluation of our actions, though we still have the major philosophical problem of how we can discover objective moral principles.

3.8 Summary

I have attempted to explore different accounts of human agency, human autonomy and moral legitimization and I have asserted that human agency can be best understood in terms of human reason. With this assertion, I have tried to defend the Kantian notion of personal autonomy. In the last two sections, my emphasis was on global autonomy as an ideal or objective of morality to be realized. An ideal global autonomy is a kind of appeal for universalism for which local autonomy provides a structural framework. Localization in fact provides a linking thread between personal and global autonomy. Thus, one should not think that I am completely against moral relativism; rather I consider it to be a small version of universalism based on its connection to a very small moral space.

The Doctrinaire Kant and his Moral Absolutism: From Pure Philosophy to Impure Ethics

The principles of practical reason, if they are to be normative, must be principles of the logic of practical deliberation. They must be formal principles. For without such principles the will, like George's mind, will be a mere heap, not of ideas now, but of impulses to act. And this brings us at last to Kant.

————— Christine M. Korsgaard¹

4.1 Introduction

From the previous two chapters, we have learned that human *reason*, *autonomy*, and *freedom* are inseparable parts of Kant's moral account and that the categorical imperative is the absolute moral law in terms of its origin from human *reason*. Kant's moral philosophy is rational and a result of his systematic metaphysical and epistemological discourse in which he gives the human *mind* the apex position for knowing and for rational inquiry. Accepting the customary division of philosophy into theoretical and practical, he distinguishes between the concept of nature and the concept of freedom and claims that the objects which belong to the former must be distinct from those which belong to the latter. Theoretical philosophy leads to understanding *nature* with the help of *a priori* principles whereas practical philosophy leads to understanding and determining the *will* with the concept of *freedom*.²

Though Kant distinguishes *nature* from *freedom* when discussing *morality*, he could not escape the complex web of his metaphysics as laid out in the first *Critique*. Due to an inclusion of metaphysical elements, his account of morality seems to be a bit more theoretical than practical. That is why many scholars consider his moral philosophy merely a procedural and formal enterprise. For some, it is supererogatory; for others it lacks real implication. There are many objections and criticisms against his moral

¹ Korsgaard (2009). p. 67.

² Kant, I., *KU*, AA 05:171.

theory. However I suggest that not all objections and criticism are correct: Some criticize Kant's theory either because they do not understand the spirit of his moral philosophy or they have understood it only in part.

I am neither against Kant nor do I completely favor his moral interpretation: Kant's approach is right, his moral spirit is pure, and his theological input is significant, but overall his ethics is impure, particularly from a practical perspective. The impurity is not in thought, but in practice. On intellectual grounds it does, of course, appear nice and amazing to claim that 'I should perform x because x is a duty' or 'I should not perform x because x is not my duty' and so forth – it looks like a sophisticated moral theory in a situation in which an agent has to perform according to it. When discussing the categorical imperative, Kant fails to mention *who* should perform x for *whom*, *where* and *why* anywhere in his moral writings. And that has created many problems for his entire moral theory.

In order to avoid these problems in his theory, there is the need either to reach the Kantian level of morality he is proposing or we should find an alternative, obviously for practical purposes, without doing any harm to his moral theory. This chapter is an attempt to point out those spots where Kant has blundered – the mistakes in his metaphysics that have produced an impractical or impure ethics. For this reason, I examine some aspects of his metaphysics prior to an examination of his ethics.

4.2 The Human Mind: A Complex Unity

Kant produces a complex structure of the human mind which can be seen as seriously problematic in the first place. According to Kant, the human mind has three faculties: (a) the faculty of cognition, (b) the faculty of feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and (c) the faculty of desire.³ Though each faculty appears to be independent of the other two, their independent functioning is based on the faculty of cognition in terms of understanding, making judgments and decisions, and reasoning. The faculty of pleasure and displeasure acts as a mediator between the faculties of cognition and desire. For Kant, understanding contains a priori principles for the faculty of cognition, namely the theoretical cognition of nature whereas for the faculty of feeling of pleasure and

³ Kant does not use the term 'faculty' with 'feeling of pleasure and displeasure,' but because he categorizes the latter as a faculty of mind, it is clumsy to write it as 'the Faculty of feeling of pleasure and displeasure.' See Guyer (2000). pp 44-45 & 82-83.

displeasure, understanding is the power of judgment.⁴ (See Kant's classification of the mind in classifications 1 and 2)

*Classification 1*⁵

Faculty of the Mind	Higher Cognitive Faculties	A priori Principles	Products
Faculty of cognition	Understanding	Lawfulness	Nature
Feeling of pleasure and displeasure	Power of judgment	Purposiveness	Art
Faculty of desire	Reason	Purposiveness that is at the same time law (Obligation)	Morals

*Classification 2*⁶

All Faculties of the Mind	Faculty of Cognition	A priori Principles	Application to
Faculty of cognition	Understanding	Lawfulness	Nature
Feeling of pleasure and displeasure	Power of judgment	Purposiveness	Art
Faculty of desire	Reason	Final end	Freedom

Allow me to closely examine and compare both of Kant's classifications. At first glance, the two classifications look similar but in fact they differ in many respects and show the conceptual complexities that Kant had in his mind.⁷ I would like to now point out those differences in order to locate and highlight the mistakes and weaknesses of Kant's moral philosophy. The first difference is that in classification 1 (hereafter C₁ for

⁴ "In Ansehung der Seelenvermögen überhaupt, sofern sie als obere, d. i. als solche, die eine Autonomie enthalten, betrachtet werden, ist für das Erkenntnißvermögen (das theoretische der Natur) der Verstand dasjenige, welches die constitutiven Principien a priori enthält; für das Gefühl der Lust und Unlust ist es die Urtheilskraft unabhängig von Begriffen und Empfindungen, die sich auf Bestimmung des Begehrungsvermögens man das Gesagte nur verstehen will, so ist die Mißdeutung sehr leicht zu Verhüten. Der Widerstand, oder die Beförderung ist nicht zwischen der Natur und der Freiheit, sondern der ersteren als Erscheinung und den Wirkungen der letztern als Erscheinungen in der Sinnenwelt; und selbst die Causalität der Freiheit (der reinen und praktischen Vernunft) ist die Causalität einer jener untergeordneten Naturursache (des Subjects, als Mensch, folglich als Erscheinung betrachtet), von deren Bestimmung das Intelligible, welches unter der Freiheit gedacht wird, auf eine übrigens (eben so wie eben dasselbe, was das übersinnliche Substrat der Natur ausmacht) unerklärliche Art den Grund enthält. ' beziehen und dadurch unmittelbar praktisch sein könnten; für das Begehrungsvermögen die Vernunft, welche ohne Vermittelung irgend einer Lust, woher sie auch komme, praktisch ist und demselben als oberes Vermögen den Endzweck bestimmt, der zugleich das reine intellectuelle Wohlgefallen am Objecte mit sich führt." Kant, I., *KU*, AA 05: 197.

⁵ Kant did not publish his first introduction. It was published by one of Kant's students who had the first introduction manuscript after Kant's death. I have quoted this classification here because it has similarities with his second introduction in many respects. From 'First Introduction', Guyer (2000), p. 45.

⁶ From 'Introduction', *Ibid*, p. 83.

⁷ I do not mean that Kant's proposed structure of the human mind is inappropriate; rather that the structure of the faculties of the human mind he presents is quite complex.

classification 1 and C_2 for classification 2), he uses 'higher cognitive faculties' while in C_2 , he uses 'faculty of cognition.' This difference creates the conceptual confusion of whether the faculty of cognition is one, with understanding, the power of judgment and reason as its parts; or all the latter three are independent cognitive faculties as assigned in C_1 . It is also unclear whether the 'faculty of cognition' under 'all the faculties of the mind' is the same as the 'faculty of cognition', indicated separately in C_2 . In either case, whether both are the same or different, many conceptual ambiguities arise.

The second difference is that in C_1 , he uses 'products', under which *nature*, *art*, and *morals* are placed, while in C_2 the latter are placed under 'application to'. The confusion which arises from this difference is that if nature, art, and morals are *merely* products, then all three lose their ontological basis – the result would be conceptually relative. But if they are different conceptual entities, as shown in C_2 under 'application to,' then it is not clear how they can be distinguished from each other.

The third difference is that in C_1 Kant uses 'purposiveness that is at the same time law (obligation)' while in C_2 he uses 'final end'. This creates confusion and a serious problem for decision making. The confusion is that in C_1 *purposiveness* is defined in terms of a *law* whereas in C_2 it is not clear whether *final end* implies anything similar. The problem, and a serious one at that, is that if the *a priori principles* in C_1 and C_2 are true, then Kant cannot defend the moral spirit of his deontological moral theory: If the human mind acts towards a purpose or final end and if that purpose or end has moral significance then accordingly all other human actions also have moral significance since they in some way help moral agents achieve an end or purpose that is connected with their final ends. If this is not the case, how can a purpose at the same time be a law when it is known that the human mind has many purposes?

The fourth difference in C_1 and C_2 is in Kant's application of 'morals' as 'freedom.' Here I have a question: Are *morals* and *freedom* synonymous terms? If they are, then my saying that 'X is free/X has freedom' implies that 'X is moral/X has morals.' If that is true, it creates a major problem for Kant in defending morality on the one hand and freedom on the other since saying that 'X is free' then means 'X is moral' or vice-versa. But the notion of freedom in the non-moral domain requires a different account: The proposition 'X is moral' can imply that 'X is free', but vice-versa is not always true. Of course the proposition 'X is free' does not mean that 'X is political': How the Kantian notion of freedom as moral can be fit into political discussions is still up for debate.

From the Kantian perspective, the faculties of cognition and desire play a major role in moral decisions. The faculty of feeling of pleasure and displeasure also plays a role, although it mainly belongs to aesthetics. The faculty of cognition, however, provides a metaphysical basis for his moral philosophy which mainly belongs to the faculty of desire since Kant claims that the will, which is a key player in moral decisions, always acts as the faculty of desire.⁸ Though the will seems to be a natural final cause for performing moral actions, Kant has made it clear that ‘it is left indeterminate with regard to the practical whether the concept that gives the rule to the causality of the will is a concept of nature or a concept of freedom’.⁹ He however seems to be accepting that the causality of the will is a concept of freedom.

With regard to the problem of determining different faculties of the human mind, Kant seems to argue that the limitations of human knowledge make it impossible to know what they (*the faculties of the human mind*) in reality are and how they can be identified. It is impossible to determine what exactly the point of its origin, content and limits to a particular faculty is in terms of its function as part of the human mind.¹⁰ However, it is the human mind and its various faculties, causally connected, that is identified in the unity as the locus of moral agency. The locus of a moral agency, as Kant seems to believe, is inherent in every rational being like humans. For Kant, rational beings are considered moral agents in terms of the originality and purity of their inherent rational nature: They have the clear concept of morality that Kant holds ‘to be implicit in our commonsense judgements concerning the moral worth of actions and of the character they express’.¹¹

This is one of the several foundations on which Kant develops his account of moral universalism that I find quite convincing in terms of the ethical-decision-making nature of a person. Convincing is also the claim that morality is a matter of the unity of the practical and theoretical reason of a person in determining a common principle. However, my opinion differs from that of Kant in many respects that I will discuss in

⁸ Kant, I., *KU*, AA 05: 171-172.

⁹ “Hier wird nun in Ansehung des Praktischen unbestimmt gelassen: ob der Begriff, der der Causalität des Willens die Regel giebt, ein Naturbegriff, oder ein Freiheitsbegriff sei.“ *Ibid.* AA 05:172.

¹⁰ “Wenn es um die Bestimmung eines besonderen Vermögens der menschlichen Seele nach seinen Quellen, Inhalte und Grenzen zu thun ist, so kann man zwar nach der Natur des menschlichen Erkenntnisses nicht anders als von den Theilen derselben, ihrer genauen und (so viel als nach der jetzigen Lage unserer schon erworbenen Elemente derselben möglich vollständigen Darstellung anfangen.” Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:9.

¹¹ Rawls (2000). p. 146.

the next chapter. Here, I would say that those who criticize Kant by arguing that his moral philosophy is theoretical or procedural forget that he uses the terms ‘theoretical’, ‘speculative’ and ‘practical’ to show not two different reasons or minds, but two inseparable dimensions of the same human mind since he claims that ultimately there is *one or the same* reason.¹²

Speculative vs. Practical Reason

There are two dimensions of the human mind or *reason* according to Kant: speculative reason (SR) and practical reason (PR). Speculative reason deals with empirical and metaphysical truth and its source of knowledge: It is in this sense ‘the arbiter of truth in all judgements’.¹³ It explores scientific enquiry and tries to know the physical world through laws based on concepts and principles of which it itself is the only source. Some of these determining principles of laws belong to the understanding—a faculty of cognition through which we know nature and the world—while some determining principles belong to a transcendental world, known as *transcendental ideas* through which we attempt to experience super-sensible entities like God and the soul. But due to its limited approach our speculative reason does not provide any determinate propositions about them. However, speculative reason succeeds in at least pursuing scientific and mathematical enquiry and gives certainty to our knowledge of daily life.

Our empirical knowledge of the world, gained through scientific and mathematical principles, is not certain since it is based on sensibility. Sensibility gives knowledge of appearances and representations. Reason, on the other hand, only provides some conceptions and principles to sensibility and it has no knowledge of a *thing-in-itself* and thus of the ultimate reality of the world. This means that the world as a whole is unknowable. The same is true of our knowledge of entities like God and the soul. Neither can be known through sensibility since they are super-sensible, and nor through reason since it is powerless in supplying knowledge of them. Kant seems to be claiming that speculative reason is limited to the world of senses; it plays a significant role in regulating the practical side of the human mind. Since it is humanly impossible to have adequate knowledge of the world and the world beyond it, the question of denial of their existence is not an issue – what is left as a means of knowing is a *faith* in the existence

¹² Quoted in Rawls (2000). p. 146.

¹³ Williams (2009).

of the world, God, the soul, and all other insensible entities: The approach of speculative reason is limited to the phenomenal world.

Kant's conception of speculative reason is problematic in many respects. It is not clear whether reason belongs to an entity of the sensible world or of the transcendental world that is insensible. If it belongs to the sensible world, the question is from where does it give first principles to understanding and sensibility to get knowledge of objects? If it belongs to the transcendental world, does it mean that it is like God or the soul? It is not clear how speculative reason acts as a principle originator in the phenomenal world and at the same time goes beyond it. This could be problematic since Kant seems to affirm that reason regulates itself in a sense that it is free and a self-legislator.¹⁴

Unlike speculative reason, practical reason not only gives principles to itself but also always acts according to them. This is what Kant wants to establish in his moral theory, defining *morality* in terms of acting from *practical* reason. Kant claims that since every human being has practical reason, everyone is a moral agent by his/her own nature and has a natural capacity to act morally. Acting morally means acting in accordance with universal moral laws or those maxims an agent can will as universal laws.¹⁵ In this sense, practical reason is an *action-responsible* side of the human mind but it does not always act responsibly due to the influence of the senses upon it. Most of the time, it acts from inclinations, desires, and plans and hence all its actions performed under the external influence of sensibility can be said to be not moral. However by its own nature and essence, practical reason is a free and autonomous entity and therefore all actions that it performs from its own laws are said to be moral and universal. The universality of a moral action, Kant seems to claim, should be determined by the principle of the categorical imperative—the *supreme* moral principle—discovered by him.

Though speculative reason and practical reason as two dimensions of the human mind are mutually different and complex, they are seen in unity because the former always acts as a law-giver to our senses and as a result our sensibility gains knowledge and truth of the visible world. This means that those laws given by speculative reason have meaning only in terms of their application to the sensible world. The latter, on the other hand, always acts in accordance with laws it gives to itself: In this sense, it is an

¹⁴ Due to the conceptual complexity involved in Kant's classification of the human mind into various faculties, I must reject his idea because I do not agree with a fundamental distinction between speculative and practical reason...more in the next chapter.

¹⁵ Kant, I. *GMS*, AA 04:421-422.

independent law-giver and at the same time an acting agent. How it gives laws to itself is difficult to explain because, from the Kantian perspective, it is not clear whether its role as a law-giver is speculative or practical. How does practical reason which gives laws to itself always act as a moral agent and follow the categorical imperative? Of course speculative reason shares the speculative dimension and particular reason shares the practical when making judgments in their related fields, demonstrating a complexity of the human mind.¹⁶ Kant seems to be focusing on a complex but united structure of the human mind when separating one faculty from the other. This makes our task of synthesizing and interpreting the Kantian account of the human mind with its various faculties quite a challenge for explaining *morality* and its practical application in the real world.

It is also true that Kant's definition of 'practical' is different from the common notion of 'practical'. 'Practical' for Kant looks theoretical and a bit structural from an everyday point of view. The same is true of the common notion of morality, which is not at all morality from the Kantian perspective since, as Kant believes, it does not follow practical reason. Kant's *uncommon* approach sometimes makes his position quite difficult to defend because *morality* is or should be *practical* from a common sense perspective even if average people cannot explain its philosophical background.

Kant seems to believe that 'practical' implies a subjective necessity of acting from speculative reason which is said to direct all its actions via its own laws. In a sense the practical use of reason is an assumption or precondition for achieving one's goal set through his actions: It is a requirement that provides the agent a moral reason for his actions. The *practical* use of reason is the other side of the same cognitive human mind of which *speculative* reason is a part. It is said to be practical because it not only determines but also directs all its actions as laws.¹⁷ Distinguishing the theoretical use of reason from the practical, Kant also claims that the former is 'concerned with objects of the merely cognitive faculty' whereas the latter is concerned with the determining factors of the will.¹⁸ The will, as we will see later, is causally connected with the conception of freedom. Practical reason determines the will and gives it objective reality

¹⁶ There is a very interesting philosophy of mind implicit in Kant's *Critiques* though one has to extract it like a dentist pulls teeth.

¹⁷ Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:4-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, AA 05:15-16.

in the sense that the will and the conception of freedom are given by practical reason to itself.

With the faculties of the human mind, Kant attempts to explain the procedure of how we should begin with speculative and practical reasoning and what to get as a result. In the study of pure practical reason, we begin with principles and then through concepts reach the senses. In this process we study a will and its causal relationship with reason itself. In Kant's own words—

We begin with principles and proceed to concepts, and only then, if possible, go on to senses, while in the study of speculative reason we had to start with the senses and end with principles. Again the reason for this lies in the fact that here we have to deal with a will and to consider reason not in relation to objects but in relation to this will and its causality.¹⁹

There is an inseparable unity in speculative and practical reason that can be realized if and only if we believe that speculative reason gives us knowledge of both the transcendental and phenomenal worlds, while practical reason guides us to act in accordance with the knowledge it receives from speculative reason. From the Kantian perspective, we find a separation between speculative and practical reason and also between knowledge and action. However, I propose that they are in reality not separate. Speculative reason and practical reason seem to be two inseparable sides of a single cognitive faculty of a person: One cannot be separated from the other. A theory presupposes practice just as knowledge presupposes action and vice-versa. Those who observe a duality in reason are mistaken.²⁰

If there was a dual nature of the human mind, if there was no unity, there would be no universal application. For example, if there is a rift between a thought given by

¹⁹ “Denn in der gegenwärtigen werden wir von Grundsätzen anfangend zu Begriffen und von diesen allererst, wo möglich, zu den Sinnen gehen; da wir hingegen bei der speculativen Vernunft von den Sinnen anfangen und bei den Grundsätzen endigen mußten. Hievon liegt der Grund nun wiederum darin: daß wir es jetzt mit einem Willen zuthun haben und die Vernunft nicht im Verhältniß auf Gegenstände, sondern auf diesen Willen und dessen Causalität zu erwägen haben.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:16.

²⁰ Some may say that there are two different ‘faculties’, two different ‘critiques’, and two different ‘realms’ in Kant’s account of reason, and may ask why the *Critique of Pure Reason* need morals. In my response to them I would say that two faculties, two critiques, and two realms are not mutually different like two different pieces of two different objects: They only look different because we fail to see their unity. Two faculties of speculative reason and practical reason are not two different human minds; rather they are two inseparable sides of a single human mind. The same can be said about the difference between two critiques and between two realms. So the question of why the *Critique of Pure Reason* needs morals does not seem to be philosophically relevant.

speculative reason and the law determined by practical reason, then there is very little chance of one's will being able to decide whether it should act from the thought of speculative reason or the law of practical reason. When the rift between the two is filled, the will finds it easy to determine its course of action. The same is true about the will of all moral agents: Once the will of a moral agent realizes the unity between its speculative and practical reason, it is said to be acting according to universal moral laws. Is the dual nature of human reason not ultimately one and it not belong to the same faculty of the human mind? I believe the human mind, particularly the cognitive faculty, seeks to bring theoretical knowledge and practical will together under a single principle of autonomy of the will that is superior and acceptable to both: There is, in fact, a unity binding these two reasons (SR and PR) together.

The philosophically relevant point is that one can develop and reach the unified form of *reason* by realizing one's cognitive faculty where the will guides all actions in the practical domain. Kant claims that the cognitive faculty is ultimately the same for both speculative and practical reason since they 'both are pure *reason*'.²¹

*Understanding vs. Reason*²²

The first and foremost thing we find in Kant's philosophy is his emphasis on the pivotal role of the human mind. The human mind plays a major role in having theoretical as well as practical cognition of the sensible and super-sensible worlds, more precisely the phenomenal and the noumenal; it acts differently in different cases. For example, it knows nature through *understanding* which is responsible for theoretical cognition. It knows its own freedom through *reason*, which is responsible for practical cognition. Both *understanding* and *reason* act differently because they do not belong to the same faculty or the same purpose of cognition.²³ *Understanding* belongs to the faculty of cognition and acts to gain knowledge of nature through the principles confirmed by sensibility. Nature is believed to be an object of the senses. *Understanding* first legislates *a priori* principles and then explores the theoretical cognition of nature that

²¹ "Nun hat praktische Vernunft mit der speculativen so fern einerlei Erkenntnißvermögen zum Grunde, als beide reine Vernunft sind." Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:89.

²² I have added this section in order to give an insight into how Kant's notion of morality is tied with his notion of knowing and understanding thoughts and objects – it aims to show the connection between his epistemology and ethics.

²³ It is true when we look at both of Kant's classifications horizontally. When we look at them vertically, they belong to the same faculty and that is what is a bit confusing. See the classifications on page 88.

appears via experience. *Reason*, on the other hand, belongs to the faculty of desire and acts as a free agent – it attempts to legislate *a priori* principles for the realization of its own freedom and itself as the subject; it always acts in accordance with and also for practical cognition.

From Kant's perspective, *understanding* is not helpful in moral discussions since morality is not a matter of sensibility. Those who have a basic idea of *understanding* and of how it acts for nature providing general information about our sensible world through causation can have better insight into *understanding* as a part of the cognitive faculty of the human mind. *Understanding* seems to help us distinguish the role of reason towards nature from its role towards morals; it seems to be a participatory side of practical reason, the role of which is limited to knowledge of nature.

For Kant, *understanding* is a faculty that enables us to have thoughts about objects of sensible intuition, in other words, it is 'the mind's power of producing representations from itself'.²⁴ *Understanding* represents objects in the phenomenal world according to general conceptions as formed by categories. It gives spontaneous knowledge of an object through the faculty of sensibility but gives no guarantee of certainty about the real nature of the object represented by it in our experiences: It simply observes the causal relationship between an object and the categories, and gives a primary thought to the mind.

Allow me to explain this with an example: The ancient belief that the sun moves around the earth can be said to be a kind of first representation of the phenomena given by the understanding. This belief was based on those general principles which Kant calls *categories of mind*. But there are other principles that are more specific and cognitively preferred by human *reason*. The belief that the sun moves around the earth was rejected by one of the cognitively preferred principles which Kant seems to call the unifying laws. These principles or laws are not knowledge, but merely a source of knowledge. Our modern knowledge that the earth moves around the sun is based on one or many of such unifying laws.

What unifying laws are and how they come to *reason* to produce knowledge are the metaphysical questions Kant seriously intends to deal with in the first *Critique*. Since the basic aim of this dissertation is to focus on Kant's ethics (not on Kant's

²⁴ "Wollen wir die Receptivität unseres Gemüths, Vorstellungen zu empfangen, so fern es auf irgend eine Weise afficirt wird, Sinnlichkeit nennen: so ist dagegen das Vermögen, Vorstellungen selbst hervorzubringen, oder die Spontaneität des Erkenntnisses der Verstand." Kant, I., *KrV*, AA 05:75.

metaphysics), I would like to put a cap on this discussion. However, it should be remembered that *understanding* has very little to do with morality and/or freedom since, as Kant seems to be claiming, morality and freedom directly belong to *reason*. Kant writes that the concept of freedom and the concept of nature are entirely separate – they do not influence each other. In Kant’s own words—

The domain of the concept of nature under the one legislation and that of the concept of freedom under the other are entirely barred from any mutual influence that they could have on each other by themselves (each in accordance with its fundamental laws) by the great chasm that separates the supersensible from the appearances. The concept of freedom determines nothing in regard to the theoretical cognition of nature, the concept of nature likewise determines nothing to the practical laws of freedom; and it is to this extent not possible to throw a bridge from one domain to the other.²⁵

Kant seems to be claiming that although the concept of freedom and the concept of nature belong to two different domains of laws, the supersensible can however determine the sensible in certain respects because the formal principles of the laws of reason provide a basis for the laws of nature. Kant describes the causal connection between the supersensible and the sensible in the following lines—

[A]lthough the determining grounds of causality in accordance with the concept of freedom (...) are not found in nature, and the sensible cannot determine the supersensible in the subject, nevertheless the converse is possible (...) and is already contained in the concept of causality through freedom, whose effect in accordance with its formal laws is to take place in the world, although the world cause, when used of the supersensible, signifies only the ground for determining the causality of natural things to an effect that is in accord with their own natural laws but yet at the same time is also in unison with the formal principle of the laws of reason...²⁶

²⁵ “Das Gebiet des Naturbegriffs unter der einen und das des Freiheitsbegriffs unter der anderen Gesetzgebung sind gegen allen wechselseitigen Einfluß, den sie für sich (ein jedes nach seinen Grundgesetzen) auf einander haben könnten, durch die große Kluft, welche das Übersinnliche von den Erscheinungen trennt, gänzlich abgesondert. Der Freiheitsbegriff bestimmt nichts in Ansehung der theoretischen Erkenntniß der Natur; der Naturbegriff eben sowohl nichts in Ansehung der praktischen Gesetze der Freiheit: und es ist in sofern nicht möglich, eine Brücke von einem Gebiete zu dem andern hinüberzuschlagen.“ Kant, I., *KU*, AA 05:195.

²⁶ “Allein wenn die Bestimmungsgründe der Causalität nach dem Freiheitsbegriffe (und der praktischen Regel, die er enthält) gleich nicht in der Natur belegen sind, und das Sinnliche das Übersinnliche im Subjecte nicht bestimmen kann: so ist dieses doch umgekehrt (zwar nicht in Ansehung des Erkenntnisses

We can say that the sensible world, under the concept of nature, presents a general idea of Kant's cosmology. Things are causally connected either as parts to parts or as parts to a whole. Kant seems to assume that the world we experience through our senses is not the world we experience through our *reason*. Similarly, the realm of morality experienced by the senses is not the same realm of morality that *reason* experiences. Here, one should not think that there are two different realms of morality; rather one should think that there are two different *levels* of morality—the sensible and supersensible.

In his first and second *Critiques*, Kant assigns two kinds of principles to human reason. The first kind of principle is *regulatory* in nature while the second kind of principle is *constitutive*. He calls the regulatory principle of reason a *maxim* which as a prototype of laws plays an important role in universalizing an action. On the other hand, the constitutive principles of reason guide us in following particular knowledge we have. These two different dimensions of reason show the unity of principles of the human mind.²⁷

4.3 Practical Reason and Freedom

In the previous chapter, I discussed the role of freedom in regard to the concept of autonomy. Here, I want to discuss the concept of freedom in regard to practical reason in terms of self-legislation. We have seen that *reason* is involved in determining laws and principles and that it deals with the problems of the transcendental or supersensible world. Due to its limited capacity, it does not (and cannot) provide adequate knowledge of the supersensible world: Kant claims that knowledge of the supersensible world cannot be revealed by reason. This is why he proposes to deny reason in order to make room for *faith* in entities like God and the immortal soul, reducing reason to a more practical level. And that is the starting point for practical reason in terms of its decisive role in determining actions as morally worthy enough for providing a basis for the

der Natur, aber doch der Folgen aus dem ersteren auf die letztere) möglich und schon in dem Begriffe einer Causalität durch Freiheit enthalten, deren Wirkung diesen ihren formalen Gesetzen gemäß in der Welt geschehen soll, obzwar das Wort Ursache, von dem Übersinnlichen gebraucht, nur den Grund bedeutet, die Causalität der Naturdinge zu einer Wirkung gemäß ihren eigenen Naturgesetzen, zugleich aber doch auch mit dem formalen Princip der Vernunftgesetze einhellig zu bestimmen, wovon die Möglichkeit zwar nicht eingesehen.“ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Williams (2009).

concept of freedom as well as for the categorical imperative as the supreme principle of morality. I will discuss the principle of the categorical imperative a bit later. Here, I want to focus on the relationship between practical reason and the concept of freedom.

It is a widespread view that one is *free* if one is not precluded from doing what one wishes to do and can *freely* follow one's inclinations, choices and decisions. A philosophical notion of freedom is that one can only be called *free* if it can be shown that one is free from one's inclinations, choices and decisions and always acts from one's essential nature of being a completely free agent. The general notion of freedom is freedom from external causes, whereas the philosophical notion of freedom is one's freedom from both external and internal causes. Most people favor the general notion of freedom and argue that freedom of the latter kind is impossible to realize; Kant is a strong supporter of the latter kind of concept of freedom (philosophical).

Kant defines 'freedom' in terms of the inherent nature of pure practical reason which provides itself with unconditional laws. Laws could be unconditional only if they came directly from practical reason without being influenced by any internal or external cause (for example desires or inclinations). Since practical reason is a self-legislator, it should follow its own commands: It should not act for and from an inclination or passion or law which is not given by it to itself. When practical reason is free from passions and inclinations, it only has laws or, in practical terms, *maxims* as moral laws.

In the preface to *KpV*, Kant explains how the concept of freedom, practical reason and speculative reason are interrelated. He seems to believe that the faculty of practical reason confirms the reality of both empirical and transcendental freedom (TF). Transcendental freedom is required by speculative reason to free itself from any antinomies it is entangled with; it is required to think of something which is unconditioned by causal series. Kant describes the relation between the concept of freedom, practical reason and speculative reason in the following lines—

With the pure practical faculty of reason, the reality of transcendental freedom is also confirmed. [...] Freedom is required if reason is to rescue itself from the antinomy in which it is inevitably entangled when attempting to think the unconditioned in a causal series. [...] The concept of freedom, in so far as its reality is proved by an apodictic law

of practical reason, is the keystone of the whole architecture of the system of pure reason and even of speculative reason.²⁸

Kant claims that freedom as a concept of speculative reason is *a priori* and a condition of moral law. Like God and immortality, it is a supersensible object of the category of causality, provided by practical reason without any collusion with speculative reason. Unlike the mechanism of nature, freedom as “causality” is given by moral law which is different from natural law. Since in the end both moral and natural law belong to the same subject—a rational agent—both are in some way in unity. This unity can be seen in the rational agent’s connection to moral and natural laws. According to Kant, it is impossible to show a unity between causality as freedom and causality as the mechanism of nature if the subject does not conceive itself as a being that stands in relation to freedom in terms of practical reason and also in relation to the mechanism of nature in terms of empirical reason.²⁹

Further, Kant seems to be claiming that it is impossible to explain how the consciousness of moral laws or freedom is possible. Kant’s acceptance of the impossibility of explaining freedom makes for a serious gap in his theory because his theory is conceptualized in terms of the freedom of a moral agent, but if one cannot explain what *freedom* is, how can one understand what *morality* is. What has been said about freedom, Kant seems to believe, is a possible explanation: We can give no further explanation. In Kant’s own words—

It (*KpV*) makes the concept of their existence in the intelligible world, i.e., freedom, its foundation. For this concept has no other meaning, and these laws are possible only in relation to the freedom of the will; but, if the will is presupposed as free, then they are necessary, being practical postulates. How this consciousness of the moral laws or – what amounts to the same thing – how this consciousness of freedom is possible cannot be further explained.³⁰

²⁸ “Mit diesem Vermögen steht auch die transcendente Freiheit nunmehr fest, und zwar in derjenigen absoluten Bedeutung genommen [...], um sich wider die Antinomie zu retten, darin sie unvermeidlich geräth, wenn sie in der Reihe der Causalverbindung sich das Unbedingte denken will. [...]. Der Begriff der Freiheit, so fern dessen Realität durch ein apodiktisches Gesetz der praktischen Vernunft bewiesen ist, macht nun den Schlussstein von dem ganzen Gebäude eines Systems der reinen, selbst der speculativen Vernunft aus.“ Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:03-04.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, AA 05:05-07.

³⁰ “Statt der Anschauung aber legt sie denselben den Begriff ihres Daseins in der intelligibelen Welt, nämlich der Freiheit, zum Grunde. Denn dieser bedeutet nichts anders, und jene Gesetze sind nur in

In the previous chapter we saw that freedom helps the will in keeping practical reason away from foreign causes and provides it with its autonomous status. Freedom from foreign causes means manifesting the will's essential nature. These three—the will, freedom, and autonomy—are causally connected and help practical reason to realize its own nature. Kant explains the practicality of pure reason in terms of freedom regarded as causality in the human will's making judgments. He seems to be arguing that if we can show that in reality freedom belongs to the human will and the will of any rational being, we can prove that practical reason alone is unconditionally practical; empirically conditioned *reason* cannot be practical based on the same argument.³¹

Kant further claims that freedom as causal law gives rise to our concept of the will so that *reason* can determine its own course of action. Once we have a clear concept of the will, we can apply it to objects and also to its subject – *reason*. Kant writes—

The principles of the empirically unconditioned causality must come first, and afterwards the attempt can be made to establish our concepts of the ground of determination of such a will, their application to objects, and finally their application to the subject and its sensuous faculty. The law of causality from freedom, i.e., any pure practical principle, is the unavoidable beginning and determines the objects to which it alone can be applied.³²

Thus according to Kant, freedom plays a key role in reason-based moral determination. The human will is directly determined by moral law because it has freedom as an inherent virtue. How does freedom play its role? Kant's answer comes in this way: Freedom plays its role both negatively and positively. In the negative sense, the principle of morality consists in freedom from all desired objects. It also consists in the determination of choice of universal legislation which a maxim must be capable of making. In the positive sense, freedom is the intrinsic legislation of pure and practical

Beziehung auf Freiheit des Willens möglich, unter Voraussetzung derselben aber nothwendig, oder umgekehrt, diese ist nothwendig, weil jene Gesetze als praktische Postulate nothwendig sind. Wie nun dieses Bewußtsein der moralischen Gesetze oder, welches einerlei ist, das der Freiheit möglich sei, läßt sich nicht weiter erklären.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:46.

³¹ *Ibid*, AA 05:15-16.

³² “da denn die Grundsätze der empirisch unbedingten Causalität den Anfang machen müssen, nach welchem der Versuch gemacht werden kann, unsere Begriffe von dem Bestimmungsgrunde eines solchen Willens, ihrer Anwendung auf Gegenstände, zuletzt auf das Subject und dessen Sinnlichkeit, allererst festzusetzen. Das Gesetz der Causalität aus Freiheit, d. i. irgend ein reiner praktischer Grundsatz, macht hier unvermeidlich den Anfang und bestimmt die Gegenstände, worauf er allein bezogen werden kann.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:16.

reason. Based on this the moral law ‘expresses nothing else than the autonomy of the pure practical reason, i.e., freedom. This autonomy or freedom is itself the formal condition of all maxims, under which alone they can all agree with the supreme practical law.’³³ No doubt, freedom is an inherent element of the nature of human reason. It plays many roles: It determines universal moral law and helps the will in realizing its autonomy in thinking, legislating and acting.

4.4 Law (*Gesetz*) and Morality (*Sittlichkeit*)

The Concept of Law and Maxim

We have learned that *morality*, for Kant, is based on universal laws and that every moral agent must practice them. This is to say that believing in morality means believing in universal laws. If this is the case, then a question arises: What does the term ‘Law’ mean for Kant and in what manner is it linked to ‘morality?’ It is interesting to know that Kant frequently uses three German terms—*Gesetz*, *Recht*, and *Regel*—which are often translated in English as *law*, *right*, and *rule*, respectively. In the *Kant-Lexicon*,³⁴ ‘law’ is defined as ‘objective rules, unified, and universal connection’. Laws are objective rules in the sense that they exist independently; they are unified because they have certain kinds of common preconditions that must be satisfied before they can be recognized as laws; and they have universal connection in the sense that they are applicable to all. This definition of ‘law’ is in normative form. And now the next question: From where do we get those objective and unified laws?³⁵

Kant talks about two categories of law: the *natural* and the *moral*. We can realize *the natural law* or the law of nature through our experience when *a priori* laws or the principles of the faculty of pure understanding or *pure reason* are applied. The faculty of understanding recognizes empirical conditions of natural laws: It is said to be the legislator of the world – it provides the laws of nature. *A priori* laws are those transcendental principles through which our mind examines the phenomenal, makes

³³ “Also drückt das moralische Gesetz nichts anders aus, als die Autonomie der reinen praktischen Vernunft, d. i. der Freiheit, und diese ist selbst die formale Bedingung aller Maximen, unter der sie allein mit dem obersten praktischen Gesetze zusammenstimmen können.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:33.

³⁴ “Gesetze sind objektive Regeln, einheitliche, allgemeingültige Verknüpfungen.“ See ‘Gesetze’ in Eisler (1930)..

³⁵ The contemporary philosophical debate on morality is basically to search for or at least propose the criterion for how to assign objectivity to moral laws and on what basis. The issue of objectivity in moral assessment is quite problematic not only from a theoretical point of view but also from the practical one.

relationships among various things, and finally produces unifying empirical principles which are identified as natural law. Since nature seems to be working in accordance with the laws produced by human *reason* or the *mind*, it is said to be subject to *a priori* transcendental laws. If anything is free from this kind of legislative procedure, it is, Kant claims, a *thing-in-itself* or *reality*, though unknown.

In the preface to *Groundwork*, Kant claims that all our rational knowledge is either material or formal.³⁶ The material form of knowledge deals with definitive objects and laws of two kinds: laws of nature and laws of freedom. The former is known as a theory of nature and the latter a theory of morals or ethics. The laws of freedom are primarily concerned with ethical matters. If this is so, the following can be asked: Why is Kant so passionate about natural laws which are primarily concerned with physics, not morality? In what manner is moral philosophy or are the laws of freedom linked with natural laws? We do not get a clear answer from Kant. He seems to hold that natural law is that law according to which everything happens or happens to be, while moral law is that law according to which ‘everything should happen, but allows for conditions under which what should happen often does not’.³⁷ No doubt, Kant believes in the idea of a twofold metaphysics—of nature and of morals—and claims that both have an empirical as well as a rational part. The rational part of ethics, according to Kant, is morals. And that is the foundation for his so-called pure moral philosophy. In Kant’s own words—

There must be such a philosophy is self-evident from common idea of duty and moral laws. Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to hold morally, i.e., as a ground of obligation, must imply absolute necessity; he must admit that the command, “thou shalt not lie,” does not apply to men only, as if other rational beings had no need to observe it. The same is true for all other moral laws properly so called. He must concede that the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of man or in the circumstances in which he is placed but sought a priori solely in the concepts of pure reason, and that every other percept which rests on principles of mere experience, even a percept which is

³⁶ “Alle Vernunftkenntniß ist entweder material und betrachtet irgend ein Object; oder formal und beschäftigt sich bloß mit der Form des Verstandes und der Vernunft selbst und den allgemeinen Regeln des Denkens überhaupt ohne Unterschied der Objecte.“ Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:387.

³⁷ “Dagegen können sowohl die natürliche, als sittliche Weltweisheit jede ihren empirischen Theil haben, weil jene der Natur als einem Gegenstande der Erfahrung, diese aber dem Willen des Menschen, so fern er durch die Natur afficirt wird, ihre Gesetze bestimmen muß, die erstern zwar als Gesetze, nach denen alles geschieht, die zweiten als solche, nach denen alles Geschehen soll, aber doch auch mit Erwägung der Bedingungen, unter denen es öfters nicht geschieht.“ *Ibid*, AA 04:387-388.

in certain respects universal, so far as it leans in the least on empirical grounds (...), may be called a practical rule but never a moral law.³⁸

Kant claims to develop a pure moral philosophy in terms of fixing the same degree of certainty he observes in the metaphysics of nature or in physics. Are the laws of nature certain? Kant gives a negative answer. For him, some laws of nature may be uncertain and may affect our views, but behind those natural laws, he claims, certainty is involved because the human mind has invented those natural laws. However, they are not always certain; they seem to be uncertain at a particular point in time as compared with *a priori* principles which are free from all kinds of uncertainty and defects – and without which the human mind cannot gain knowledge about objects. This is why Kant claims that ‘all moral philosophy rests solely on its pure part. Applied to man, it borrows nothing from knowledge of him (anthropology) but gives him, as a rational being, *a priori* laws.’³⁹ It should be noted that Kant makes a distinction between a practical rule (*Regel*) and a moral law (*Gesetz*). According to Kant, a practical rule rests on mere experience and empirical grounds, whereas a moral law rests on *a priori* principles. This may be the reason why he considers moral philosophy the rational part of ethics.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that Kant’s moral philosophy is purely based on his metaphysical account. The notion of morality is based on ontology without which the notion of morality would seem to be an empty notion. If we forget for a moment Kant’s notion of a noumenal world and its connection to human action, we cannot find anything like moral principles. Some problematic questions of moral consideration come to me: If there are *a priori* transcendental laws and they are certain, how do they come to human reason? What is the source of *a priori* laws and why are they certain?

³⁸ “[D]enn dass es eine solche geben müsse, leuchtet von selbst aus der gemeinen Idee der Pflicht und der sittlichen Gesetze ein. Jedermann muß eingestehen, daß ein Gesetz, wenn es moralisch, d. i. als Grund einer Verbindlichkeit, gelten soll, absolute Nothwendigkeit bei sich führen müsse; daß das Gebot: du sollst nicht lügen, nicht etwa bloß für Menschen gelte, andere vernünftige Wesen sich aber daran nicht zu kehren hätten, und so alle übrige eigentliche Sittengesetze; daß mithin der Grund der Verbindlichkeit hier nicht in der Natur des Menschen, oder den Umständen in der Welt, darin er gesetzt ist, gesucht werden müsse, sondern *a priori* lediglich in Begriffen der reinen Vernunft, und daß jede andere Vorschrift, die sich auf Principien der bloßen Erfahrung gründet, und sogar eine in gewissem Betracht allgemeine Vorschrift, so fern sie sich dem mindesten Theile, vielleicht nur einem Bewegungsgrunde nach auf empirische Gründe stützt, zwar eine praktische Regel, niemals aber ein moralisches Gesetz heißen kann.“ *Ibid*, IV, 389

³⁹ “[S]ondern alle Moralphilosophie beruht gänzlich auf ihrem reinen Theil, und auf den Menschen angewandt, entlehnt sie nicht das mindeste von der Kenntniß desselben (Anthropologie), sondern giebt ihm, als vernünftigem Wesen, Gesetze *a priori*.“ *Ibid*.

Kant's answer to these questions is faulty because his explanation is supported by human *belief*, not by human *reason*. He seems to be claiming that these laws are dependent on God who implants them in our mind and in nature as well, and therefore they are immutable and eternal. Since there is no evidence to prove the existence of God except through having a belief that 'there is God', his explanation seems to be based on a *faith* that contradicts *reason*. Kant claims that God is the ideal of *reason* but at the same time claims that his existence cannot be proven by speculative reason.⁴⁰ I consider this to be the first big gap in his speculative philosophy: It seems to me that his complete rational philosophy is ultimately based on faith in *a priori* laws or some superior entity like God, although Kant would never accept this. That is why Kant's moral philosophy must face a challenge from its own claims.

If we go back to Kant's first *Critique* in which he tries to establish the nature and power of *reason*, we find that his notion of God, as compared with the traditional notion, somehow belongs to the transcendental *a priori* laws, similar to Platonic universal ideas. (That is why his philosophy is also known as transcendental idealism.) His epistemological considerations seem to be connected with his metaphysical transcendentalism, though he argues that neither *reason* nor *cognition* itself provides any metaphysical reality. If Kant's position is true that God is not a metaphysical reality but only an ideal of reason, we are forced to accept that transcendental conditions in general and *a priori ideas* in particular have no source of existence. And if that is the case, *a priori* principles cannot be justified as real. How can Kant then justify his pure philosophy? If we move towards the other possibility and assume that for Kant nature may be the source of *a priori* principles then he faces the same problem and must demonstrate to the world the nature of *nature*.

In the second *Critique*, the *KpV*, Kant seems to be maintaining that God is real and determinate in the moral sphere when he argues that—

All other concepts (those of God and immortality) which as mere ideas, are unsupported by anything in speculative reason now attach themselves to the concept of freedom and gain, with it and through it, stability and objective reality. That is there possibility is proved by the fact that there really is freedom, for this idea is revealed by the moral law.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Kant, I., *KrV*, AA 05:99.

⁴¹ "[A]lle andere Begriffe (die von Gott und Unsterblichkeit), welche als bloße Ideen in dieser ohne Haltung bleiben, schließen sich nun an ihn an und bekommen mit ihm und durch ihn Bestand und

This passage reveals that the concepts of God and immortality are not objectively real because they are dependent on the concept of freedom. This implies that the ideas of God and immortality ultimately prove the supremacy of the concept of freedom in determining moral laws. And if that is the case as it appears to be, I do not understand why Kant assumes God and immortality to be postulates of morality. He claims that a moral agent should free himself from his natural impulses and inclinations in order to always act from universal moral law. Why he does not say that a moral agent should also free himself from moral postulates which he considers mere ideas is unclear. In contrast to moral postulates, natural impulses and inclinations show some objective reality which Kant tries to exclude from the realm of morality. But why does he do that? I don't see any rationale behind his giving priority to mere ideas (those of God and immortality) over real desires and purposes. Why does he consider three postulates of morality, not one, when he knows that the concepts of God and immortality are ultimately dependent on the concept of freedom? Kant's explanation comes in these lines:

The postulates of pure practical reason all proceed from the principle of morality, which is not a postulate but a law by which reason directly determines the will. [...]. These postulates are not theoretical dogmas but presuppositions of necessarily practical import; thus, while they do not extend speculative knowledge, they give objective reality to the ideas of speculative reason in general [...]. These postulates are those of immortality, of freedom affirmatively regarded (...), and of the existence of God.⁴²

Kant's explanation contains many problematic elements. The above passage claims that moral postulates are not theoretical dogmas; rather they are produced by the principle of morality. If this is so, Kant must accept one of two alternatives: (a) moral postulates are real because they come from the principle of morality, or (b) not

objective Realität, d. i. die Möglichkeit derselben wird dadurch bewiesen, daß Freiheit wirklich ist; denn diese Idee offenbart sich durchs moralische Gesetz.“ Kant, I. *KpV*, AA 05:4.

⁴² “Sie gehen alle vom Grundsatz der Moralität aus, der kein Postulat, sondern ein Gesetz ist, durch welches Vernunft unmittelbar den Willen bestimmt, welcher Wille eben dadurch, daß er so bestimmt ist, [...]. Diese Postulate sind nicht theoretische Dogmata, sondern Voraussetzungen in nothwendig praktischer Rücksicht, erweitern also zwar nicht das speculative Erkenntniß, geben aber den Ideen der speculativen Vernunft im Allgemeinen (vermittelt ihrer Beziehung aufs Praktische) objective Realität [...]. Diese Postulate sind die der Unsterblichkeit, der Freiheit, positiv betrachtet (als der Causalität eines Wesens, so fern es zur intelligibelen Welt gehört), und des Daseins Gottes.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:132.

everything coming from the principle of morality is real. If Kant accepts (a), he must give the concepts of God and immortality objective reality but then moral postulates will become conditions for morality that Kant will never accept. If he accepts (b), he must consider the principle of morality incomplete in the sense that it sometimes provides unreal and unnecessary elements like the concepts of God and immortality in our moral orientation. I don't know how Kant would deal this problem. What I can say for sure is that his inclusion of moral postulates seems problematic in regard to his rational philosophy. I can also say that either his pure rational philosophy or his ethics is impure in certain respects. Can we then say that Kant has failed to provide the real source of *a priori* laws?

Allow me to come to Kant's concept of law and morality. Kant distinguishes between subjective and objective principles of practical reason. *Subjective* principles are known as *maxims* and *objective* principles as *laws* in relation to the will. He defines practical principles of practical reason as follows—

Practical principles are propositions which contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules. They are subjective, or maxims, when the condition is regarded by the subject as valid only for his own will. They are objective, or practical, laws when they are recognized as objective, i.e., as valid for the will of every rational being.⁴³

According to Kant, not all principles are laws. To be a law, a principle must be a product of reason. Those principles which any person *X* makes for herself are not laws in accordance with which she, as a rational being, is bound to act, because it is quite possible that such principles are influenced by the faculty of desire and the senses. If this is the case, they can be considered as rules which are also a product of reason, but since they are subject to actions that deal with purposes, they are not laws. However, Kant says, a rule which can be characterized by an "ought to" is a kind of imperative to an agent. In his own words—

⁴³ "Praktische Grundsätze sind Sätze, welche eine allgemeine Bestimmung des Willens enthalten, die mehrere praktische Regeln unter sich hat. Sie sind subjectiv oder Maximen, wenn die Bedingung nur als für den Willen des Subjects gültig von ihm angesehen wird; objectiv aber oder praktische Gesetze, wenn jene als objectiv, d. i. für den Willen jedes vernünftigen Wesens gültig, erkannt wird." *Ibid*, AA 05:19.

The practical rule is always a product of reason, because it prescribes action as a means to an effect which is its purpose. This rule, however, is an imperative for a being whose reason is not the sole determinant of the will. It is a rule characterized by an “ought,” which expresses the objective necessitation of the act and indicates that, if reason completely determined the will, the action would without exception take place according to the rule.⁴⁴

Here we can see the difference between imperatives and maxims. According to Kant, imperatives are objective principles, whereas maxims are merely subjective principles. When imperatives are conditional or when they determine the will only in respect to a desired effect or purpose, they are known as hypothetical and are recognized merely as practical precepts. When imperatives only determine the will without regard to its effect, they are known as *categorical*. Hypothetical imperatives are not laws but categorical imperatives are, because the former doesn't completely determine the will as will, whereas the latter does so. The former determines the will in regard to its effect, while the latter determines it as it is. Thus, to be a law, an imperative must be categorical. An imperative is not categorical if it lacks the necessity of being completely free from condition. In this sense, maxims as subjective principles become laws but not categorical imperatives. To be a categorical imperative, a law must be determined by the will to be a moral principle and must be objectively valid.⁴⁵

Some may believe that Kant's subjective maxim is *personal*: Perhaps they have misunderstood the definition of a maxim. In reality a maxim involves the objectivity of being a law. A rational being who knows that a maxim involves objectivity also knows that it is valid in relation to moral laws in all similar situations.⁴⁶ Those who do not

⁴⁴ “Die praktische Regel ist jederzeit ein Product der Vernunft, weil sie Handlung als Mittel zur Wirkung als Absicht vorschreibt. Diese Regel ist aber für ein Wesen, bei dem Vernunft nicht ganz allein Bestimmungsgrund des Willens ist, ein Imperativ, d. i. eine Regel, die durch ein Sollen, welches die objective Nöthigung der Handlung ausdrückt, bezeichnet wird, und bedeutet, daß, wenn die Vernunft den Willen gänzlich bestimmte, die Handlung unausbleiblich nach dieser Regel geschehen würde.“ *Ibid.*, AA 05:20.

⁴⁵ “Die Imperativen gelten also objectiv und sind von Maximen, als subjectiven Grundsätzen, gänzlich unterschieden. Jene bestimmen aber entweder die Bedingungen der Causalität des vernünftigen Wesens, als wirkender Ursache, bloß in Ansehung der Wirkung und Zulänglichkeit zu derselben, oder sie bestimmen nur den Willen, er mag zur Wirkung hinreichend sein oder nicht. Die erstere würden hypothetische Imperativen sein und bloße Vorschriften der Geschicklichkeit enthalten; die zweiten würden dagegen kategorisch und allein praktische Gesetze sein. Maximen sind also zwar Grundsätze, aber nicht Imperativen.” *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Dietrichson writes: “Kant insists, of course, that an action is to be both objectively correct and subjectively worthy, it must, in addition to being based on a universalizable maxim, be *motivated* in a

observe this dimension of maxims do not know what they ought to do in a given moral situation either. Kant says that all material principles or principles related to material life cannot be a determining basis for morality. That is why *imperatives* are said to be free from material principles in order to be universal moral laws, objectively valid. Kant writes—

Since it was shown that all material principles were wholly unfit to be the supreme moral law; it follows that the formal practical principle of pure reason, according to which the mere form of a universal legislation possible through our maxims must constitute the supreme and direct determining ground of will, is the only principle which can possibly furnish categorical imperatives, i.e., practical laws which enjoin actions as dutiful. Only a so defined principle can serve as a principle of morality, whether in judging conduct or in application to the human will in determining it.⁴⁷

No doubt, laws, according to Kant, are mainly *a priori* and maxims are subjective principles that rational beings think of as standards for their course of action. When a maxim is universalizable, it becomes a universal law. In moral matters, Kant insists that we act from those maxims, which at the same time can be made universal.

The Concept of Morality and Moral Law

Morality, for Kant, refers to a specific meaning of the *worthiness* of human actions in terms of their respect for universally valid laws – regardless of the results produced by them, since the essence of moral value, he asserts, depends on those laws which determine an agent's will. If an agent's will is determined by a moral law for the sake of some feeling and not for the sake of the law itself, his action can be said to be legal, but not moral. An action is *moral* only if it is driven by the motive of respect for moral laws. It can then be asked: What kinds of laws are *moral* or what are moral laws? If an agent's motivation to respect those laws makes him moral, then the same question I

special manner. In other words, it must proceed, not only “according to duty“, but also “from duty“. See Deitrichson (2009). p. 143.

⁴⁷ “[D]aß, weil materiale Principien zum obersten Sittengesetz ganz untauglich sind (wie bewiesen worden), das formale praktische Princip der reinen Vernunft, nach welchem die bloße Form einer durch unsere Maximen möglichen allgemeinen Gesetzgebung den obersten und unmittelbaren Bestimmungsgrund des Willens ausmachen muß, das einzige mögliche sei, welches zu kategorischen Imperativen, d. i. praktischen Gesetzen (welche Handlungen zur Pflicht machen), und überhaupt zum Princip der Sittlichkeit sowohl in der Beurtheilung, als auch der Anwendung auf den menschlichen Willen in Bestimmung desselben tauglich ist.“ Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:41.

asked in the previous subsection reappears before us: What is a law and where does it come from?

According to Kant, the first condition of moral law is *freedom* which is of *a priori* nature and hence it is the foundation of the system of pure reason. Compared to it, the ideas of God and the immortality of soul are not conditions of moral law; rather they are ‘conditions of the necessary object of a will which is determined by this law’.⁴⁸ We know nothing about the existence of God and the immortality of soul, but it is *freedom* which gives objective reality to them in the practical context of morality, and in this manner their ideas gain subjective necessity in the moral domain: They are, in fact, the objects of pure practical reason. On this footing, *God* and *immortality* are the two other conditions of moral law.

From Kant’s first *Critique* we can assume that speculative reason acts only from *a priori* principles and gives objective reality to those things which satisfy its categories.⁴⁹ Why does Kant, who loves speculative reason above all other things, think that there is a practical dimension of pure reason? Is the practical dimension of *reason* real or unreal? If it is real, how can the ideas of God and immortality be said to be objectively given by freedom? If it is not real, why does Kant give the world a readymade notion of morality?

In *Groundwork*, Kant provides a conceptual framework of morality when he asserts that moral actions are those done solely from duty, not for any specific end. He claims that a moral law becomes duty when it is practiced by the will of the agent solely for its purity and genuineness. With this thought, he clarifies the objective of ethics claiming that ‘the metaphysics of morals is meant to investigate the idea and principles of a possible pure will and not the actions and conditions of the human volition as such, which are for the most part drawn from psychology’.⁵⁰ Kant’s second assertion leads to a kind of emptiness in his basic idea of morality since he overlooks the actions and conditions of human volition. This is another reason why his moral philosophy is such a debatable topic both in academic and non-academic domains: Some argue that Kant’s basic idea of morality is influenced by the Christian ethics of his time. I think Kant’s

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, AA 05:4.

⁴⁹ ‘Objective reality’, for Kant, seems to be ‘the reality’ that exists independently of the individual mind or perception.

⁵⁰ “Denn die Metaphysik der Sitten soll die Idee und die Principien eines möglichen reinen Willens untersuchen und nicht die Handlungen und Bedingungen des menschlichen Wollens überhaupt, welche größtentheils aus der Psychologie geschöpft werden.“ Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:390.

denying that actions done based on altruism should be considered moral disappoints many.

Of course Kant cannot surrender the *apriority* of duty if he wants to develop a notion of morality based on certain *a priori* laws. This is what leads him towards the concept of autonomy in order to determine moral obligation in terms of moral legislation and respect for laws. The concepts of morality and obligation come from *reason* since, for Kant, obligatoriness ‘constitutes the essence of morality’.⁵¹ This is what Kant seems to be establishing in his metaphysics of morals. He is of a certain belief that since ‘the human reason, even in the commonest mind, can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and completeness in moral matters’, morality is a matter of *reason* which is capable of producing a will *good in itself*.⁵² I will later focus on how human reason has an influence on human will, which forms the categorical imperative.

Kant defines the *moral law* as an imperative or an unconditional command of human reason. A categorical imperative or an unconditional command is a law because it is given by the will and testified by reason—the source of it. Since it is a command by *reason*, it is an obligation or a ‘constraint’ for human action. In his own words—

The moral law for them, therefore, is an imperative, commanding categorically because it is unconditioned. The relation of such a will to this law is one of dependence under the name of *obligation*. This term implies a constraint to an action, though this constraint is only that of reason and its objective laws. Such an action is called *duty*.⁵³

What is the basis of a moral law? According to Kant, it is the autonomous will on which a moral law is dependent since the will is not only the origin of a moral law but also confirms it as belonging to duty. The same is true about all moral laws and duties. In the previous chapter we saw that autonomy of the will is the sole criterion for determining a law as moral. When the will autonomously determines a course of action, that action is qualified to be an objective moral law because it is not only free from all external causes but also internal causes of the agent. Most anti-Kantians seem to argue

⁵¹ Beck (1976). p. 20.

⁵² “[D]ie menschliche Vernunft im Moralischen selbst beim gemeinsten Verstande leicht zu großer Richtigkeit und Ausführlichkeit gebracht werden kann.“ Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:391.

⁵³ “Das moralische Gesetz ist daher bei jenen ein Imperativ, der kategorisch gebietet, weil das Gesetz unbedingt ist; das Verhältniß eines solchen Willens zu /: diesem Gesetze ist Abhängigkeit, unter dem Namen der Verbindlichkeit, welche eine Nöthigung, obzwar durch bloße Vernunft und deren objectives Gesetz, zu einer Handlung bedeutet, die darum Pflicht heißt.“ Kant, I. *KpV*, AA 05:32.

that Kant's emphasis to human reason cannot provide objective moral laws but only subjective principles because the human reason that originates moral laws is not objective but subjective. I think this argument is based on a misunderstanding of Kant's formulation of reason as the source of morality. When Kant claims that reason provides objective moral principles, universally valid, he means that reason makes ethical decisions from its own laws, and since the reason of all agents performs in the same way without differentiating between their own laws, there is no subjectivity involved.

In order to explain autonomy of the will and its role in ethical decision making, Kant makes moral agents aware of what is not autonomy, but rather *heteronomy* of choice. The heteronomy of choice is the opposite of the autonomy of the will. It neither establishes any obligation nor implies any constraint; it always goes against 'the principle of duty' and 'the morality of the will'.⁵⁴ According to Kant, it is the heteronomy of the will that is the source of all spurious principles of morality:

If the will seeks the law which is to determine it anywhere else than in the fitness of its maxims to its own universal legislation, and if it thus goes outside itself and seeks this law in the property of any of its objects, heteronomy always results. For then the will does not give itself the law, but the object through its relation to the will gives the law to it. This relation, whether it rests on inclination or on conceptions of reason, only admits of hypothetical imperatives: I should do something for the reason that I will something else.⁵⁵

There is no confusion involved regarding spurious principles of morality and real principles of morality: Spurious moral principles are related to the heteronomy of the will, subjectivity, and relativity, whereas real moral principles are related to the autonomy of the will, objectivity, and universality. Kant seems to have a clear view on what a determining basis for moral law is. According to him, the three—the autonomy of the will, objective validity, and universal application—can be considered the criterion or the determining basis for morality. I do not see any theoretical problem in accepting

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, AA 05:33.

⁵⁵ "Wenn der Wille irgend worin anders, als in der Tauglichkeit seiner Maximen zu seiner eigenen allgemeinen Gesetzgebung, mithin, wenn er, indem er über sich selbst hinausgeht, in der Beschaffenheit irgend eines seiner Objecte das Gesetz sucht, das ihn bestimmen soll, so kommt jederzeit Heteronomie heraus. Der Wille giebt alsdann sich nicht selbst, sondern das Object durch sein Verhältniß zum Willen giebt diesem das Gesetz. Dies Verhältniß, es beruhe nun auf der Neigung, oder auf Vorstellungen der Vernunft, läßt nur hypothetische Imperativen möglich werden: ich soll etwas thun darum, weil ich etwas anderes will." Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:441.

Kant's criterion for morality, but when we scrutinize it and try to find a justificatory foundation for it in the real world, many practical problems emerge. I have pointed out some of them in different sections of this dissertation. However, a full epistemological evaluation of Kant's criterion for morality is necessary.

From the Kantian perspective, what determine maxims to be moral laws are the three components of his criterion (autonomy, objectivity, and universality), not any material content or goal. For example, *happiness* could not be considered to be based on a moral law because it is not determined by an objective principle, but by the sensibility of the agent. The determining base is itself a law—a subjective maxim which has been (and also should be) universalized by the autonomous agent. Happiness of the agent or others cannot be a determining base of moral law since it involves sensuous desires and inclinations, goals and purposes. It does not satisfy the three components of Kant's criterion: it is a product not a principle – it cannot be objectively valid because the meaning and means of happiness differ from person to person. Since it lacks objective validity, it cannot be universalized. In contrast, moral law 'is thought of as objectively necessary only because it holds good for everyone having reason and will'.⁵⁶ Here, *good* does not imply any desired good in relation to the world of objects; rather it implies *good-in-itself*.

There is a distinction between morality and self-love, and Kant rightly observes that all people and rational beings have a capacity for differentiating between the two: They can very clearly see whether an object belongs to the former or the latter. One can see that a maxim of self-love or prudence gives advice to the agent to do something for its own sake, whereas the law of morality always commands the agent to perform something as duty.⁵⁷

Kant seems to claim that the superiority of moral laws as *a priori* can neither be proven nor can there be any example of its explanation. If what Kant says is correct, his moral theory seems problematic in terms of its lacking a source of justification for moral laws. It can then be asked: If moral laws cannot be proven then why should we believe in those laws and act in accordance with them? If there is no proof of their certainty then what is *practical* in practical reason? Is Kant's moral theory not a philosophical construction that is of no use? Let's see what Kant says in the following lines—

⁵⁶ "Das moralische Gesetz wird aber nur darum als objectiv nothwendig gedacht, weil es für jedermann gelten soll, der Vernunft und Willen hat." Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The moral law is given, as an apodictically certain fact, as it were, of pure reason, a fact of which we are a priori conscious, even if it be granted that no example could be found in which it has been followed exactly. Thus the objective reality of the moral law can be proved through no deduction, through no exertion of the theoretical, speculative, or empirically supported reason; and, even if one were willing to renounce its apodictic certainty, it could not be confirmed by any experience and thus proved a posteriori. Nevertheless, it is firmly established of itself.⁵⁸

One should not be confused between what is *moral* and what is *legal*. Kant makes a distinction between the two arguing that moral law directly determines the will only for the sake of the law without any feeling or purpose. On the other hand, if the will is determined to fulfill a feeling or purpose and if the determined will doesn't act for the sake of the law but for that feeling or purpose, it is called legality, not morality. The difference between the two is that in the first case, moral law directs the will to act without any subjective or objective feelings, while in the second case moral law seems to somehow be linked with the feelings of the agent.⁵⁹

We can explain the difference between the two with an example of 'truthfulness'. When we speak a truth taking it as a command from our reason or will, we do not think anything of it. When we speak a truth without having any thought or feeling that our truth can put us behind bars or that we can be killed by some who suffered some kind of personal loss due to our truth, it is moral. When we speak a truth having just the opposite will it is then legal as we see in court. Kant seems to hold that the essentiality of the moral worth of human actions lies in the direct determination of the will by moral law. If an action lacks this essentiality, it has no moral worth.

We can now understand why Kant emphasizes moral law as duty and why he insists that we should have respect for moral law. In fact, Kant does not see any difference between *duty* and *respect for laws*: He claims that respect for laws is nothing other than the concept of duty, which is done not from an inclination or desire but law itself. His

⁵⁸ "Auch ist das moralische Gesetz gleichsam als ein Factum der reinen Vernunft, dessen wir uns a priori bewußt sind und welches apodiktisch gewiß ist, gegeben, gesetzt daß man auch in der Erfahrung kein Beispiel, da es genau befolgt wäre, aufreiben könnte. Also kann die objective Realität des moralischen Gesetzes durch keine Deduction, durch alle Anstrengung der theoretischen, speculativen oder empirisch unterstützten Vernunft, bewiesen und also, wenn man auch auf die apodiktische Gewißheit Verzicht thun wollte, durch Erfahrung bestätigt und so a posteriori bewiesen werden, und steht dennoch für sich selbst fest." *Ibid*, AA 05:47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, AA 05:71-72.

claim is based on the belief that in all decisions related to the understanding of human nature, there is always a sense of moral law. In other words, all human judgments, from a psychological point of view, ultimately rest on moral law. Kant explains the concept of duty in the following words—

The concept of duty thus requires of action that it objectively agree with the law, while of the maxim of the action it demands subjective respect for the law as the sole mode of determining the will through itself. And thereon rests the distinction between consciousness of having acted according to duty and from duty, i.e., from respect for the law. The former, legality, is possible even if inclinations alone are the determining grounds of the will, but the latter, morality or moral worth, can be conceded only where the action occurs from duty, i.e., merely for the sake of the law

It is of the utmost importance in all moral judging to pay strictest attention on the subjective principle of every maxim, so that all the morality of actions may be placed in their necessity from duty and from respect for the law, and not from love for or leaning toward that which the action is to produce. For men and all rational creatures, the moral necessity is a constraint, an obligation. Every action based on it is to be considered as duty, and not as a manner of acting which we naturally favour or which we sometimes might to favour.⁶⁰

In principle it appears to be a great philosophy to have a notion of moral law or human duty as such, but the question is whether human duty of this kind, purely as moral law, can be practiced only by so-called rational agents or also by all human beings believed to have rational capacity. Kant seems to hold a perfectionist view when he claims that moral law is for those who are perfect beings and whose will takes moral laws as laws of holiness. Such perfect beings are infinite in their nature. Since human

⁶⁰ “Der Begriff der Pflicht fordert also an der Handlung objectiv Übereinstimmung mit dem Gesetze, an der Maxime derselben aber subjectiv Achtung fürs Gesetz, als die alleinige Bestimmungsart des Willens durch dasselbe. Und darauf beruht der Unterschied zwischen dem Bewußtsein, pflichtmäßig und aus Pflicht, d. i. aus Achtung fürs Gesetz, gehandelt zu haben, davon das erstere (die Legalität) auch möglich ist, wenn Neigungen bloß die Bestimmungsgründe des Willens gewesen wären, das zweite aber (die Moralität), der moralische Werth, lediglich darin gesetzt werden muß, daß die Handlung aus Pflicht, d. i. bloß um des Gesetzes Willen, geschehe.

Es ist von der größten Wichtigkeit in allen moralischen Beurtheilungen auf das subjective Princip aller Maximen mit der äußersten Genauigkeit acht zu haben, damit alle Moralität der Handlungen in der Nothwendigkeit derselben aus Pflicht und aus Achtung fürs Gesetz, nicht aus Liebe und Zuneigung zu dem, was die Handlungen hervorbringen sollen, gesetzt werde. Für Menschen und alle erschaffene vernünftige Wesen ist die moralische Nothwendigkeit Nöthigung, d. i. Verbindlichkeit, und jede darauf gegründete Handlung als Pflicht, nicht aber als eine uns von selbst schon beliebte, oder beliebt werden könnende Verfahrensart vorzustellen.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:81.

beings are finite beings, for them moral law is a law of duty: It is a law of moral constraint and one that determines actions of finite beings ‘through respect for the law and reverence for its duty’.⁶¹ In this sense, moral law or duty seems to me a *vocation* of the will. I will discuss that in the next chapter.

That is why Kant claims that all human actions, done by a good will, out of love or sympathy, have no moral worth since acting out of love or sympathy is not the real nature of the will and hence not the real conduct of rational beings like us. Acting out of love or sympathy could not be a moral maxim that can be universalized as a command of the will since such maxims fulfill only sensible goods and pleasures and lack moral constraint. For this very reason, Kant insists that all moral agents must not forget their subjection to their practical reason by which the will commands them to act only in line with duty. He writes—

We stand under a discipline of reason, and in all our maxims we must not forget our subjection to it, or withdraw anything from it, or by an egoistical illusion detract from the authority of the law (even though it is given by our own reason) so that we could place the determining ground of our will (even though it is in accordance with the law) elsewhere than in the law itself and in respect for it. Duty and obligation are the only names which we must give to our relation to the moral law. We are indeed legislative members of a moral realm which is possible through freedom and which is presented to us as an object of respect by practical reason; yet we are at the same time subjects in it, not sovereign, and to mistake our inferior position as creatures and to deny, from self-conceit, respect to the holy law is, in spirit, a defection from it even if its letter be fulfilled.⁶²

By *we*, Kant seems to mean rational beings like us, perfect and imperfect, intelligent and not intelligent. Perfect beings always follow commands of their will and always act from duty, while imperfect beings always need to follow their practical commands.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, AA 05:82.

⁶² “Wir stehen unter einer Disciplin der Vernunft und müssen in allen unseren Maximen der Unterwürfigkeit unter derselben nicht vergessen, ihr nichts zu entziehen, oder dem Ansehen des Gesetzes (ob es gleich unsere eigene Vernunft giebt) durch eigenliebigen Wahn dadurch etwas abzukürzen, daß wir den Bestimmungsgrund unseres Willens, wenn gleich dem Gesetze gemäß, doch worin anders als im Gesetze selbst und in der Achtung für dieses Gesetz setzten. Pflicht und Schuldigkeit sind die Benennungen, die wir allein unserem Verhältnisse zum moralischen Gesetze geben müssen. Wir sind zwar gesetzgebende Glieder eines durch Freiheit möglichen, durch praktische Vernunft uns zur Achtung vorgestellten Reichs der Sitten, aber doch zugleich Unterthanen, nicht das Oberhaupt desselben, und die Verkennung unserer niederen Stufe als Geschöpfe und Weigerung des Eigendünkels gegen das Ansehen des heiligen Gesetzes ist schon eine Abtrünnigkeit von demselben dem Geiste nach, wenn gleich der Buchstabe desselben erfüllt würde.“ *Ibid.*, AA 05:82-83.

From this perspective, the objections with which Kant has been criticized for his perfectionist view and moral abstraction are not credible. There are many examples from the real world that Kant uses in his moral theory to make it clear that moral law is applicable to all without any exception. One of his examples is of love: ‘Love God above all and thy neighbor as thyself’ (*Liebe Gott über alles und deinen Nächsten als dich selbst*). According to Kant, to love God is to like following his commandments in the sense that they are laws as commanded by *reason*; and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is to like to perform all duties towards him: To love indiscriminately is a command from reason or will since it requires ‘respect for law which orders love and does not leave it to arbitrary choice to make love the principle’.⁶³

Is it possible to love someone in the real world without any desire or feeling? Kant’s principle seems to be self-contradictory in practical affairs because it is impossible to love someone taking *love* merely as a command: One cannot avoid one’s inclinations attached to the principle of love of this kind. For this reason, Kant calls love attached to inclinations *practical love*.⁶⁴ He seems to believe that when the principle ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself’ is taken as a command or law, it presents ‘the moral disposition in its complete perfection’ like other commands of the will, although he believes that ‘as an ideal of holiness it is unattainable by any creature, it is yet an archetype which we should strive to approach and to initiate in an uninterrupted infinite progress’.⁶⁵

Can one reach to that level of perfection where *practical love* becomes a command and one can practice it from its lawfulness? Kant’s answer seems to be negative: He seems to be saying that ordinary human beings like us are not conscious of our freedom from natural feelings, impulses, desires and external causes; to reach to that level of perfection is not possible unless we realize ourselves as being free agents whose duties are to act in line with our *reason* and *will*.⁶⁶ To be free means to be free from desires and inclinations. Freedom of this kind is impossible for us to attain because of our imperfection. One’s imperfection does not mean that one lacks human qualities and rational capacity; rather that one has not yet realized his own nature of being a free

⁶³ “Denn es fordert doch als Gebot Achtung für ein Gesetz, das Liebe befiehlt, und überläßt es nicht der beliebigen Wahl, sich diese zum Princip zu machen.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ “...die sittliche Gesinnung in ihrer ganzen Vollkommenheit dar, so wie sie als ein Ideal der Heiligkeit von keinem Geschöpfe erreichbar, dennoch das Urbild ist, welchem wir uns zu nähern und in einem ununterbrochenen, aber unendlichen Progressus gleich zu werden streben sollen.“ *Ibid*.

⁶⁶ One should always remember that there is a difference between Kant’s usage of *Begerungsvermögen* (faculty of desire) and *Begierde* (desire). When I use ‘desire’, I mean *Begierde*.

agent. Once he realizes his real nature, he will not act from his desires at least in moral matters, but from his reason and will. A person who has realized his freedom and who always acts from reason, not on desires, is a perfect moral agent.

Kant seems to be depicting an imperfect moral agent in two forms. In one form, a moral agent is capable of reaching a level of moral perfection because he is a perfect being by essence. In another form, the agent is so deeply attached to his physical and psychological desires that if he wants himself to free from those desires for the realization of his free will, he must sacrifice them – and that is not so easy to do. Here is Kant’s explanation—

If a rational creature could ever reach the stage of thoroughly liking to do all moral laws, it would mean that there was no possibility of there being in him a desire which could tempt him to deviate from them, for overcoming such a desire always costs the subject some sacrifice and requires self-compulsion, i.e., an inner constraint to do that which one does not quite like to do.⁶⁷

We can agree with Kant on this point, namely that human beings *do* have a capacity for reaching a level of perfection but it is quite difficult for them to overcome their personal desires and inclinations related to practical affairs. Why this is so is a question for further research; Kant does not give us any clue to know how one can realize one’s perfection in the real world. What he seems to claim is that even though no creature can reach a perfect level of moral constraint, it does not mean that the whole idea of perfection has no meaning. The truth is that (and it is a practical implication of Kant’s moral theory) *moral perfection* is always ‘an ideal of holiness’ or ‘an archetype’ which we as beings with bodies must forever seek to achieve: All our actions must be directed towards it in order to realize moral law or respect for the law.

For some people, moral law may look empty since it does not have any content from the phenomenal world. But it just appears to be so: They do not observe that moral law treats *personhood*, not the *individual* person. Personhood is the content of moral law that comes from the autonomous will. To say that moral law is empty is to say that there is

⁶⁷ “Könnte nämlich ein vernünftig Geschöpf jemals dahin kommen, alle moralische Gesetze völlig gerne zu thun, so würde das so viel bedeuten als, es fände sich in ihm auch nicht einmal die Möglichkeit einer Begierde, die ihn zur Abweichung von ihnen reizte; denn die Überwindung einer solchen kostet dem Subject immer Aufopferung, bedarf also Selbstzwang, d. i. innere Nöthigung zu dem, was man nicht ganz gern thut“ *Ibid*, AA 05:83-84.

no will, no freedom, no autonomy, and hence no personhood as such. The question that puzzles ordinary people and moral relativists is as follows: How is moral law applicable to the physical world? If it is not applicable, it is no doubt empty. I hold the moral relativists' observation for incorrect: Moral law is applicable to the physical world not exactly in the Kantian form but in a modified form that I will discuss in the next chapter.

The difference in views on moral and immoral constraints is based on the notion of personhood. In the Kantian sense, a person is a purely rational being having a will as legislator; and in the relativists' sense he is a being with desires, inclinations and a life plan. Kant's idea is that personhood does not lie in the faculty of 'likeness', 'dislikeness' or the 'the faculty of desire' (*Begehrungsvermögen*); rather it lies in human reason: Likeness and dislikeness do not possess one's personality. If what Kant claims is true, we can ask how a person can abandon the faculty of pleasure and pain or like and dislike.

I think Kant's focus is on one's *reason* which he believes to be the locus of one's personhood, whereas the relativists' focus is on one's psycho-physical structure that gives rise to feelings and impulses. For Kant, one's *reason* is superior to one's feelings and impulses; for relativists, one's natural instincts are unavoidable. In other words, reason is the higher element of personhood and natural instincts are lower. Relativists and others favor the lower elements over the higher, while others like Kant and the Kantians favor the higher over the lower. I think Kant is justified in his position since all natural instincts and desires are in a way backed by the will. His concern philosophically speaking is why all human beings, or rational beings like us, do not give preference to the higher over the lower.⁶⁸

We can now summarize Kant's idea of *law*, *morality* and the relationship between the two: Kant seems to affirm that *universal laws* and *morality* are inseparable terms. If an agent acts from the former, he is engaged in the latter; if he acts from the latter, he conforms to the former, leaving no question of supremacy between morality and universal laws in Kant's moral philosophy: Both are aspects of the guiding force of rational agents. Some may argue that it is not clear enough whether morality or universal laws should be prioritized in Kant's moral theory since he defines morality in terms of law. They may argue that for Kant some laws are moral and the practice of those laws means practicing morality. I consider this argument to be weak, however,

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, AA 05:86-88.

since once we understand that morality and laws are inseparable terms, there is no question of giving priority to one over the other.

4.5 The Source of the Categorical Imperative

According to Kant, the idea of the categorical imperative as the supreme principle of morality contains three laws, which he calls three formulations—

1. Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.⁶⁹
2. Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.⁷⁰
3. Every rational being must act as if he, by his maxims, were at all times a legislative member in the universal realm of ends. [...]. So act as if your maxims should serve at the same time as the universal law (of all rational beings).⁷¹

Kant seems to claim that practical reason is capable of grasping the absolute principle of morality: the categorical imperative, which is an unconditional command to the moral agency; it is capable of following the three principles of the categorical imperative. Well, if that is true, the categorical imperative is no doubt a higher moral principle. The question here is: Where do these three formulations of the categorical imperative come from? When we search for the source of the categorical imperative, we face a number of problems. One problem can be seen in terms of God as the only source of the categorical imperative. Since the existence of God is a metaphysical problem for philosophers, Kant's claim that the categorical imperative is an absolute moral law seems to be subject to scrutiny. The second problem is related to the role of human reason in regard to his silent acceptance of an immortal soul. It is not quite clear how they both (reason and soul) harmoniously and unconditionally play their roles in every moral space. Also in question is how they are mutually linked and how they function.

⁶⁹ “[H]andle so, als ob die Maxime deiner Handlung durch deinen Willen zum allgemeinen Naturgesetze werden sollte.“ Kant, I., *GMM*, AA 04:421.

⁷⁰ “Handle so, daß du die Menschheit sowohl in deiner Person, als in der Person eines jeden andern jederzeit zugleich als Zweck, niemals bloß als Mittel brauchst.“ *Ibid*, AA 04:429.

⁷¹ “Demnach muß ein jedes vernünftige Wesen so handeln, als ob es durch seine Maximen jederzeit ein gesetzgebendes Glied im allgemeinen Reiche der Zwecke wäre. Das formale Princip dieser Maximen ist: handle so, als ob deine Maxime zugleich zum allgemeinen Gesetze (aller vernünftigen Wesen) dienen sollte.“ *Ibid*, AA 04:438.

Kant's supposition of a transcendental role of the categorical imperative is further problematic since it seems inapplicable in the real world. For some, his moral theory seems to be supporting a perfectionist model of morality, which is, for certain sound reasons, less important than the importance of the inevitability of morality. In his analysis of pure reason, Kant talks about twelve categories of understanding and claims that even ordinary human being makes decisions on the basis of those categories. What is true about practical reason? Does practical reason also act in accordance with those categories? The problem is that if those categories decide the function of practical reason, practical reason itself does not seem perfect or autonomous. If so, how could the unconditionality of the categorical imperative be established and how could moral laws and maxims be decisive for the Kantian agent?

One's pure practical reason (PPR) only has principles, maxims or laws to determine how it should act in a given moral space. Kant seems to be distinguishing between the principle of morality which is applicable to all in every situation and a principle which is applicable to all in a given *moral* situation. The first kind of principle is the categorical imperative which directs a moral agent to act only from duty. The second kind of principle is the situational imperative (SI). The universalizability of both the categorical imperative and the situational imperative is the primary condition of moral worth for an action, though Kant never talks about a situational imperative. The only difference between the categorical imperative and the situational imperative is that the former is applicable to all and in all situations, whereas the latter is applicable to all in a given situation.

For example, the categorical imperative directs all moral agents to perform their duties for *duty's sake*. Since the categorical imperative is a universal moral law, it has nothing to do with a particular situation, though Kant's position is highly criticized for being supererogatory because *duty for duty's sake* looks empty or like an abstract moral idea. What Kant means is that the categorical imperative is a supreme principle of morality; and actions which are based on this principle are moral and have universal application. The situational imperative, on the other hand, has universal application in similar situations and is more practical. For example, if action **X** is moral in a situation **O** then all persons who belong to **O** must perform **X** in their turn – it is not the case that

person **A** should perform **X** and person **B** should not: When all circumstances are given, a particular action can be universalized for all similar situations.⁷²

I will discuss these problems in more detail a bit later. Here, allow me to first summarize Kant's account of the categorical imperative. Kant says that all rational beings belong to the intelligible world and all their actions 'would completely accord with the principle of the autonomy of the pure will'.⁷³ The intelligible world is said to be self-legislative in the sense that it belongs to the autonomous will. Kant claims that acting in line with the autonomous will in accordance with the laws given by pure practical reason in the sensible world is one's duty or an imperative for him. He seems to propose that the categorical imperative can be practiced only by members of such an intelligible world. In his own words—

Thus categorical imperatives are possible because the idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world. Consequently, if I were a member of only that intelligible world, all my actions *would* always be in accordance with the autonomy of the will.⁷⁴

Kant certainly seems to believe that in the sensible world, an act of an intelligible being must conform to or be in accord with the categorical imperative in order to be morally worthy. Every will is autonomous, pure, and intelligible, but due to its connection to the sensible world it is affected by sensuous desires and motives. Because it is affected by desires and motives, it cannot act autonomously as a moral agent. In order to act autonomously, the will must free itself from natural inclinations and impulses. As an objective command, the categorical imperative guides the affected will

⁷² One feature of the categorical imperative that needs to be emphasized is its construction. Kant's ethics is in a sense a situational ethics, because every detail of the situation needs to be built into the statement that needs to be universalized. That is why commandments like "thou shalt not kill" don't work for Kant. Killing may well be justified once all the circumstances are taken into account. Nothing in Kant comes from outside, but only from inside the subject. In this sense Kant's ethics is ultimately subjective, but the subjectivity does not imply relativity in the common use of the term: The subjectivity also implies the objectivity of a free will and the ability to universalize that which is common to every human.

⁷³ "Als bloßen Gliedes der Verstandeswelt würden also alle meine Handlungen dem Princip der Autonomie des reinen Willens vollkommen gemäß sein; als bloßen Stücks der Sinnenwelt würden sie gänzlich dem Naturgesetz der Begierden und Neigungen, mithin der Heteronomie der Natur gemäß genommen werden müssen." Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:453.

⁷⁴ "Und so sind kategorische Imperativen möglich, dadurch daß die Idee der Freiheit mich zu einem Gliede einer intelligibelen Welt macht, wodurch, wenn ich solches allein wäre, alle meine Handlungen der Autonomie des Willens jederzeit gemäß sein würden." *Ibid*, AA 04:454.

and helps it to realize its freedom. In other words, the categorical imperative is a command on the intelligible will which may have been distracted by foreign causes.

Every rational human being, Kant believes, is a member of the intelligible world but not everyone acts as a free moral agent in the sensible world. However, Kant believes that every such being, whose decision making is affected by foreign causes of the sensible world, wishes ‘to be free from such inclinations which are burdensome’ to him.⁷⁵ Kant describes the nature of a member of the intelligible world in the following words:

He can expect only a greater worth of his person. He imagines himself to be this better person when he transfers himself to the standpoint of a member of the intelligible world to which he is involuntarily impelled by the idea of freedom, i.e., independence from the determining causes of the world of sense; and from this standpoint he is conscious of a good will, which on his own confession constitutes the law for his bad will as a member of the world of sense. He acknowledges the authority of this law even while transgressing it. The moral ought is therefore his own volition as a member of the intelligible world, and it is conceived by him as *ought* only in so far as he regards himself at the same time as a member of sense.⁷⁶

From Kant’s writings, it is not clear what the grounds for such a distinction between a supersensible (intelligible) and a sensible (unintelligible) world are.⁷⁷ This is another problematic issue in Kant’s metaphysics that should be discussed in the context of morality from the epistemic perspective of the phenomenal world and the noumenal world. I will skip this issue as well in order to work on the main objective of the section, namely to find the source of the categorical imperative. Allow me to examine the three possible sources one by one.

⁷⁵ “Er kann es aber nur wegen seiner Neigungen und Antriebe nicht wohl in sich zu Stande bringen, wobei er dennoch zugleich wünscht, von solchen ihm selbst lästigen Neigungen frei zu sein.” *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ “[S]ondern nur einen größeren inneren Werth seiner Person erwarten kann. Diese bessere Person glaubt er aber zu sein, wenn er sich in den Standpunkt eines Gliedes der Verstandeswelt versetzt, dazu die Idee der Freiheit, d. i. Unabhängigkeit von bestimmenden Ursachen der Sinnenwelt, ihn unwillkürlich nöthigt, und in welchem er sich eines guten Willens bewußt ist, der für seinen bösen Willen als Gliedes der Sinnenwelt nach seinem eigenen Geständnisse das Gesetz ausmacht, dessen Ansehen er kennt, indem er es übertritt. Das moralische Sollen ist also eigenes nothwendiges Wollen als Gliedes einer intelligibelen Welt und wird nur so fern von ihm als Sollen gedacht, als er sich zugleich wie ein Glied der Sinnenwelt betrachtet.” *Ibid.*, AA 04:454-55.

⁷⁷ It is true that if we do not accept the distinction of two worlds—the supersensible and the sensible—there is not much left in Kant for philosophical discussion. I believe Kant’s dichotomy of the supersensible and sensible world needs some adjustments.

Is God a Source?

In Kant's moral theory, the question can be asked whether the principle of the categorical imperative is a divine command of God to rational agents, that is, whether God is the source of the categorical imperative. This question can be asked because Kant accepts God as a postulate of morality and he sometimes seems to be defending Christian ethics in which God is the source of morality. Kant's answer, however, is negative. In his deontological ethics, he claims that the idea of the categorical imperative as the supreme principle of morality does not come from outside of the rational agent: It is therefore not imposed by God.

Some may argue that these doubts cannot be completely ignored because it sometimes seems that morality is based on the existence of God. Others may argue that Kant has put God in the domain of moral law as a strategy for escaping the criticism for not producing a theological moral theory: They may contend that when Kant talks about a *pure will* or *holy will*, he is in fact talking about God, because only God's will is pure and holy. To act from a rationally pure will means to act from the will of God; in this sense, God's will seems to be the source of the categorical imperative.

These arguments do not work against the Kantian account of the categorical imperative since he is clear in stating that our theoretical reason cannot establish the existence of God: If there need not be a God, then how can morality be based on him? No doubt, Kant cannot ignore the idea of God in his discussion – but why? The reason is clear: He knows that otherwise he cannot firmly present his position to the Christian theologians and ethicists of his time. And that is why he seems to be establishing God through practical reason and by arguing that our sense of moral duty or the categorical imperative provides us with the thought that God exists. This is popularly known as Kant's moral argument for the existence of God. However, he claims that his argument does not supply proof of the existence of God. Therefore, we cannot say that God is the source of the categorical imperative.

Is Nature a Source?

If not God, is nature the source of the categorical imperative? Those who consider nature to be a supersensible entity or a divine force can give an affirmative answer on the basis that all beings including rational beings are part of nature. They can argue that

the autonomous will of a rational agent cannot be excluded from the domain of nature; it chooses to act from moral law just as a non-autonomous will chooses to act from inclination. The former acts on laws whereas the latter acts on inclinations, but both parties act within the realm of natural space. It cannot be said that laws come from outside the kingdom of nature while inclinations come from within: They can argue that both laws and inclinations are given by nature and hence we must accept that nature is the source of the categorical imperative.

This argument seems to be quite strong. However, I consider it to be deficient in the sense that it defines nature as a supreme entity like God. Since Kant does not think nature to be of this kind, this argument does not harm Kant's moral theory. Nature cannot give a basis for determining moral laws and therefore it cannot be the source of the categorical imperative. Even if it is true that rational agents belong to nature, it cannot be said that nature is the source of morality because the process of how the categorical imperative takes place does not give us any clue of nature's involvement in producing the categorical imperative. We have already learned that the categorical imperative comes from human *reason* without any connection to objects of nature. So like God, nature cannot be considered a source of the categorical imperative.

Is Reason a Source?

It is widely believed by Kant and the Kantians (even by anti-Kantians) that the principle of the categorical imperative comes from inside the rational will in terms of a self-imposed moral law.⁷⁸ Kant claims that 'all moral concepts have their seat and origin entirely *a priori* in reason'.⁷⁹ This is true not only about speculative reason but also about ordinary human reason. I agree with Kant that *reason* is the source of all moral concepts including the categorical imperative. In what sense is reason the source?

Based on Kant's interpretation, the categorical imperative does not seem to be a direct law the subject (rational will or reason) gives to itself. If this is the case, the following may then be asked: Why does the rational will command itself? Why is there

⁷⁸ Both the Kantians and the anti-Kantians accept that *reason* is the source of the categorical imperative; however they accept reason as a source of the categorical imperative for two opposite purposes. The former accept it to defend Kant's standard deontological ethics while the latter accept it to criticize Kant's ethical theory.

⁷⁹ "...daß alle sittliche Begriffe völlig a priori in der Vernunft ihren Sitz und Ursprung haben und dieses zwar in der gemeinsten Menschenvernunft eben sowohl, als der im höchsten Maße speculativen." Kant, I., *GMS*, AA 04:411.

a need for it (reason) to give its own laws to itself? Does it all not look awkward? If we seriously scrutinize the three formulations of the categorical imperative, we see without any doubt that the categorical imperative is something more than a law. But what is that *something* in the categorical imperative? I will answer this question in the next section. Here I would like to propose that although reason is the source of the categorical imperative neither Kant nor the Kantians have convincingly explained the reason for why *reason* is the source and in what sense it is the source.

Is the Categorical Imperative a Causal Relation?

In *Groundwork*, Kant makes two similar claims. On the one hand, he claims that autonomy of the will is the supreme principle of morality, while on the other hand he claims that this supreme principle is the categorical imperative. However, Kant does not distinctly clarify the relationship of the categorical imperative to autonomy of the will. Some of what has been said prompts the idea that the categorical imperative is possibly a causal relation between different activities of reason. The principle of autonomy, as we saw in the previous chapter, is related to freedom of the will by which the will chooses that maxim which it can comprehend as universal law. Since the will is the capacity of acting from principle, one can simply ask the following: How does this capacity turn into action? In *KpR*, I find two patterns or orders of a causal relation that can be explained as a function of the categorical imperative. They go as follows:

- i. Practical Reason → Conscious of Laws → The Will → Actions
- ii. Laws → Maxims → Test of Maxims → Actions

Human reason with sound moral understanding follows these two patterns when determining the categorical imperative as its course of action. The parts of each pattern are causally connected: There is nothing outside of human reason that commands it to perform *x* or *y*; rather human reason itself possesses these patterns and always acts from them. To become moral, an action should go through these patterns. It can then be asked: How do these patterns work? It is not clear in Kant's moral theory whether practical reason or objective (divine) laws are the source of moral action. If practical reason is the source, then it first creates some (moral) laws to guide all its actions before performing them. In this case, maxims, laws, consciousness of laws and the will are causal parts of its final decision on a course of action.

On the other hand, if objective laws are the source of moral action, then practical reason of rational beings can be said to be acting due to a causal push of those laws. However, in either case, whether practical reason or objective laws determine the course of moral action, both patterns seem to be causal but not causal in the normative sense of cause and effect; both patterns are causal in the sense that they are interconnected and interdependent. If they are really necessary parts of Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative, the categorical imperative can be said to be a causal relation.⁸⁰ If the will is not involved and maxims are not guided by laws, the categorical imperative is not possible: Since maxims are the subjective principles of human reason and only some of them are qualified to become laws, and since not all laws can be said to be moral laws, the categorical imperative must have a clear pattern. And since a pattern forms a causal chain, Kant's categorical imperative must be considered to be of the same nature. In Kant's own words—

When the maxim according to which I intend to give testimony is tested by practical reason, I always inquire into what it would be if it were to hold as a universal law of nature. It is obvious that, in this way of looking at it, it would oblige everyone to truthfulness. [...]. Through reason we are conscious of a law to which all our maxims are subject as though through our will a natural order must arise.⁸¹

Kant insists on the purity of practical reason as being the only determining grounds for moral law, which is 'an *a priori* principle that originates in our free reason'.⁸² However, the manner in which determination of moral law takes place in free reason cannot be explained without considering a causal pattern, though the pattern does not assign any conditionality to moral law.

When Kant distinguishes between the domains of nature and the will, he accepts in some sense the causal role of determining grounds. He argues that there are only two

⁸⁰ Korsgaard observes this in a different way. According to her, "To act is to constitute yourself as the cause of an end. The hypothetical imperative picks out the *cause* part of that formulation: by following the hypothetical imperative, you make yourself the *cause*. [...], the categorical imperative picks out another part of that formulation—that the cause is *yourself*. By following the categorical imperative, you make *yourself* the cause." Korsgaard (2009). p. 72.

⁸¹ "Wenn die Maxime, nach der ich ein Zeugniß abzulegen gesonnen bin, durch die praktische Vernunft geprüft wird, so sehe ich immer darnach, wie sie sein würde, wenn sie als allgemeines Naturgesetz gölte. Es ist offenbar, in dieser Art würde es jedermann zur Wahrhaftigkeit nöthigen. [...]. Gleichwohl sind wir uns durch die Vernunft eines Gesetzes bewußt, welchem, als ob durch unseren Willen zugleich eine Naturordnung entspringen müßte, alle unsere Maximen unterworfen sind." Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:44.

⁸² Rawls (2000). p. 147.

options: Either the laws of a system of nature determine the will or it is the will that determines the laws of a system of nature. In the former, objects of nature must be accepted as causing factors of conception, which determines the will, whereas in latter, it is just the opposite, or to say that the will must be accepted as the causing factor of the objects of nature. Kant seems to be accepting the latter case when he claims that ‘the causality of objects has its determining grounds solely in the pure faculty of reason, which therefore may be called pure practical reason’.⁸³

Indeed, Kant tries to answer two questions: (a) How can pure reason know objects in causation, and (b) how can pure reason provide direct determining grounds for the will? According to Kant, the second question is to ask in what way practical reason can determine its maxims. Are the determining grounds based on empirical conception or is practical reason practical in terms of being a law of ‘a possible order of nature which is empirically unknowable’.⁸⁴ Kant asks: ‘Is the determining ground empirical, or is it a concept of pure reason (a concept of its lawfulness in general)? And how can it be the latter?’⁸⁵

Kant’s own answer to these questions is unclear. He himself seems to be wondering where to locate the ‘practical’ nature of reason and the grounds on which practical reason can determine its capacity—the will. Here is what Kant says—

The decision as to whether the causality of the will is sufficient to the reality of the objects is left up to the theoretical principles of reason, involving as it does an investigation of the possibility of volition, the intuition of which is of no importance in the practical problem. The only concern here is with the determination of the will and with the determining ground of its maxims as a free will and not with its result. For if the will be only in accord with the law of pure reason, the will’s power in execution may be what it may; and a system of nature may or may not actually arise according to these maxims of the legislation of a possible nature (...). This *Critique* concerns itself only with whether and how reason can be practical, i.e., how it can directly determine the will.⁸⁶

⁸³ “[D]aß die Causalität desselben ihren Bestimmungsgrund lediglich in reinem Vernunftvermögen liegen hat, welches deshalb auch eine reine praktische Vernunft genannt werden kann.“ Kant, I., *KpV*, AA 05:44.

⁸⁴ “[O]b auch reine Vernunft praktisch und ein Gesetz einer möglichen, gar nicht empirisch erkennbaren Naturordnung sein würde.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:45.

⁸⁵ “Denn es kommt nur auf den Bestimmungsgrund des Wollens in den Maximen desselben an, ob jener empirisch, oder ein Begriff der reinen Vernunft (von der Gesetzmäßigkeit derselben überhaupt) sei, und wie er letzteres sein könne.“ *Ibid*.

⁸⁶ “Ob die Causalität des Willens zur Wirklichkeit der Objecte zulange, oder nicht, bleibt den theoretischen Principien der Vernunft zu beurtheilen überlassen, als Untersuchung der Möglichkeit der

If we give attention to Kant's interpretation of the will as a capacity of human reason and think about the possibility of how the will can be determined, we can certainly come to a causal order which Kant would find quite difficult to accept: If he accepts the categorical imperative as a casual relation in reason's ethical decision making process, his moral theory would be more acclaimed. I personally do not understand why he fails to discuss this dimension of causality in the categorical imperative.

The whole procedure of decision making is based on the simple fact that pure speculative reason first gives laws to itself, then those laws give commands to pure practical reason to determine its course of action. Since the will is the capacity of pure practical reason, it causes in its bearer a state of being conscious of those laws; however mere consciousness of those laws is not enough. The will must also causally push its bearer to follow those laws as determining grounds for its course of action. If the rational agent performs an action according to this process, his action has moral worth; otherwise it does not.

If it is true that the three laws of speculative reason known as the laws (formulations) of the categorical imperative push the will of pure practical reason to determine its course of action with the help of other causal factors like freedom and autonomy of reason, we can come to the conclusion that they are all causally linked. Speculative reason seems to be the *first* cause or source that produces moral laws which are imperative to practical reason. The categorical imperative cannot escape being a causal relation of the whole procedure. In our close scrutiny of the three formulations of the categorical imperative, we can see how speculative reason, practical reason, the will, universal law as standard, consciousness of those universal laws, and the autonomous state of united reason are interlinked or causally involved, though not in the cause-effect form.

My personal point of view is that the categorical imperative is not a principle caused by a single part or element of human reason; rather it is an output of a complex pattern in which both the speculative and practical parts of reason, will as its capacity, its

Objecte des Willens, deren Anschauung also in der praktischen Aufgabe gar kein Moment derselben ausmacht. Nur auf die Willensbestimmung und den Bestimmungsgrund der Maxime desselben als eines freien Willens kommt es hier an, nicht auf den Erfolg. Denn wenn der Wille nur für die reine Vernunft gesetzmäßig ist, so mag es mit dem Vermögen desselben in der Ausführung stehen, wie es wolle, es mag nach diesen Maximen der Gesetzgebung einer möglichen Natur eine solche wirklich daraus entspringen, oder nicht, darum bekümmert sich die Kritik, die da untersucht, ob und wie reine Vernunft praktisch, d. i. unmittelbar willenbestimmend, sein könne, gar nicht.“ *Ibid*, AA 05:45-46.

autonomy as a necessary condition, and all other factors that help reason to be conscious of its nature in every moment of time are causally involved. Only in this process is the will good and is it capable of acting from its own laws.

In a hypothetical imperative, for example ‘if you want x , you do or ought to do y ’, it is clear that the grounds for doing y are somehow causally connected with x in the sense that the doer knows that y will produce x . Here x and y are related as ends and means. In contrast, in a categorical imperative, for example ‘do y , or you ought to do y ’, this is not the case since there is no x or z as an end to which y is connected. However, if we look at the first formulation of the categorical imperative, it is clear that there is causality involved. We can sum up the first formulation in terms of causality as ‘perform y as if the maxim s of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature x (*end*)’. In other words, moral agents should act from those maxims which can be converted into universal law. The universalizability of moral laws or the moral worth of y can be explained in terms of its (causal) connection with x . However, the causality involved in the categorical imperative is not like the causality involved in the hypothetical imperative because a categorical moral judgment cannot be turned into a hypothetical judgment.

4.6 Problems with Kant’s Moral Theory

I have repeatedly said that there are many problems with Kant’s moral theory. Most of them have already been raised or pointed out in some context. However, a few problems need to be discussed a bit more because they weaken Kant’s moral theory. One of those can be seen in his acceptance of the immortality of the soul, and the other in the existence of God as a postulate of morality. I don’t understand why Kant presupposes the immortality of the soul as a required condition for morality. Is his acceptance a result of his inclination towards Christian theology? If a person is really governed by pure practical reason, why does Kant believe in the existence and immortality of the soul and consider it to be a postulate of morality? If he accepts the continuous existence of pure practical reason, why does he use theological terms like ‘God’, ‘immortality’, ‘soul’ and ‘holiness’?

Secondly, I do not see how the continuity of pure practical reason or the soul is really required for morality. Is ‘morality’ a matter of temporality or non-temporality? Why should I need another life to be a perfect moral being and what certainty is there that

people who cannot realize their moral nature in the present life will ultimately realize it in their future life? I don't think that such a presupposition is really required for our moral behavior. If a person really has pure practical reason, as Kant strongly seems to believe, and knows what morality is, he does not need a decade or century to practice moral law. I must say that I totally disagree with Kant on this point because I think morality is neither dependent on religion nor on the idea of another world; rather it is a matter of realization and practice by all rational beings like us in the real world we are living in. The idea of another world beyond the physical world seems to be highly influenced by theological thought or it can be seen as a product of a wonderful imagination. Therefore, I am of the opinion that morality should not be discussed in reference to the idea of another world.

The problem related to the existence of God is quite similar to the problem related to the idea of the immortality of the soul. Kant tries to attach the idea of God as a necessary condition for morality for the same reason that he tries to attach the immortality of the soul. There seems to be a circularity involved in Kant's position. On the one hand, he claims that it is moral law that is the supreme principle of morality and that the will of a moral agent is completely free, while on the other hand he seems to be claiming that the supreme principle of morality somehow comes as a command from God or the holy will of God. Kant would most definitely not accept what I am saying, but if we examine members of the intelligible world who all seem to be liberated or enlightened or pure soul just like God, we can defend my claim. Why Kant suddenly becomes so religious and insists that morality reaches from the domain of pure practical reason to the kingdom of God is baffling. Is there not a confrontation between *faith* and *reason* apparent in Kant's moral theory, particularly in his assertion of God as a postulate of morality?

Kant would like to establish a 'morality' that is applicable to all and 'the objectivity of the moral law'. We see that moral law is nothing other than the pure functionality of pure reason in practical affairs – it looks problematic because Kant is trying to prove the subjectivity of the will as objective. This is not plausible based on his theory since *subjectivity* and *objectivity* are the terms used for opposite positions. Kant could have been right if he had assumed that the subjectivity of person *A* is not different from that of person *B*: He mistakenly assumes that what is subjective is also objective. No doubt, he is trying to establish a completely new form of 'objectivity'. Well, if he is right, he

cannot avoid assuming a divine will or command to which our individual subjectivity belongs. From this perspective, his idea of freedom of the will or autonomy of the agent does not sound good: The problem of determinism in assuming any divine will or objective reality of morality arises. I do not know how Kant would resolve this problem.

The other problem can be explained as follows: If we accept that Kant's moral theory does not assume any situation or relation, it would be completely impossible in practice, since no action can be thought outside of a certain particular situation. So in order to think of a maxim, Kant must presuppose a situation or space. It can then be asked: Where is that space and is it empirical or non-empirical? Kant seems to be accepting that there is only one moral space, i.e., the intelligible world – there is no other space or multiplicity of the intelligible world or moral space. This is one of the major problems many anti-Kantians highlight in their criticism. For me, it is quite plausible to think of a multiplicity of moral space; however each space can be considered Kantian.

Furthermore, Kant seems to believe that to be human is always to participate in moral actions – he seems to be claiming that his account of moral universalism does not mean that morality has become merely a formal and procedural exercise, since universality rests on the foundation of a decisive ethics which gives a command to perform a certain kind of action without any kind of bargaining with a situation or desire or goal. I doubt if there is or can be an action independent of a situation.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have briefly examined Kant's ethical theory in connection with his epistemology and metaphysics, and pointed out that Kant's moral universalism as based on the categorical imperative is acceptable and highly appealing; nevertheless his theory is not free from conceptual problems. I have discussed some of those problems in different sections, showing that the categorical imperative is nothing other than a causal relation. I have claimed that Kant's two postulates (of God and the immortality of soul) are unimportant for morality, which is based on reason. However, I have left some problems undiscussed due to the limited scope of the dissertation. I have also promised to answer some relevant questions in the next chapter – so allow me to move on to that.

Duty: A Moral Vocation of the Rational Will¹

The world of the senses and belief in the reality of that world is produced in no other way than through the conception of a moral world, even for the person who may never have thought about his own moral vocation [...], or, if he should have thought about it, has not the least intention of fulfilling it at any time in the indefinite future.

————— Johann Gottlieb Fichte²

5.1 Introduction

Kant's account of ethical universalism in general and of the categorical imperative in particular are grounded mainly on three of his presuppositions: (1) all rational beings including humans are free moral agents in virtue of their nature, (2) morality is a matter of the intelligible world, members of which act in accordance with the supreme principle of moral law, determined by their autonomous will, and (3) moral laws are duties in terms of their relation to agents' rational nature.

Theoretically, these presuppositions seem to be compatible with Kant's moral discourse in a noumenal or an ideal moral world, in which all beings are presumed to be rational and absolutely free in making their decisions and acting in accordance with moral principles which they at the same time take for universally valid without regard to any subjective or objective inclination except the inclination of self-determined will to moral laws. Since we live in the phenomenal world in which agents have physical bodies and they are bound to be in a complex chain of various human relationships, questions of the practical implications of Kant's moral theory arise: How can the supreme principle of morality of the noumenal world be practiced by rationally unequal

¹ I have borrowed the term 'vocation' from Fichte and Weber and used it as the categorical imperative or 'moral calling' of the will. I have found many places in the first *Critique* where the term 'vocation' is used in relation to duty or command of the rational will, though there may be some confusion over the English term 'vocation' with the German terms *Berufe* (*KpV*, AA 05:78) and *Bestimmung*. In *KpV* (AA 05:122), Kant's sentence 'Der Satz von der moralischen Bestimmung unserer Natur' seems to support my observation that 'duty' is a 'moral vocation'. Beck (1976) has translated both terms—*Berufe* and *Bestimmung*—as 'vocation'. I think *Bestimmung* is fit for *vocation*.

² Fichte (1800). p. 78.

human beings in the world we live in? In what way is the categorical imperative applicable to members of the physical world and to what extent? How do we fill the gap between theoretical and practical lives in the moral domain, between speculative and practical reason in human agency, and between *end-in-itself* as such and *end-in-itself in situation x*? This chapter aims to propose a modified version of Kant's moral theory.

5.2 Three Proposals to Kantian Ethics

Kantian ethics faces a number of criticisms for three reasons: (i) the existing duality of noumenal and phenomenal worlds, (ii) the existing duality of pure and practical reason, and (iii) his theological assumption of the existence of the soul and God as postulates. I do not find any sound reason for accepting these propositions as necessary for our discussion of morality in the phenomenal world and therefore suggest avoiding them in this particular discussion. The noumenal world may be acceptable from the perspective of spirituality, sainthood, enlightenment, theology, and religion: But it is of no importance for moral purposes. How can the noumenal world solve moral problems in the phenomenal world? To solve the problems that have emerged in Kantian ethics, I propose the following three changes be made to his moral universalism:

The Phenomenal World: The Only World of Morality

I first propose to avoid entering the noumenal world into our moral discussion. Kant seems to claim that the categorical imperative is not necessary for morally pure beings in an intelligible world; it is only necessary for those members of the intelligible world who are imperfect in acting rationally due to their desires, inclinations, feelings and external affections. Based on those affections by other internal and external causes, they cannot act from their pure nature. Here Kant is absolutely right, but the following should then be asked: What is the role of the noumenal world in making imperfect people perfect and moral? The noumenal world is an ideal world where all beings act from their pure nature. In reality, we do not find such a pure world of pure beings – it looks mythical or philosophically constructed. In order to free people from internal and external causes, Kant seems to go beyond the phenomenal world to construct or design another world of pure reason: the noumenal world. The idea of such a world does not stand up to critique nor is it reasonable for moral purposes: Even if there were such a

world, average people would either not belong to it or they would not get help from the so-called moral beings of that world.

The noumenal and phenomenal seem to be two inseparable sides of our real world in which when an agent acts from duty, he belongs to the former side; when he acts from self-interest or the interests of others, he belongs to the latter side. A person can and does act phenomenally and noumenally in the real world. When he acts phenomenally, he acts as an ordinary being whereas when he acts noumenally, he acts as a pure being. Ordinary beings like us do not always act from desires and inclinations: Many of us act from *reason* in some moral situations, though it does not happen very often. In other words, there is no noumenal world beyond this world: Every human being is rationally capable of revealing his noumenal and phenomenal nature in the real world, at least in moral context.

Another reason for avoiding the noumenal world in our moral discussions is that it considers common human beings morally inferior. If we examine Kantian ethics seriously, we must accept that the phenomenal world is an immoral world since no one here acts from duty, i.e., from reason – there is no morality here; it is only in the noumenal world. Now if common human beings are inferior, if they are immoral beings, how can they reach the superior level? Kant cannot justify his position unless he accepts that all normal human beings have equal rational capacity or equal belief in this capacity to make ethical decisions like that of the intelligible beings of the noumenal world. Once we accept the rational capacity of common human beings, we need not go beyond the phenomenal world. However, the only thing that can be said is that very few of us do or may act from that capacity. So what is left for Kant is to provide a way with which every one of us may act from this capacity: It may be regular practice or self-awareness or any other means of actualizing this capacity.

Moreover, talking about morality in the noumenal world is an absurdity since if everyone from that world is moral then there is no question of discussing morality among or for them. And if we do not consider that human beings of the phenomenal world have the same rational capacity as rational beings of the noumenal world, then no one, not even Kant can justify reason-based morality – the higher order conduct because then they cannot understand what morality and moral perfection are in the Kantian sense. And that is why I propose to drop the concept of the noumenal world from the discussion of morality.

*Pure and Practical: One Reason*³

We have already discussed that Kant's distinction of reason into the pure and the practical creates some conceptual problems. Kant mistakenly thinks that practical reason gets commands from pure reason, which ascribes to *a priori* laws. Where those laws come from, and why practical reason always needs a command from pure reason are those problematic questions that cannot be answered satisfactorily. So my second proposal is that rather than believing reason to be of two kinds, we should see reason as only agency with two inherent qualities or features – it is pure as well as practical. Reason always asks itself to act from its own essential nature with its two sides—pure and practical—but due to the domination of internal and external natural causes it often fails to do so. However, its failure does not demonstrate its lack of capacity; rather it demonstrates that either the internal and external causes have dominated the rational capacity or the agent is highly inclined to those causes. This may happen due to a lack of awareness or because the other causes are too strong or because we deliberately ignore our reason – we experience this conflict between *reason* and *desire* in our everyday lives. For example, we can question whether education is reasonable or desirable. If we take it as reasonable, we can see its universal application at every age and time. If we take it as being merely desirable, illiteracy in some tribal communities can be justified if their members do not desire to have an education.

In a (practical) situation, reason directs itself to act from universal moral law just as feelings or desires direct one to act from interest. Since people do not realize their capacity of reason and rely more on interest, they overlook or avoid those directives given by their reason. Rational capacity is an internal moral force that pushes its bearer to act from itself. But most of us avoid our rational capacity when deciding our daily course of action. For example, if we suddenly see a child drowning in the river, our first thought is given by reason in the form of a moral principle: *save the life*, whereupon many other thoughts follow:

1. Save the life (of the child)
2. Save the child to get a reward *or*
3. Save the child to gain popularity *or*

³ Some may ask: Is it not that from which the standards of morality come? My answer is that reason itself gives objective moral laws in terms of their universalizability and also practices them. So this question is meaningless.

4. Save the child because it is well-known *or*
5. Save the child because of such and such...etc.

It is not important in which manner these thoughts come to the agent, what matters is whether he does or does not act from the first thought, which comes directly from reason: It is the first thought because all other thoughts cannot come to the agent if the first thought is not there – *save the life*. Kant can certainly defend the first thought as conforming to the categorical imperative in terms of *a priori* laws or laws produced by reason since the first thought is unconditional and free from internal and external causes. This is what Kant wants to establish in his notion of duty or moral laws. If an agent acts from the first thought, it means he has followed his reason, or we can say that if he follows his reason, he will definitely act from the first thought. But the reality is different: We, as moral agents, do not act from our first thought; we act from second or third or fourth thoughts because we are used to acting in this manner. Can we justify our ‘*used to*’ moral attitude? My answer is negative: We cannot justify our *used to* attitude as right and as the true nature of rational beings like us.

A very relevant question arises here: How should we act from reason? To answer this question, we need to know our real nature, our capacity, our merits and demerits. We need awareness and a *moral* world view, based on reason. It is quite possible that the way we act in the phenomenal world is not the right way of acting: Kant’s main point is that acting from reason is the right way because when we act from reason, our maxims and actions gain universal appeal. What seems to be problematic in Kant’s position is that according to Kant, practical reason first gets a command and then acts accordingly. However, I propose the following: Reason is enough to direct itself to act in the sense that the first phase of the acting process can be said to be connected to the pure side of reason, and the second phase of the acting process to the practical side of reason. Reason is one, not two: It autonomously thinks, evaluates and determines its course of action. All other thoughts, for instance in the above example, are caused either by natural inclinations, self interest, ignorance, a lack of capability, or abnormality.

Some may argue that reason cannot be located without its attachment to a particular inclination. They may also argue that it is not clear to them how reason gives the first thought and how it moves itself to act in a particular situation. My response to these arguments is that we are so stimulated by internal and external causes that we fail to

locate reason in its pure form. Again, our approach is based on the mistaken idea that reason is dependent on natural instinct. I would like to discuss the question of how reason acts from itself in the next section.

The Categorical Imperative: A Moral Calling

In his moral universalism, Kant claims morality to be a/the categorical imperative. Most people may argue that they in their reason do not or cannot experience any such command or imperative to act from laws. The argument is quite strong in the context of the existing duality of pure and practical reason. But if we can remove the duality, the argument will become weak. To do so, my third proposal is to replace the Kantian term ‘imperative’ with the new term ‘calling’ and to consider the categorical imperative as the ‘*moral calling of reason*’. Once we accept that there is only one reason, there is no need to get a command from anything else. One’s reason is in itself enough to carry out its moral actions. The Kantian term ‘imperative’ is relative: It presupposes another entity or source as a commander or imperative-giver. As I proposed earlier, we need not believe in another reason or source as a commander or imperative-giver. When we accept that human reason in the real world has the capacity to direct itself to perform an action as according to moral law, terms like ‘imperative’ and ‘command’ become inappropriate.

We have seen that reason is the center of moral agency in Kant’s moral philosophy. Since humans are rational beings, meaning they have the faculty of reason, they are equal moral agents and hence are presumed to have the idea of the same objective moral law. Why laws? Because laws defend the equal moral status of rational agents. There seems to be a distinction between the domains of thought and action in moral discourse, but in reality there is not. If asked which part of an agent’s body is responsible for an action performed by him, our fingers would point to his head, more precisely his mind indicating where his decisions originate from. After looking at things more closely, we find that it is rational capacity or reason that is responsible for the action because it is believed that if there were no reason or rational will behind the action, it would not have been carried out. When Kant talks about freedom and autonomy of reason, he probably means the same thing as saying that moral agency is the will of human reason. Ordinary people do not act in accordance with their will: That is why Kant seems to believe that

they do not act from their reason and hence they do not act morally – ordinary people always act from inclinations and desires without using their rational will.

It could be accepted that reason is or should be responsible for determining a rational course of action without any regard for its consequences: Only reason or the rational will calls upon a person (its bearer with body) to act. In the case of an action done from a desire or an inclination, the moral agent, say *A*, satisfies his personal value-judgments, but at the same time fails to satisfy value-judgments taken by his higher faculty – reason. The agent, however, does not have an argument for why he has chosen value-judgments based on desire over the value-judgments of his rational will: The agent simply cannot say that he did *x* to achieve *y* or *z* since the question regarding the value-judgment of the will still remains unanswered.

There is a serious problem in accepting a relativistic and teleological kind of ethics: The problem is that both relativistic and teleological ethics give priority to lower-ordered decision making over higher-ordered decision making (or to the second calling over the first calling). If the agent says that he did *x* to fulfill his particular desire, say *y*, or his best friend's desire, say *z*, he accepts that these desires are in principle not condoned by his higher-ordered decision making faculty. If this is so, Kant seems to be absolutely right in claiming that action *x* is not the action of *A*'s own reason, but of *A*'s desire. Some teleologists may respond to this arguing that action *x* was finally endorsed by *A*'s will. If they argue in that manner, they are ultimately accepting Kant's position that it is the will that in the end determines a course of action. Indeed, they are justifying Kant's position and not their own. It is clear in this example that the will has not endorsed the action *x* or *y* simply because rational will does not endorse desires in moral context.

I don't find the teleologists' position convincing or their arguments strong enough since it can still be asked why the will endorses a desire instead of endorsing itself. In fact, teleological ethics cannot give us a reason why a particular desire must be fulfilled. If an agent can prefer a desire over her will, why can she not do just the opposite, in other words ask why can she not prefer the will over her desire? It can be observed that the agent who acts from an inclination chooses one of many objectives to be achieved – it is an attitude of preference, or better, a choice that he makes between two desires. What puzzles Kant and me is why the agent does not choose the will over a desire if he really prefers a more noble preference or moral worth. A particular action done from

desire can be justified only by the result produced by it but the result cannot justify the moral worth of that action.

For example, a thief can fulfill his desire by stealing a bundle of notes from a bank. He may feel happy about the money he has stolen but neither the stolen money nor his desire, which pushed him to steal money from the bank, has any moral worth. How can we justify his action as moral? The thief himself knows that stealing can be considered good only in terms of the money as a means of fulfilling a desire; stealing is clearly not good in terms of the goodness of his action. Yet the thief ignores the goodness of an action for the goodness of money and desire. If we judge the act of stealing from the Kantian perspective and consider money to be an external cause and the desire to steal that money an internal cause, we can see how these sensuous causes affect the goodness of an action. And if we go much deeper into what Kant is saying, we can believe with certainty that the goodness of an action lies in the purity of the rational will or reason. The purity of the will is not religious or theological; rather it is freedom of the will from all causes, external and internal. In other words, the purity of the will is the state of its freedom.

If we turn the same question of preference to Kant, we do have an answer, namely that since the world of desires and objects dominates human will, which is the essence of a rational being, the preference of the former should not be justified over the latter. Relativists may argue that the will is determined by desire and objects and hence morality must be grounded in the desires and inclinations of the agent. I believe the relativists' position can be recognized as a pre-Copernican position in moral discussions: They seem to believe that desires and inclinations determine the will just as the ancient Greeks believed, before Copernicus, that the sun moved around the earth. I definitely give full credit to Kant's revolutionary moral philosophy for bestowing us with the moral truth of *what* determines *what* in ethical decision making: He is absolutely right in claiming that it is reason and the will that determine our decisions and courses of action.

But unlike Kant who defines *duty* as the categorical imperative, I prefer to define duty in terms of a moral calling or *vocation*. A *duty* is a moral calling of the rational will, which legislates, examines, and determines an action for practice. After one's will calls for an action, one can listen or avoid its calling. Agents, who hear moral callings of their wills, should always act from laws that have universal application. For example,

‘respect elders’ is a moral calling of the will and it has universal application, not on based on any hidden consequence, inclination, love or affection, but on its own moral worth in terms of its universality. A calling to respect elders can be found in every society, community, time and space. If we find a tribe where elder people are not treated from this moral calling, we cannot say that the calling has no universal application: We can only say that the tribal people are incapable of hearing the moral calling of their will, i.e., respect elders.

A *calling* is not like a command; rather it is a force that pushes human agency, which is presumed to lie in *reason*, to have respect for laws and to act according to them. Ordinary people act according to their desires or inclinations because those desires and inclinations block the way of the moral calling or force. If I hear the moral calling of ‘protection of life’, I will not commit suicide. Similarly, if a person hears the moral calling of his will to be truthful, he will always speak the truth without regard to the result his truthfulness may produce. The moral calling of ‘truthfulness’ has universal application. Here, critics may argue that the moral calling of truthfulness cannot be universalized; they may argue as follows: Suppose the police was after a thief who somehow managed to hide inside the house of his friend who is not a thief. If his friend tells the police the truth, the thief will be caught and sent to jail. The friend could also be punished, under certain laws, for being an accomplice to the thief. In this case, critics may argue that the moral calling of truthfulness cannot have universal application because the situation requires telling a lie and not the truth – they can argue that if the friend tells a lie, the thief will be saved from the police and their friendship will be strengthened.⁴

But this argument can easily be defeated: When the thief hides inside his friend’s house, he thinks that his friend will lie and save him from the police. The thief seems to be following truthfulness within the relationship of friendship and at the same time following untruthfulness in action. This is, of course, contradictory. If something is based on truth, how can it survive on lies? The thief in the critic’s argument tries to universalize two contradictory callings of ‘truthfulness’ and ‘untruthfulness’. On the one

⁴ Some may say that since Kant is famous for a similar argument, in which the person sought by the police is not a thief, this particular argument seems very peculiar. I respond to them by saying that the person in my example is *really* ‘a thief’ and that my example is constructed only to give an idea of how to evaluate the universalizability of a particular kind of course of action such as ‘to be truthful’. I do not find this example peculiar because after all, I defend Kant’s moral universalism.

hand, he universalizes truthfulness in friendship while on the other hand he universalizes a maxim to lie, making the argument unacceptable. Allow me to elaborate.

Suppose the friend tells a lie and saves the thief. In doing so, he tries to universalize the maxim of 'untruthfulness' to the police. The police will retreat accepting that the friend is telling the truth. Suppose the police also follow the same maxim of untruthfulness and do not believe the friend's words. The police will definitely search for the thief inside the house. As a result, the thief will be caught and sent to jail. So the maxim of untruthfulness cannot save the thief under any circumstances. Whether the thief universalizes truthfulness or untruthfulness, the police will still catch him: The result cannot determine which action is better. What can determine an action as morally good or bad is the action itself. Further, I believe that we will all accept that the universalizability of truthfulness has true moral worth over the universalizability of a lie.

Thus, the Kantian form of ethics or reason-based morality is universally appealing. And that is what I defend in terms of moral calling being a force of human reason. I find *prima facie* no counter argument against my position.

5.3 An Interpretation of *Duty* As a Moral Calling

The principle of the categorical imperative can be framed somehow as: *Do x only if your rational will commands you to*. Now rephrase that command with: *Do x if there is a rational calling for x*. The *calling* by the will is not a desire or want or an inclination; rather it is a moral force of reason that pushes the agent to do *x* because *x* is universalizable. The calling as the highest moral force is not directly a duty; it is a force that decides *x* to be duty. However, it can also be said in the Kantian sense that acting from that force is our duty or the categorical imperative. If an agent always acts from the moral force of his reason, all his actions will be of universal application. Here is an example:

Suppose *x* is a duty of *y* who is the mother of *b* and at the same time the wife of *c*. The question here is: Is *x* a duty of *y* towards *b* or *c*? If we judge action *x* and consider it to be a duty of *y* from the principle of the categorical imperative, we must prove that *x* satisfies the following three conditions—

1. *x* is a duty according to a maxim that *y* at the same time wills that it is capable of becoming a universal law (*first formulation*, hereafter FF₁)

2. x is a duty of y if and only if y treats b or c in her action x only as an end (FF₂)
3. x is a duty of y only because y is a rational being who through his maxim belongs to a universal kingdom of ends (FF₃)

Now take FF₁ and apply it in a situation r where y is a mother and a wife. If we follow FF₁, we must say that x is a duty of y towards b and c without any exception. It implies that x is applicable to b in the same manner as it is applicable to c and that there is no relational difference between y to b and y to c as far as action x is concerned. y should treat her son the same as she treats her husband which means that morality, or more precisely ‘ x as duty’, is independent of the human relationship. We can prove it to be true after replacing x with the maxim ‘treat everyone politely’ or ‘do your schoolwork’. In other words, ‘treating everyone including b and c politely’ is a duty of y and also of other persons since the maxim is universalizable without regard to human relationships and inclinational attachments. It can then be asked: What happens if we replace x with other maxims like ‘feeding or providing food to the hungry’, ‘taking care of a patient’, and so on? I will try to answer this question a bit later. For now, let me examine whether x does or does not satisfy the other two conditions of the categorical imperative.

According to FF₂, there could be two possibilities: Either y should treat b and c as ends based on relations such as ‘mother–son’ and ‘husband–wife’ or as ends independent of the relationship, i.e., as moral beings. In the first possibility, if y treats b only as a son, she must treat c as a son too because c is also a son of someone. This looks really problematic since y cannot treat c as a son; c is her husband. Since Kant seems to be explaining morality without bringing in human relationships, there is no question of treating people as sons or husbands or teachers. And that is the major problem in Kant’s account of morality because his account overlooks the chain of human relationships in the phenomenal world and hence it becomes impractical. But let’s look at the second possibility: Of course y can treat both b and c as dignified moral beings as moral agents (doers) and also as moral recipients without regard to personal inclinations and relations.⁵

⁵ I propose that we as rational beings are not only *moral agents* but also *moral recipients*. As a moral recipient one expects a kind of duty from moral agents who are in a given situation doers or moral performers. On the other hand, when one acts as a moral agent one fulfills or should fulfill the moral expectations of moral recipients. Since moral agents are in turn both *doers* and *recipients* they know or should know what their duties are in a given situation. To avoid conflict between different notions of *duty*,

If *y* satisfies two conditions FF_1 and FF_2 of the categorical imperative, the third will automatically be satisfied. In other words, it can be said that those whose maxims are universalizable and those who act in accordance with those maxims treat everyone as ends and will therefore belong to the kingdom of ends. The kingdom of ends is Kant's intelligible world to which all rational beings should belong.⁶ He seems to think that all members of the kingdom of ends are intelligible or rational beings. I put forward that a kingdom of that kind should not be somewhere else; rather it should be in the real world so that all non-intelligible beings can follow the path towards it. It would be better to say that Kant wants to see every human being as a member of 'the kingdom of morals' instead of saying 'the kingdom of ends'.

We must accept that maxims based on human relations are either outside of the moral domain or they are situational. If Kant thinks that these kinds of maxims have nothing to do with morality, he is certainly wrong and I would say that his notion of morality is defective both from a speculative and practical perspective. The defect is that if his 'practical reason' is not practical from the common perspective and that if the notion of morality does not include such types of human actions, then Kant's whole discussion of morality is only an intellectual exercise and has no significance for humanity since it excludes ordinary human beings from the realm of morality. If he agrees that the categorical imperative is also applicable to these maxims, there is no doubt that his moral theory is practically situational when applied to the real world, but that situation is not based on subjective arbitrariness; rather it is based on objective moral laws that are competent enough to be universalized. Such laws come from the moral force of reason. In this sense the following two maxims are qualified to be moral duties and can be justified by the Kantian notion of the categorical imperative in all similar situations—

1. Feeding or providing food to the hungry (M_1)
2. Taking care of patients (M_2)

we must search for objective moral principles; I am quite convinced that Kant's notion of *duty* and his criterion for searching for universal moral principles in terms of 'what one cannot expect of oneself should also not apply to others' provide a strong foundation for what it is to have a moral duty in a given situation that is acceptable to both moral agents and moral recipients. More precisely, a moral agent should examine a moral situation both from the perspectives of being a doer and recipient before acting or determining his/her course of action. That is the way through which we can evaluate whether a particular action is moral and whether that action is universalizable.

⁶ This is not to say that rational beings have to achieve something that does not belong to them. What I mean is that rational beings belong to the kingdom of ends metaphysically, but they do not belong to it morally since they haven't realized their very nature of being a part of the kingdom of ends and of being a member of the intelligible world.

The two maxims (M_1 and M_2) are applicable to all moral agents (doers and recipients) in all situations and become moral duties. They are of universal application not based on any subjective motive of the agent or any objective result that they may produce, but because they are unconditional callings of the rational will of the rational agent to act according to them as duties: They are duties of y not because they fulfill any personal or relational demands of y , but because they belong to a particular situation in which y is the agent. In the case of M_1 , it is y 's moral duty to feed a hungry child living on the street the same as she feeds her own child following a maxim that all moral recipients expect the same moral duty from the agent regardless their relation to the agent except the doer-recipient relationship between them. It is a categorical imperative or a situational imperative of a rationally-willed agent to feed or provide food to a hungry person whosoever he or she is if she can do so. If y feeds her own child and ignores the child living on the street, the act of feeding is not moral since she violates FF_1 of the categorical imperative. Nor is it moral if she feeds a child with any result-based motive, for example, to gain affection from the child. Similarly, in the case of M_2 , all men and women as rational agents including y should take care of patients not because they are relationally tied to them or to have a better reputation or fame or money, but because 'taking care of a patient' is a calling of the rational will that can be universalized: It is the moral force of the will to be realized as duty.

Some people, mainly consequentialists, may argue that the two maxims— M_1 and M_2 —are empirical and therefore neither of them is Kantian. They may argue that the idea that 'feeding the hungry is a duty' is based on empirical results and that they cannot find a person who would feed a child without some motive; similarly the consequentialists might claim that we treat patients with care because we want to help them which is based on historical facts or on our sympathetic motives that are relative to one's culture and civilization.

However, these arguments are not convincing: the two maxims look empirical because we are in the habit of examining our actions in this way. If we judged them from a non-empirical perspective, there would not be any problem of motive, culture or civilization. These arguments, in a way, try to justify that the cultural or historical identity of a person is more and above his rational identity. If that is the case, we have no right to condemn the Islamic veil custom. Once we accept that culture and

civilization are only relatively true, we can better understand what I am saying with my argument.

In the case of feeding, there is no category of hungry people as moral recipients and also no motive: A moral agent in a situation where he/she has to make a choice between whether to feed a hungry person or whether to ignore him/her should determine his course of action after imagining himself in the place of the hungry person and the hungry person in his place: What would he expect from the agent in the situation of being hungry? Would he not (the agent who is in the place of the hungry person) expect the same course of action—*feed the hungry (as a duty)*—from the agent (the hungry person who is in the place of the real agent)? The answer, of course, is yes: Any moral recipient would expect the same fulfillment of duty from another fellow moral agent. If this is the case, then feeding a child on the street is our duty regardless of our personal connection with that child.⁷

Kant's moral theory says the same thing, namely that a moral being always acts rationally because his personhood (*reason*) commands him/her to do so. Since *rationality* is equally distributed amongst all human beings in terms of their personhood and not in terms of their actual physical capacity, they are all supposed to follow their very nature. My proposal to consider ourselves as *moral recipients* aids us in determining our course of action as universalizable.

Similarly, we should take care of patients not because of our motive to help but because treating a patient is a moral vocation of the rational will. It may be the case that a patient dies even after our care, but this does not disprove that taking care of people as members of humanity is an imperative – it would be relative only if I said that we should take care of patients and not others: That is not what I mean at all. Rather my point is that taking care of people is a maxim that can be universalized. It is given by our own will as a *call* that we are believed to hear – or at least we ought to hear. In the Weberian manner, I can paraphrase my argument that *nothing is morally valuable to human beings, as rational beings, if they cannot act with reason.*

⁷ It is our moral obligation to provide food to hungry people, regardless of who they are. As I said, we are not only moral agents, but also moral recipients, and we should determine our course of action from the two perspectives of being a *doer* and also of being a *recipient*. If a person can feed the hungry child, he should do that because taking care of a hungry person (the child in the example) is like taking care of patients, which can of course be universalized. Based on this, we are obligated to provide food to more than 1.02 billion hungry people around the globe. See FAO Report 2009.

My answer to possible objections from the relativists is that in all similar situations, the choice is between acting from a conditional imperative and acting from an unconditional (categorical) imperative – it is up to the will of an individual to make a choice between the two. If the will acts categorically, it confers morality and the dignity of man. If it acts conditionally, it satisfies patterns and structures of society. It is true that an individual who is passionate about actions based on a culture or tradition finds it challenging to act categorically due to increasing difficulties in liberating himself from his attachment to internal and external causes. It is also true that at some point in time, his rational will criticizes his own actions and doesn't endorse them for practice. This proves that the will always favors the duty of seeking truth and acting according to it to give ultimate meaning to its own actions. Figuratively, we can say that the will directs itself and creates a sense of duty and respect for laws and in so doing conscientiously avoids its desires and self-interest.

5.4 Human Universalism As a Postulate

Although Kant's moral theory suffers from several conceptual problems related to theory and practice, there is something of greater moral significance that can be used as a base for a modified version of moral universalism: It is the idea of *human universalism* (HU) as a postulate of morality. As a postulate, it is basically anchored in Kant's notion of personhood and the universality of moral actions. The idea is not procedural; it is not merely a moral concept to satisfy one's speculative reason or any divine command. Rather it is a basis for exercising one's rational will in the so-called phenomenal world in the same manner the will is believed to act in the noumenal world without regard to the faculty of desire or feeling of pleasure and displeasure. It provides a moral theory which is applicable to all human beings who have a rational capacity for categorical decision making and assumes actions of a certain kind as unconditioned duties even if they look conditioned. With this conception, I bring down the Kantian morality of the noumenal world to the phenomenal world: I bring the Kantian notion of 'universal kingdom of ends' or 'humanity as an end' from the intelligible world to the surface in order to develop a stronger notion of moral universalism, making some modifications to

Kant's theory in certain respects.⁸ The following lines by Kant reflect the idea of human universalism that I am seriously talking about—

The idea of personality awakens respect; it places before our eyes the sublimity of our own nature (in its [higher] vocation), while it shows us at the same time the suitability of our conduct to it, thus striking down our self-conceit. This is naturally and easily observed by the most common human reason.⁹

At the beginning I mentioned that Kant's moral theory is based on an internal presupposition of human universalism, though he does not say anything about it. He presupposes that what is true for an individual human being is also true for all humans and what is true for all humans is also true for an individual. If this is not the case, no maxim can be universalized as moral law. For this reason, Kant develops his moral theory on that presupposition and assumes that when an individual rational being realizes his own autonomous will, it also at the same time realizes the autonomous will of all other rational beings, and when it realizes the will of all other rational beings, it will only choose a maxim in a moral domain that can be universalized from the will of all. That is the inherent nature of the human will and what Kant wants to establish in his notion of practical reason under the autonomy of the will: to give the world a moral meaning by connecting all its members with the categorical imperative as the supreme principle of morality.

One can mistakenly understand that the universal kingdom of ends is an end for which the categorical imperative is a means, but that is not the case. There is no end-means duality in Kant's moral theory since what appears to us as means is the end itself: When one follows the categorical imperative, he automatically belongs to the universal kingdom for which he does not need any means; rather he needs to realize his own nature of being an autonomous agent. The good will or free will is self-enlightening or

⁸ Some people may think that no attempt will succeed in reducing Kant's moral theory to a concrete level because such an attempt would lose the Kantian spirit. I do not agree with them because I think that such an idea is based only on Kant's speculative reason and not on his practical reason, inherent in human nature.

⁹ "Diese Achtung erweckende Idee der Persönlichkeit, welche uns die Erhabenheit unserer Natur (ihrer Bestimmung nach) vor Augen stellt, indem sie uns zugleich den Mangel der Angemessenheit unseres Verhaltens in Ansehung derselben bemerken läßt und dadurch den Eigendünkel niederschlägt, ist selbst der gemeinsten Menschenvernunft natürlich und leicht bemerklich." Kant, I, *KpV*, AA 05:87.

self-realizing when acting morally. In other words, if there is any *end-in-itself* in the moral domain, it is the *autonomous will* of reason that acts from its own laws.

Human universalism is not a theological or religious concept; rather it is a purely moral concept. Theological and religious universalism are impossible unless and until we believe in a moral concept of human universalism. The concept of human universalism presupposes that all human beings belong to the kingdom of ends. Due to their ignorance brought in by internal and external causes, they find it difficult to realize their nature and membership – they do not realize that morality is a matter of both the noumenal world and the phenomenal world. The only difference is that all members of the noumenal world have either realized or are realizing that the essence of morality or the categorical imperative is inherent in every individual will as a moral vocation or calling. In contrast, members of the phenomenal world have not yet reached that level.

Acting from duty is a vocation of a rational will that every human being has, not because of a divine or supersensible entity but because of the inherent rational capacity as its essence. A vocation of this kind does not presuppose that morality is merely a matter of the intelligible world; rather it presupposes that all human beings possess an equal potential of knowing and decision making, though only some of them realize their rational potential. This potential can be realized by an agent through the exercise of his rational will in a practical domain. The will is a binding force of reason, and freedom, autonomy, moral laws and the categorical imperative are in fact its (reason's) integral parts.¹⁰ All these inherent properties can only be expressed as a binding force.

My account of human universalism as a postulate of duty does not face the objection that Kant's moral theory does for making the existence of a soul and God postulates of the categorical imperative. Once we free our thoughts related to spirituality and metaphysics, our ethics will be universalized. We have seen that Kant does not say anything about one's duty in a particular situation. He only says that a moral law is one's duty or obligation or the categorical imperative according to which an action should be judged by the will before being performed. Human universalism on the other hand says that x is a duty for all in all similar situations only because it is a duty determined by the will. We can sum up this idea as: y performs x because she is called

¹⁰ Landshut once wrote, when discussing Weber's view of science as vocation, that 'the human significance of the scientific standpoint, in relation to the anarchy of all received ethical, political, or philosophical postulates, lies precisely in its complete freedom, which forces the understanding mind to maintain itself in a state of inner suspense as it were.' See Landshut, p. 105.

by her will to do so or *y*'s will wants her to perform *x* as a command in a given situation *r*.

5.5 Ethical Decision-making

The central question of morality regarding a private life in a public world is as follows: How should a man live in a public world that does not offer him any binding criterion for his own life? I argue that Kant gives such a criterion in terms of ethical decision making in a universal context. The criterion is grounded in autonomous reason, which not only legislates but also acts from those moral decisions that come to it in the form of moral laws. As a systematic theorist, Kant seems to be of the opinion that detachment from the world of objects and desires is required for rational understanding so that a 'reflective judgement has the effect of producing an 'enlarged mentality''.¹¹

Those who understand the spirit of Kant's moral theory know that Kant in fact wants to establish the universalizability of morality on the basis of universal human nature that I briefly discussed under the idea of human universalism. He seems to be assuming that if everyone realizes his own free will, autonomy, and self-legislative nature then everyone will be a member of the kingdom of ends, or better, everyone will be a member of a kingdom of morals. The critics may ask: How does an agent realize that he belongs to a kingdom of morals? Following Kant, I would say that it is one's faculty of decision-making that determines whether he does or does not belong to a moral kingdom – it can be determined by reason itself.

Reason is a self-sufficient faculty: It does not need any support from other sources. It recognizes the moral space and acts from its calling as a force. By 'ethical decision making', I do not mean that reason makes ethical decisions on the basis of outcome or self-interest; rather I mean that it makes decisions on the basis of laws that are either universal or universalizable. The act of decision-making is also based on reason's autonomy. So there is no question or confusion that reason plays a mechanical role for evaluating actions based on their results or patterns: no! Reason evaluates moral maxims according to the universalizability of duty as a calling or command of its own.

Another crucial dimension—the epistemic dimension—of how ethical decision making takes place within an autonomous reason without regard to its connection to the

¹¹ Lassman & Velody (1989). p. 172.

physical world remains. I will leave that topic for other researchers in the hope that they locate or fix some other properties in Kant's moral theory in order to strengthen the idea of moral universalism so that the process of ethical decision making by *reason* be properly revealed.

5.6 Universal Attitude or Universal Moral Law?

The essence of Kant's account of the categorical imperative as the supreme principle of morality is that all moral agents should act from their rational will so that they can at the same time will their maxims to be universally valid. Here a question arises: Is Kant talking about universal moral attitude or universal moral law? The term 'attitude' literally implies a manner or disposition or orientation of mind that comes into expression through the action done by the agent. In this sense, Kant's saying that one should 'always act from the will' seems to be a moral attitude that every rational agent should follow in every given space. If the agent has this attitude and acts accordingly, his actions have true moral worth.

When Kant talks about morality in an objective sense of *a priori* laws, he seems to believe that moral agents should always act from the moral law—the categorical imperative. The three formulations of the categorical imperative are those moral laws from which moral agents are presumed to act. In this sense, he seems to believe that only those actions that are done from these three formulations of the categorical imperative have true moral worth.

For ordinary people like us, the two dimensions of human actions—universal attitude or universal moral law—are a bit confusing. We can say that we are not in the position to decide which to follow—the will or the laws. However, I do not think this is really a problem for those who understand the essence of Kantian ethics since whether the agents act from the universal attitude of the will or from universal moral laws, their actions have true moral worth: Both ways of acting reveal the true nature of an autonomous agent – they appear to be different only in perception. In reality, they are the same because universal moral laws do not come from outside of the rational will; rather they come from the will itself. So the question of whether the agent acts from the will or from moral laws is irrelevant: In either case, the agent acts morally.

5.7 Summary

This chapter gives three proposals to Kantian ethics in a modified version of moral universalism defining duty as a moral calling of the rational will in order to defend Kant's ethical spirit. The idea of duty as moral calling is based on the rational capacity of reason that can be defended in terms of a decisive force, based on human universalism as a postulate of morality. Ethical decision making is another dimension of reason-based morality that I have briefly explained to a sufficient level. This chapter reinforces my position that moral universalism is stronger than moral relativism in terms of the Kantian account of duty.

Why Kantianism? A Concluding Remark

His (Kant's) writings on ethics are marked by an unanswering commitment to human freedom, to the dignity of man, and to the view that moral obligation derives neither from God, nor from human authorities and communities, nor from the preferences or desires of human agents, but from reason.

————— Onora O'Neill¹

After the Kantian era of morality in the 18th century, the world divided into two main groups: the Universalists and the relativists. The Universalists tried to establish Kantianism while the relativists tried to criticize it. The former group defined 'morality' in terms of *objective* 'laws', the latter group defined it in terms of *good* 'results' or of laws relative to a culture or society. Because the Universalists emphasized the importance of moral laws and overlooked the results of actions in the real world, their moral theory could not win the hearts of ordinary people. In contrast, the relativists took 'people', not 'principles', into account when defining morality. Because of their everyday approach, the relativists founded a number of moral theories like utilitarianism, consequentialism, individualism, communitarianism, and pragmatism etc., all connected to one another in some respect. But each moral theory that belongs to the relativists' group is weak based on the fact that its determining ground is local, not global or universal.

The Universalists or Kantians were seriously concerned with the following question: Why does the world need a universal form of morality? Their approach was different: They tried to create a theory of morality that could be universalized and in so doing overlooked other even more important aspects of human interest, one of which is an individual's rational capacity for ethical decision making in the real world in harmony with its preferences and relationships.

¹ O'Neill (1991[1993]). p. 175

The importance of human relationships can be observed when a person, who is at the same time a father, brother, husband, friend, citizen and so forth, is asked to follow the principle of the *categorical imperative* or *duty for duty's sake*. The Kantian notion of 'duty' seems to be empty if it is not linked to human relationships because a duty cannot be said to be practical if there is no recipient of it. The hidden emptiness in Kant's account of duty can easily be recognized by questioning what the content of duty is; maxims or universal laws cannot be said to be the content of duty because they face the same question. If I say that I will perform duty for duty's sake, it is clear to me what duty requires and what violates its requirements. However, it is unclear *what* exactly it is that I should not violate. In order to avoid such problems, I have presented a modified version of Kantian ethics giving three proposals to it and defining *duty* as a *moral calling* or *vocation*.

Now you are probably wondering about the answer to the following question: Why do I defend Kant and Kantianism and in what form? Where should I begin? There are many reasons for defending Kantianism, though it is not possible to convince the relativists in Kantian terms. So I will give a quite general but the most significant reason for the justification of my defense. One can evaluate how my modified version of moral universalism reflects the Kantian form of morality. However, in some way, my position may look similar to that of the relativists, but only in its manifestation: The spirit of my argument is purely Kantian and that is important to my readers.

We all know that moral universalism faces its biggest challenge from multiculturalism, which claims to be the main defender of the rights and values of non-Western cultures, and hence is believed to strongly support moral relativism. But moral relativism creates three serious problems: (1) it weakens all ethical arguments against cultural imperialism, (2) it divides people and societies by keeping them away from moving outside their cultural and moral boundaries, and (3) it provides no criterion for making moral decisions in a strict sense of *morality* and can justify any good or bad action as *moral* within a particular culture and society.

The second and third problems are more serious because they exacerbate other kinds of problems like conflict, terrorism, and communal violence and hence disturb the peace and tolerance of the world. These two problems must be cleared up if human society really wants to realize a global world as *one* world of humanity and to connect one culture to another in a fair and impartial manner. The question is how we can set the

world free from these major problems: How can we develop, within us, a moral attitude of cultural harmony for a better human society?

I am quite convinced that the philosophical notion of moral universalism is the best suited alternative for this humanitarian purpose: That is the notion that demands cultural unity and a common set of values and moral norms beyond cultural boundaries and *individual* ethics. It recognizes each and every culture as equal in the moral domain as universally required. In order to defend moral relativism, some may argue that multiculturalism is historically justified, whereas moral universalism is theoretically designed. I wholeheartedly accept this argument but defeat it by saying that multiculturalism is based on historical facts that are contingent or subject to change, so to speak; moral universalism however is based on our essential nature of being rational and moral which is not subject to change. The multiplicity of cultural moral norms or relative morality is visible because the philosophical notion of multiculturalism is rooted in the very idea of the existence and growth of various customs and traditions in their own cultural periphery without being disturbed by other cultures – it believes that morality is relative to culture.

This belief is wrongly conceived in regard to the moral spirit and reciprocity that can be found in the various cultural, religious, and philosophical teachings of Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, and Sikhism, of Mohammed, Gandhi, the Dalai Lama and many others. In this sense, the notion of moral universalism is said to be rooted in human culture but seems to be unexplored due to the lack of reciprocity between various cultures in all respects. The focus of moral universalism is therefore not only to create a unity of cultures, but also to make people realize their moral nature by exchanging values and patterns of life based on the popular belief that a certain kind of human behavior is universal.

My usage of the term ‘culture’ is not similar to the usage of the same term by moral relativists: I use it in terms of a global moral space that we can take as the kingdom of morals or, in Kantian terminology, the kingdom of ends, where everyone acts from universal or common norms of morality without regard for any cultural boundaries or conventionally conceived tradition. When I talk about the unity of cultures, I mean only morality as culture or moral culture: When everyone acts from duty as the calling of their rational will, their actions create a culture of morality. Nonetheless, whatever I say here in plain language should not be taken as a position similar to that of moral

relativism or Aristotelian virtue ethics - no! My position is Kantian and I defend moral universalism.

In the introduction to this dissertation I stated that moral relativism, supported by moral multiculturalism, generally refers to a philosophical account of cultural diversity and its survival within a particular demographic territory. It holds that each culture, without regard for its theory, practice or popularity, should survive without one specific culture predominating and recognizes different identities of various cultures, communities and religions and advocates a society of multiplicity. Compared to that, moral universalism is a more advanced and progressive philosophical concept of cultural unity and common moral value. It does not undermine the identities of various cultures; rather it provides a larger moral space for them to be mutually benefited. Unfortunately, the core notion of moral universalism or the unity of cultures is misunderstood by anti-universalists and multiculturalists because they unnecessarily fear that universalism is an idea which has the power to devastate cultural diversity or at least marginalize less popular cultures to a certain extent – but the truth is different.

The truth is that moral universalism is opposed to moral relativism and in this regard is *more* likely to maintain the global face of the world: It is an account of universal ethics for universal application or of similar accountability in similar situations regardless of culture and creed; it is an expression of a single path of unity and oneness in the thoughts and actions of our multicultural society. Moreover, the account of cultural unity based on *common morality* is the soul of moral universalism. Therefore the new form of cultural historicism and moral relativism, namely multiculturalism, seems to be irrelevant for ethics: Once we recognize and realize the essence of unity of various cultures, the idea of localization will automatically transform into universalism in due course.

Moral relativism provides a kind of consolation to those who are radical and culturally confined and should therefore not be given the privilege of ruling over ethical decision making capacity. Taking human problems into account, I must say that the ethical exercise is the more effective path to unity and harmony since the human mind-set of value-perception is inherent in every culture and society.

There are three positions that we find in our discussion on Kant's account of morality: standard, semi-standard, and anti-standard (or in a sense *non-standard*). Although there is no written evidence for the three positions I talk about, the historical

discussion on Kantian ethics reveal those three possible positions. In what form do I defend Kantian moral universalism? I defend in some sense the standard position and in another the semi-standard. Allow me to give a brief explanation of these positions.

The standard position seems to accept Kant's ethics as it was produced by Kant and interpreted by the Neo-Kantians. It believes in ethical universalism, based on absolutism, and seems to claim that the practical purposes of the empirical world are not important for morality. What is important is the will of rational beings without regard to the real world. However, how to accommodate the will within the scope of practical purpose seems to be an unanswered question.

The standard position cannot give a satisfactory answer to the question of why the phenomenal world should be excluded from the scope of morality: If morality is not for this world, then why should the people of this world be taught the lessons of morality provided by another world for another world, more precisely the lessons of morality provided by the noumenal world to the phenomenal world, and why should they worry about their actions if they have nothing to do with this life? Therefore, the standard position does not reflect the real scope of morality – if lessons of morality have any significance, it must be in the real world. Since this dimension of morality is not taken seriously by the standard position, I do not completely accept it; but because I have extracted significant parts of morality from the standard position, I also do not completely reject it.

I accept that Kant's account of reason is capable of being practical in the phenomenal world, but only if we can somehow connect it to *commonsense* morality by correcting his account: His account does not show any link to commonsense morality; therefore many criticize Kant's moral theory as supererogatory. The standard position can be considered to be Kant's moral structuralism or his intellectual design of morality. I defend the standard position of Kantian ethics in terms of *reason* as the source of morality without any connection to internal and external causes or laws that cannot be universalized in the moral domain. I also defend Kant's methodological approach to ethical decision making in terms of its self-legislation under the autonomy of the will.

The anti-standard position is held by both anti-Kantians and relativists. This position denies Kant's notion of morality both on the theoretical and practical level by arguing that his theory is procedural and formal; they claim it has nothing to do with the moral sense of ordinary people, their culture, tradition, and history. I have already criticized

this view and have given some arguments against this position. In sum, I strongly criticize the anti-standard position because it fails to understand the essence of Kantian moral universalism.

Those who support the anti-standard position in the form of moral relativism might allow for the existence of slavery: One could argue that if the Greeks approved of slavery, then slavery was good for them despite it being bad for the slaves since they obviously did not approve of it. The same could be said of despotism, oppression, economic deprivation, caste discrimination, class discrimination, racial discrimination, and so on. Moral or cultural relativism can even lead to fascism whereas Kantian universalism can never lead to fascism but only to a true participatory democracy, something which is much needed in today's world. Hence, moral relativism, despite its appearance of being progressive, is ultimately regressive; and Kant's universalism despite its appearance of being retrograde is actually the progressive choice. And for that reason, I defend moral universalism.²

The semi-standard position accepts Kant's moral theory in a modified form. On the basis of my explanation of Kantian morality in the previous chapter, I can say that I defend the semi-standard position. This position does not criticize Kant; rather it corrects Kant and therefore making it a Kantian position. It accepts his methodology and approach on how to reach from a sensible object to a non-sensible will; it accepts the supremacy of human reason in ethical decision making; it also accepts that morality is a matter of universality that is possible in a purely objective sense, which presupposes a subjective but common notion of the will.

Benhabib raised a good point that answers the crucial question of why we need a universal form of morality: Because the universality of morality is an urgent necessity of the world. She argues that the world is in need of understanding 'how claims to universality can be reconciled with assertions of religious and cultural difference; how the unity of reason can be reconciled with the diversity of life-forms'.³ Her answer is presented as follows: '*My* agent-specific needs can serve as a justification for *you* only if I presuppose that *your* agent-specific needs can likewise serve as a justification for *me*.

² The basic idea that this passage reflects came to me from Dr. Priyedarshi Jetli in an email discussion on the issue. I also presented a paper entitled 'Kantian Universalism vs. Moral Relativism' at the Department of Philosophy, University of Calgary in 2008. The paper defends the same idea of moral universalism against moral relativism.

³ Benhabib (2007). p. 9.

And this means that you and I have recognized each others' right to have rights.⁴ Rephrasing her words, I can say that my agent-specific morality can serve as a justification for others as moral beings only if I presuppose that others' agent-specific morality can likewise serve as a justification for me as a moral being – and that means that we have recognized each others' morality as common.

Universality is urgent for us to understand because we are members of a social world, in which everyone for his or her part is a 'doer' in respect to his or her responsibilities towards other members of the same social world. To fairly evaluate those responsibilities that are assigned to us as moral agents, we must look towards our *reason*, not our desires and natural instincts, because only our reason can fairly ascertain the value of our moral actions. It is *the* human reason that has primacy over human goals, making the goal-centric morality of MacIntyre and Taylor appear very weak. How can one fulfill one's natural command for an *end* as *good* by practicing *duty* as conceived by Kant? Benhabib gives a solution different from Kantianism: The form is different because she explains 'morality' simultaneously in two different contexts: the *political* and the *global*.⁵ If she discussed 'morality' independently of these two contexts, she would be making a different claim probably closer to Kantianism. However, she is after all a Universalist.

Thus to conclude this chapter as well this dissertation, I would say that although Kant's ethics has been criticized for its absolute form of morality, the element of universality we find in his writings is still significant. In its pure form, Kant's ethics is without a doubt a form of moral structuralism: It seems to be impractical in the real world. In order to show its practical dimension, Kant's moral universalism needs revision and a few theoretical changes. My hope is that my proposals will be taken as a revision of the universalizability of the categorical imperative and of Kant's notion of *duty*.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁵ One aspect about Kant that is generally overlooked is the political implications of his view on ethics. I would venture to say that there could have been a Marx without Hegel but there could not have been a Marx without Kant. Similarly I would say that there could be a Sartre without Hegel but not a Sartre without Kant. Since the categorical imperative is purely rational, it is said to be a capacity that is universal and common to every human being: the ultimate egalitarian principle. Kant's epistemology is also egalitarian because each human being has the same capacity to acquire knowledge. What are the implications of this? One could be the call for socialism, which some have in fact deduced from Kant.

APPENDIX

Nishkama Karma and the Categorical Imperative: **A Philosophical Reflection on the Bhagavad-Gita**

It is true that Kant has made us aware of the absolute and unconditional nature of ethical imperatives. Yet, reading Kant into Gita is [...] simplifying the matter too much.

————— Tara Chatterjea¹

I. Introduction

The western philosophical tradition seems to have two basic characteristics: First, it prioritizes normative philosophy over practical philosophy, and second, it believes that philosophy and religion are two different disciplines, though many western philosophers, ancient and modern, have discussed philosophical questions of metaphysics and ethics from the religious perspective. Kantian ethics is a good example for demonstrating these characteristics: Kant's whole ethical philosophy, which is normative, is based on human reason, not on human religion. However, the hidden fact exists that his normative ethical rationalism contains elements of Christian ethics, in particular of pietism, his faith.²§

In contrast, the eastern philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism subscribe to the opposite view: They are neither normative nor do they take philosophy as completely independent of religion; rather they believe that reason and religion are two foundational pillars of philosophical meditation. They discuss philosophy (*darshana*) as a way of life. For these traditions, philosophy is not a subject of mental and academic exercise; rather it is a discipline with which one can develop one's capacity to realize one's spiritual and moral essence. For this very reason, we do not find a distinction between what is normative and what is practical in Indian philosophical theories.

¹ Chatterjea (2002). p. 125.

² Firestone & Jacobs (2008). § Some scholars may say that the division I make between Indian philosophical tradition and western philosophical tradition in relation to religion and theology is inadequate. They may argue that it is too general and can be doubted to be true if we refer to the Carvaka philosophy. My response to them is that no exceptional example weakens my observation.

Yet, despite this basic distinction between the philosophical traditions of east and west, they have many things in common. Many western philosophical theories carry a close resemblance to those of the east. For example, we can observe similarities between classical Indian and classical Greek tradition in the philosophies of Heraclitus and Buddhism, and of Parmenides and Shankara; we can recognize similarity of thought in British philosophers like David Hume and F. H. Bradley with that of Buddhism and Shankaradvaita Vedanta, respectively; the philosophy of German philosophers like Schopenhauer closely resembles that of Vedic and the Upanishadic philosophy expounded by Shankara; and so forth. However, it is notable that most of the resemblances between these two traditions are mainly on metaphysical issues.

On morality, if there is a resemblance between any ethical theory of Indian tradition and western tradition, it is no doubt between the Bhagavad-Gita's *nishkama karma* and Kant's *categorical imperative*. Kant tried to find a way of formulating morality in terms of universal laws. To do so, he examined various sources of human actions, for example actions done from desires, motives, obligations, prudence, altruism, and so on. Finally he found a universal moral law: *duty for duty's sake*—popularly known as the principle of the categorical imperative. His idea of the categorical imperative is quite similar to the idea of *nishkama karma*, explicated by Lord Krsna, in the Bhagavad-Gita.

This appendix aims at providing some philosophical reflections on how *nishkama karma* and the *categorical imperative* are of close conceptual resemblance regarding the nature of man (*Purusa*) and his/her duty (*karma*). Western readers of this thesis should benefit by enhancing their ethical knowledge of this eastern tradition. I mainly focus on the philosophical and ethical aspects of the Gita and avoid its theistic elements. However, the Gita conception of *nishkama karma* cannot be well understood without properly grasping the implications of some of its other terms like *dharma* and *svadharma*. For this very reason, I not only discuss the concept of *nishkama karma*, but also of *dharma* and *svadharma* in detail in this Appendix.

II. The Bhagavad-Gita: A Philosophic-religious Text

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is one of many holy texts of Hinduism. It is a part of the sixth book—'Bhismaparvam'—from the *Mahabharata*. The exact dating of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Mahabharata* are unknown, however, most scholars believe that both texts were written at about 1000–500 BCE. The holy *Gita* is considered to be one of the most

popular and accessible books of classical Hinduism by both eastern and western scholars.³ One can imagine its popularity by knowing that almost every Hindu family holds a copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

In this holy text, there is a philosophical dialogue and discussion between Lord Krsna and his favorite warrior Arjuna.⁴ This dialogue takes place on the battlefield at Kuruksetra (a city located nearby Delhi). It regards the essence of being human, the ethics of human duty, devotion, meditation, selflessness, and spirituality that are said to be the interconnecting threads of Hinduism. However, although it describes the science of self-realization and the significance of spiritual knowledge, its fundamental philosophy is to explain *dharma*, *svadharma*, and *nishkama karma*.

The Gita has immensely influenced philosophers and thinkers like Shankara, Ramanuja, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Dr. Albert Schweizer, Carl Jung, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Rudolph Steiner, Aldous Huxley, and many others. These thinkers believe that the philosophy of the *Gita* applies to all human beings and does not postulate any sectarian ideology. It is approachable from the sanctified realms of all religions and is glorified as the epitome of all spiritual teachings because the *Gita* reveals the eternal principles which are fundamental and essential for spiritual life from all perspectives, and allows one to perfectly understand the esoteric truths hidden within all religious scriptures. The primary purpose of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is to illuminate the true nature of humanity and divinity. On the one hand, the text reveals classical-spiritual Hinduism, while on the other hand, it reflects a similar sense of ethical rationalism as found in the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

III. The Notion and Nature of *dharma*

The term *dharma* has a long and rich history based on its origin, development, and philosophic-religious implications. *Dharma* is discussed in almost all classical texts of Hinduism. The term is derived from the root \sqrt{dhr} (to hold or possess or have) with the primary suffix *-ma*, and is often interpreted as ‘that which is held or possessed’.⁵ From

³ The *Bhagavad-Gita* is available online in Sanskrit and many other languages (Hindi, Bengali, English, German, Greek, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew, Arabic, Russian and Serbian). See the URL: <http://www.bhagavad-gita.org/>

⁴ The dialogue between Krsna and Arjuna reflects the teacher-disciple tradition (*Guru-Shishya Paramapara*) of ancient India in seeking and sharing knowledge.

⁵ *Dharma* is also discussed in Buddhism and Jainism. In classical Buddhism, the term is known as *dhamma* (in Pali) and has been discussed as the key concept of Buddhist philosophy. Buddhists define

Rig-Veda to contemporary Indian languages and dialects, the term has been widely used. For example, in *Rig-Veda* there is a term *dhárman* that is understood as something ‘established’ or ‘sustained’ and has been tied with the Vedic concept of *rta* that is often explained as ‘the law of world order’ or ‘the Cosmic Law’.⁶ The *dhárman* and *rta* of *Rig-Veda* become *dharma* in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, which has explained it as ‘the most excellent law’ or ‘truth’.⁷ In the *Dharma-sūtra*, *dharma* is interpreted as the key to Hindu ethics. Later in *Mahabharata*, *dharma* is defined as ‘laws both of this–worldly and other–worldly’.⁸ The *Gita* emphasizes this same meaning of *dharma*.

In order to determine what is to be held or possessed as *dharma*, both eastern and western scholars have given some explanations. For some, *dharma* represents the ‘laws for world order’; for others, the laws of righteousness or a set of rules for the regulation of human life. For some, it represents a behavioral pattern; for others, a guiding force for human actions. For some, it embodies the empirical value of actions directed by Vedic scriptures; for others, an accepted Hindu custom (*acara*). And for some, *dharma* is a set of caste–based qualities tied up with the notion of *varnasramdharma*; and still for others, *dharma* is synonymous with the western term *religion*.^{9#}

However, these interpretations are only partly true and therefore do not give the proper meaning of the term because *dharma* is such a unique and specific term that no

dhamma sometimes as *pratityasamutpada* (causal chain of life’s circle), sometimes as the universal law of truth, and sometimes as the teaching of Lord Buddha. *Dharma* is considered to be one of the three jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Samgha. See *Vinayapitaka* and *Suttapitaka*. In classical Jainism, *dharma* is taken as the inherent nature of an object (*vatthu sahavo dhammo*) and since objects are qualitatively different from one another, their *dharmas* are said to be different as well. See *Dharma-Bindu* by Haribhadra. Jainism gives a more comprehensive account of *dharma* that seems similar to that of Hinduism, though Jainists’ conception of *dharma* is more technical compared to that of Hinduism. But both philosophical traditions seem to accept that the *dharma* of a human being is to act morally, contrary to *adharmas* which is said to be immoral action.

⁶ RV. 10.133.6.

⁷ *Brh. Upanishad*. 1.4.14.

⁸ dhāraṇād dharma ity āhur dharmeṇa vidhṛtāḥ prajāḥ | yat syād dhāraṇa saṃyuktaṃ sa dharma iti niścayaḥ || *Mahabh.* 12.110.11

⁹ See P. V. Kane (1969); Derrett (1976); Creel (1977); & Harder (2001). # Most western Indologists mistakenly think that the *Gita*’s notion of *dharma* is more or less *varnashramdharma*. I completely disagree with them because *dharma* is prior to *varnashramdharma*; the former is the basis for the latter. How can a basis *b* of something *x* be *x* itself? We can extract some elements of *dharma* from *varnashramdharma* but we cannot extract elements of *varnashramadharma* from *dharma*. The reality is that *varnashramdharma* is a concept related to Hindu social life, while *dharma* is a concept of universal moral life. *Varna* is a category of people who are assigned some specific duties and responsibilities in accordance with their capacity and capability in Hindu social life. For example, members of the so-called upper caste Brahmin can also be warriors the same as Ksatriyas, and Ksatriyas can also perform the duties of a priest. The same can be said about the other two castes of Vaishya and Shudra. Historically, there is evidence that Shudras become popular priests with no ties to Hindu caste–system. My philosophical impression is that some historians and western scholars have wrongly interpreted the ancient Hindu social system.

exact interpretation or translation can be made. Although the term has been taken from many theological, philosophical and ethical perspectives, its sole meaning is to realize and flourish in one's own absolute nature of being a moral and spiritual being. An example from our physical world can help us understand this point. The human entity, soul or reason, is like a piece of iron alloy, mixed with other non-metallic materials like clay. When we purify the raw material applying some scientific processes, we find pure iron that is capable of absorbing magnetic power. Similarly, a human entity is mixed with sensuous desires, views, and inclinations. When this entity through a rational or meditational process abandons those sensuous desires and inclinations, it reaches its real form (*svabhava* or *dharma*) and realizes its pure magnetic power of spirituality.

For this reason, I regard *dharma* neither as religion nor custom; rather as the essence or inherent nature of the cosmos.¹⁰ *Dharma* is a unilateral, integral, and unbroken realization of one's moral nature.¹¹ When applied to human beings, it is their inherent nature of being moral-spiritual entities. Since a moral-spiritual entity is believed to be righteous at all times, and since we are essentially moral-spiritual beings, it is our real *dharma* to be righteous at all times without regard to our desires and inclinations. Further, those who define *dharma* as *varnashramdharma* probably would not have given proper attention to the fact that the first verse of the Gita begins with the word *dharma-ksetre* (the field of *dharma*).¹² If we take *dharma* as *varnashramdharma*, the categorization of a field of *dharma* seems to be amusing and even absurd because a field does not belong to *varna*; indeed, *varna* is a category that is applicable to living beings like humans. If this is so, the following can then be asked: What is *dharma-ksetre* in general and *dharma* in particular?

The *dharma-ksetre* is a moral space in the battlefield. The term reveals that even in a situation of war and battle, one should always act from his/her *dharma* or moral spiritual nature. The battle between Kauravas and Pandawas is a good example of the human conflict on moral issues. The battle symbolically implies that at the time when it is compulsory for an agent to make a choice between a moral and an immoral course of action, one should always choose the former, not the latter. This is why the battlefield is

¹⁰ M. K. Gandhi wrote: "The term 'religion' I am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realization of knowledge of self." I use the term 'dharma' in the same sense. See Gandhi (1927). p. 29.

¹¹ According to Creel: 'Dharma pointed to duty, and specified duties; dharma also supplied a rationale or justification for duties by reference to patterns of order understood to be regnant in society and in the cosmos.' See Creel (1975). p. 161.

¹² dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ | māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāś caiva kim akurvata sañjaya || BG. 1:1.

called a field of *dharma* where morality faces a war from immorality. Those who do not get this deeper sense of *dharma* are in fact confused in their minds (*dharmasamūḥācētāḥ*).¹³

When Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna: “Considering at your own *dharma* (righteousness) you should not falter; indeed there is nothing higher for a Kshatriya (upholder of justice) than a righteous war”, meaning that fighting against upholders of injustice is always a *dharma* or moral duty for upholders of justice.¹⁴ One could say that if war is necessary to save righteousness and justice, it is everyone’s duty to go to war. If a warrior does not go to war when justice and righteousness are under attack, it means that he either favors injustice or he undervalues justice; similarly he either favors immorality or undervalues morality.¹⁵

Understanding *dharma* as one of the four *Purusharthas*, we can certainly say that *dharma* is not *varnashramadharma*; rather it is to say that the former denotes one’s moral duties while the latter denotes social duties.¹⁶ Kṛṣṇa’s account of *dharma* should be taken in its entirety. *Varnashramadharma* can be said to be conducive to universal *dharma* that is easy to perform in the phenomenal world. It is notable that the *Gita* talks about *dharma* from the spiritual and moral perspectives. From a spiritual perspective, *dharma* is one’s surrender to the Supreme Being; from a moral perspective, it is one’s preliminary duties in a socio–moral space. Those who focus on its spiritual connotation define *dharma* as religion, whereas those who focus on its moral connotation define it as moral duty. It is up to the readers of the Bhagavad-Gita to decide which connotation they choose to subscribe to when discussing the nature of *dharma*.¹⁷

¹³ BG. Ch. 2:7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Ch. 2:31.

¹⁵ The battle of Mahabharata has a metaphorical implication: Kaurava’s big army is like one’s sensuous desires (*ichchhabhava*), whereas Pandava’s army is like one’s pure soul or reason which always acts according to one’s pure righteous nature (*svabhava*) and one’s mind is like the real battlefield at Kuruksetra. Like the struggle between Kaurava and Pandava, there is a continuous struggle as a war between one’s sensuous desires and pure reason or soul. The ethical predicament is to determine whether one should follow one’s sensuous desires or reason/soul. This is what the whole mythological story of the *Gita* tells us; it gives us solutions to the moral dilemma of whether one should act from sensuous desires or reason/soul in the form of *svadharma* and *nishkama karma*.

¹⁶ Rosen (2006). Ch. 3

¹⁷ Mishra writes: ‘The real significance of dharma lies in the profound Vedic perception of man’s existence as a rational being who harmonizes the different purposes of life to be realized here and hereafter.’ See Mishra (2005). p. 55. On the other hand, S. P. Kumar writes: ‘The most comprehensive description of dharma is that one should look upon others as upon oneself.’ See Kumar (2005). p. 12.

IV. *Svadharmā* and *Nishkama Karma*

Svadharmā (Realization of Self-nature)

Svadharmā is made up of the prefix *sva* and the root word *dharma*. Like *dharma*, *svadharmā* too has a wide range of connotations and implications. Scholars from the east and the west have often interpreted the term in their own way creating ambiguity, confusion, and controversy—the most popular is of *svadharmā* as *varnashramadharmā*. Those who consider ‘*sva*’ to be an adjective often interpret *svadharmā* as ‘owned’ or ‘assigned duties’ in a social system, and assimilate *svadharmā* as *varnashramadharmā*.

Those who consider ‘*sva*’ to be a noun in terms of ‘the spiritual self’ interpret *svadharmā* as ‘moral duties of the Self’ which is said to be identical in all persons. This identical self can be said to be the Cosmic Spirit of the transcendental world. On the other hand, a phenomenal self (or an individual self in the phenomenal world) connected to a physical body and certain psychological properties, is a manifestation of the cosmic spirit in a social system. Such a socially situated self plays different roles in order to fulfill certain social demands. The Hindu social system of *varnashramadharmā* should be understood from the perspective of one’s socially assigned duties and responsibilities considering it (one’s *varnashramadharmā*) to be the narrow sense of *svadharmā*. In the broader sense, *svadharmā* implies actions that are of one’s cosmic nature of truly being a pure spiritual and moral entity.¹⁸

The controversy regarding the concept of *svadharmā* is quite misleading; in fact the controversy is a result of scholars’ misinterpretation of the term ‘*sva*’. Some scholars say that *svadharmā* is a Brahmanic creation in favor of the caste-system of ancient India, whereas others say it is an ethical concept. Some say it is one’s particular duty assigned to him or her by the community or society, others say that it implies individually determined duties, and so on. Most of us will agree, *prima facie*, that the concept of *svadharmā* reflects these implications. However, I must say that above all, there is a deeper sense of the term: *Svadharmā* is one’s moral obligation in a situation of social predicament or dilemma. On the battlefield at Kuruksetra, when Arjuna was challenged by the moral predicament of whether to go to war or retreat from the

¹⁸ The idea of the Cosmic Self looks similar to the idea of pure reason, developed by Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*, although the two are metaphysically quite different from each other. However, we can say that the Cosmic Self is the locus of a person’s *svadharmā* just as pure reason is the metaphysical locus of the practical reason of a moral agent.

battlefield, Krsna reminded him of his moral duty (*svadharma*) of being a warrior for righteousness. And those are the moral nuances that Gita brings out in its concept of *svadharma*.¹⁹

There is no verse in the *Bhagavad-Gita* that forbids a Brahmin, a Vaisya, or a Shudra from performing the duties of a Ksatriya (the warrior class) in the battlefield when morality and justice are under threat. If this is so, how can some reach the conclusion that *svadharma* is synonymous with *varnashramadhharma*? Indeed the emphasis on *varnashramadhharma* in the *Gita* is just an example to demonstrate the moral duties of a warrior on the battlefield; it is like demonstrating the moral duties of a teacher towards his or her students in the classroom. Assimilating the *Gita*'s notion of *svadharma* with Kant's notion of self-legislation, we can say that consequences and situations do not determine one's duty in a moral space; rather it's one's inherent moral nature that determines one's duty in a particular situation. In the *Gita*, Krsna does not talk about how one gains *varna-identity*; rather he in his talk reveals that one's *varnadharma* or course of action is based on the proportional composition of three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, which make up a person.^{20#} One's *varna* is not based on birth but only on qualities and actions, determined by a dominating quality. The caste-system can be said to be a result of timely changes in Hindu societal patterns that occurred in the post-classical era. Due to these changes in societal patterns, *dharma* and *svadharma* became traditional and could not maintain their true implications.

In light of the distinction I have made between a sensuous self (*the lower self*) and a spiritual self (*the higher self*), it can be contented that an action can be regarded as *dharma* or moral duty if it is practiced by one's higher self which is a self-governing entity. Even in the case of a moral dilemma or conflict over good or bad actions, the voice of the higher self should be the deciding one, because the higher self always acts

¹⁹ Chatterjea (2002), pp. 111-112.

²⁰ This is a unique interpretation of how one's *varna-identity* is determined by the three *gunas* introduced in classical Hinduism for determining one's psycho-physical capabilities and behaviors. It may be quite surprising for some that a person born in a Brahmin family may be of Shudra Varna and a person born in a Shudra family may be of Brahmin Varna. This can be judged as true by knowing one's astrological composition (in Indian astrology) and observing his or her course of action. A Brahmin may be seen as engaged in immoral and bad actions compared to a Shudra who may be seen as engaged in actions of high moral value. For example, Dronacharya was born in a Brahmin family but he chose to be a warrior, acted as a warrior, and trained many who wanted to be warriors. He did not choose to be engaged in Brahmanic activities. # All created life is individually composed of eight elements: Bhumi (earth), Ap (water), Anala (fire), Vāyu (air), Kha (ether), mind, intellect, and ego. (bhūmir āponalo vāyuh̄ khaṇ mano buddhir eva ca
ahaṅkāra itīyaṅ me bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā || BG, 7:4)

according to the law that can be universally applicable. For example, the *svadharmā* or *svabhava* of a warrior is to always fight for righteousness, and applicable to all warriors. Taking Kṛṣṇa as a symbol of the higher self and Arjuna of the lower self, it can be said that fighting against Kauravas is Arjuna's moral duty (*dharma*), directed by Kṛṣṇa's conception of *nishkama karma*.

Nishkama Karma (Duty without Desire)

Nishkama Karma is a very unique concept of the Gita that is translated as 'a duty without desire', as 'an action done with no regard to its fruits', as 'disinterested action', and 'selfless action'.²¹ § It commands that an agent has the right to prescribed activities (moral and social duties) but never at anytime to their results; the agent should never be motivated by the results of the actions he performs nor should he/she have any affinity for not doing his/her prescribed activities. This concept has two basic implications: (1) One should always act according to one's spiritual-moral nature (*svabhava*), and (2) he/she should always act according to *duties* prescribed by society for the sake of righteousness as a moral virtue (*social duties*).

The first implication is all about *dharma* as universal moral law and the second is about the *svadharmā* of an agent in a moral space created by society. The *Gita* tells us that regardless of whether the agent acts from his/her nature or from social duties, he/she should not have any desire of or any attachment to the fruits of those actions. If an action is done from a desire or feeling or an attachment, it has no moral worth; even if the agent desires to achieve a certain result, he/she cannot always achieve it because the result of an action is not in his/her hands; rather it is in the hands of the Supreme Self. The *Gita's* interpretation of *nishkama karma* as a determining law of morality looks similar to Kant's interpretation of the categorical imperative, which implies that the moral agent should always act according to his/her reason or good will free from sensuous inclinations and desires. From the perspective of *dharma*, *nishkama karma* is a universal moral law and from the perspective of *svadharmā* as *varnashramdharma*, it is a moral maxim determined by society.

In the *Gita*, an action performed according to *nishkama karma* is known as *karma-yoga* and the agent/doer as *karma-yogi* in the sense that acting from selfless motives is

²¹ karmaṇy evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana | mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te saṅgostv akarmaṇi || 2:47. § Mehta translates *nishkama karma* as selfless action. See Mehta (2005). p. 39.

possible only if the agent sacrifices his desires and inclinations. A verse of the *Gita* says that one should always perform one's duty to the best of one's moral capacity with one's mind attached to the lord, abandoning selfish attachment to the results and remaining calm in both success and failure. Acting in this kind of yogic manner brings peace and equanimity to his/her mind.²² Another verse says that a *karma-yogi* or the selfless person becomes free of both virtue and vice in this life itself and therefore strives for selfless action. Acting to the best of one's moral capacity without becoming selfishly attached to the fruits of one's work is called *karma-yoga* or *seva* (service).²³

It is interesting to know that *nishkarma karma* is devoid of desires, but not of *karma* (duty). The reason the *Gita* gives is quite clear: embodied beings cannot completely renounce actions until they reach the level of enlightenment because they are composed of three constituent *gunas* (qualities) of *Prakṛti*, i.e., *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* that necessarily give rise to actions, both sensuous and spiritual.²⁴ For this reason, it can be said that the *Gita's* concept of *nishkama karma* is not negation of actions, but negation of desires attached to one's duty. Since desires cause bondage and limit one's potential for renunciation or self-realization, an agent must free himself/herself before he/she can realize his/her own reality.

When caught up in the moral dilemma of whether to go to war for righteousness or to leave the battlefield for unrighteousness, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa a very philosophical question of metaphysics in which he wants to know what it means to be an enlightened or a rational person: What are the characteristics of an enlightened person whose intellect is steady? What does a person of steady intellect think and talk about? How does such a person behave with others, and live in this world?²⁵ Arjuna's moral dilemma is quite similar to Sartre's moral dilemma in which a moral agent (a soldier) finds it difficult to decide whether he should stay with his mother and let his country be invaded by the enemy or go to his military battalion and allow his mother to die.²⁶ As a perfect philosopher, Kṛṣṇa solves Arjuna's moral dilemma clearing up all his doubts.

²² *yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṃ tyaktvā dhanañjaya | siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṃ yoga ucyate || BG. 2:48.*

²³ *buddhiyukto jahātīha ubhe sukṛtaduṣkṛte | tasmād yogāya yujyasva yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam || 2:50.*

²⁴ *na hi dehabhṛtā śakyaṃ tyaktuṃ karmāṇy aśeṣataḥ | yas tu karmaphalatyāgī sa tyāgīty abhidhīyate || 18.11*

²⁵ *sthitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya keśava | sthitadhīḥ kiṃ prabhāṣeta kim āsīta vrajeta kim || 2.54.*

²⁶ This dilemma is discussed in Chapter 2 of the thesis.

Krsna answers, O' Arjuna when gives up all desires for sense gratification produced within the mind and becoming satisfied by the realization of the self in the pure state of the soul; then it is said one is properly situated in perfect knowledge.²⁷ In other words, only a self-realized person can be called enlightened; enlightenment is the *svabhava* (nature) of a self that can be realized only if the self always acts according to its own laws. A person whose mind is unperturbed by sorrow, who does not crave pleasures, and is completely free from attachment, fear, and anger, is called an enlightened sage of steady intellect.²⁸

The mind and intellect of a person who is not attached to anything and is neither elated by getting desired results nor perturbed by undesired results become steady.²⁹ When one completely withdraws one's senses from the sense objects as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into the shell for protection from calamity, the intellect of such a person is considered steady.³⁰ The desire for sensual pleasures fades away if one abstains from sensual enjoyment, but the craving for sensual enjoyment remains in a very subtle form. This subtle craving also completely disappears from one who knows the Supreme Being.³¹

Why does Krsna talk about the enlightenment of agents in terms of the realization of their own individual natures of being rational–spiritual selves? Because he knows it better than others how one's unrestrained senses enslave one's intellect and encourage one's decision-making faculty to act from selfish motives. The restless senses forcibly carry the mind of not only a common person but also of even a wise person away striving for perfection.³² When the senses of a person are under complete control, his/her intellect becomes steady and leads the person to self-realization.³³ One loses control over one's mind because he/she develops attachment to sense objects by thinking about them all the time and that causes desires. In other words, desires for sense objects come from the attachment to sense objects and cause vices like anger, delusion, wild ideas,

²⁷ prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān pārtha manogatān | ātmany evātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthitaprajñas tadocyate || BG. 2:55.

²⁸ duḥkheṣv anudvignamanāḥ sukheṣu vigataspr̥haḥ | vītarāgabhayakrodhaḥ sthitadhīr munir ucyate || 2:56.

²⁹ yaḥ sarvatrānabhisnehas tattatprāpya śubhāśubham | nābhinandati na dveṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā || 2:57.

³⁰ yadā saṁharate cāyaṁ kūrmoṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ | indriyāṅīndriyārthebhyas tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā || 2:58.

³¹ viṣayā vinivartante nirāhārasya dehinaḥ | rasavarjāṁ rasopy asya paraṁ dr̥ṣṭvā nivartate || 2:59.

³² yatato hy api kaunteya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ | indriyāṅi pramāthīni haranti prasabhaṁ manaḥ || 2: 60.

³³ vaśe hi yasyendriyāṅi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā | 2:61.

and bewilderedness.³⁴ It should be noted that the spirit of Kant's rational ethics in which he stresses the essential role of human reason in moral decisions was sensed by Kṛṣṇa when he explained to Arjuna that one's reasoning is destroyed when one's mind is bewildered; one strays from the right path when reasoning is destroyed.³⁵

Some people who consider the *Gīta's* philosophy to be theological and not purely moral may not agree with my observation and may therefore reject my interpretation. They may argue that I am relying more on selected ethical ideas inherent in the *Gīta* and giving less attention to most parts of the text that are primarily theological. They may also argue that the *Gīta's* concept of *nishkama karma* is not purely an ethical theory; rather it is a theory that emerged from the notion of *dharma* (religion) taken as *varnashramadharmā*.

I accept this argument wholeheartedly because I know (as most of us do) how one's imperfect understanding results in imperfect knowledge. At the beginning I explained that reason and religion are two inseparable foundational pillars of Indian philosophical tradition. I have the impression that western Indologists take Hinduism in general and the *Gīta's* philosophy in particular to be religious teachings and not philosophical. At this juncture I can only say that their arguments are not acceptable because they have not grasped the dimension I am highlighting in this Appendix. Of course, religious elements in the *Gīta* are comparatively more frequent than ethical elements but I do not think that philosophical ideas are quantifiable.

In human social life, the concept of *nishkama karma* is contrary to the concept of *sakam karma* (desired action). One who understands what *sakam karma* implies can also understand the philosophical implications of *nishkama karma*. *Sakam karma* is said to be an action that is done from the motive of achieving something. Most of our actions are *sakam karma*, not *nishkama karma*. For example, people cook food to satisfy their hunger; students prepare notes for examinations to secure the highest grades; people get married to enjoy physical pleasure and to have a family; farmers harvest their fields to have food; scientists do experiments to enhance knowledge; nations have military forces for security; and so on. In fact, most of us are *sakami* people who desire results of our actions, contrary to *nishkami* people who always act from the motive of action.

³⁴ dhyāyato viśayān puṁsaḥ saṅgas teṣūpajāyate | saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmāḥ kāmāt krodhobhijāyate || 2:62.

³⁵ krodhād bhavati saṁmohaḥ saṁmohāt smṛtīvibhramāḥ | smṛtībhraṁśād buddhināśo buddhināśāt praṇāśyati || 2:63.

A *sakami* person is naturally inclined to and interested in sensuous feelings and demands and always makes an effort to fulfill them. A *nishkami* person, on the other hand, always acts from his/her spiritual nature that is described in terms of *dharma–svadharmā–varnashramdharma* in the *Gita*. However, in the real world it is hard to find *nishkami* persons who always act from duty (karma), not from desires, just as it is hard to find an exceptional agent (à la Kant) who always acts according to the categorical imperative. The reason is clear: detaching from sensuous inclinations is not easy for ordinary people. In order to be a *nishkami* agent, one needs to go through yogic exercise to overpower one's desires and feelings. This is a unique technique we find in the *Gita* and other classical texts of Hinduism. It makes the *Gita's* concept of *nishkama karma* uniquely different from Kant's conception of the categorical imperative because Kant does not tell us how we can defeat our sensuous inclinations: He has only given some formulations that are fascinating in theory, but problematic in practice.³⁶

Indian scholars like D. C. Mathur interpret the *Gita's* concept of *nishkama karma* in terms of 'an exhortation to duty' and 'a stirring call to action'. Mathur emphasizes the point that Kṛṣṇa's philosophical teaching to Arjuna on the battlefield at Kuruksetra gives a rationale to moral actions. He writes—

[T]he *Gita* is an exhortation to duty and a stirring call to action. Krishna undertakes the task of persuading Arjuna to shake off inertia and perform his duty in a manly way. This is supposed to be a moral persuasion because it is aimed at convincing Arjuna and converting him on rational grounds. The actual arguments may have a mixture of reason and emotional appeal, but the impression given is that of rational justification for moral action.³⁷

According to Mathur, the concept of *nishkama karma* as disinterested duty has two ethical implications: (1) A moral agent should 'perform all its duties (*dharma*) conscientiously in light of its *svabhava* and *svadharmā*', and (2) all actions 'must be done in a spirit of nonattachment'. Mathur explains that by 'nonattachment', the *Gita* means 'freedom from an egoistic pride in one's own agency (*kartṛtṛt-vabhimāna*), and

³⁶ This is precisely because Kant is not interested in religion, nor in how one gets to be a person who can perform morally right actions. He just tells us how one can decide what is morally right and obligatory, as that is the purpose of ethics. Even weaknesses of the will which often result in not doing that which is the right thing to do is not a part of ethics. So theoretically we can agree with Kant.

³⁷ Mathur (1974). p. 34.

freedom from the desire of the fruits of action (*phalasa*)'.³⁸ I agree with Mathur and thus argue that it is our *svabhava* and *svadharma* that morally push us to perform *nishkama karma* or a duty detached from desires and worldly affairs.

V. *Nishkama Karma* and the Categorical Imperative: A Moral Path to Perfection

In the *Gita*, we find a duality of *dharma* and *svadharma*; of *Purusa* and *Prakrti*; of moral duty and social duty; of Krsna Consciousness and human consciousness; of Supreme Soul and ordinary soul; and of a perfect being and an imperfect being. Similarly, in Kantian ethics we find a duality of Good Will and Holy Will; of rational being and irrational beings; of practical reason and pure reason; of perfect duty and imperfect duty;³⁹ and of a noumenal being and phenomenal being. The nature of the *spiritual self* described by the *Gita* looks identical to the nature of the *good will* described by Kant, and the Krsna consciousness looks identical to the Holy Will. The *Gita* reveals that a human self is *svabhavatah* (essentially) spiritual and moral and therefore it should always act from its real *svabhava*. In the same manner, Kant reveals that the *good will* is *svabhavatah*, a moral autonomous being, and therefore it should always act from its pure will. The duty of a spiritual and moral being is expressed in the *Gita's* concept of *nishkama karma* or 'duty without desire' and in Kant's concept of the *kategorischer Imperativ* or 'duty for duty's sake'.

The *Gita* emphasizes the purity of the self in terms of *dharma* (universal law) and *svadharma* (self-law) and Kant emphasizes the purity of the *reine Vernunft* (pure reason) and *praktische Vernunft* (practical reason). With their similar concepts, both the *Gita* and Kant reach the same moral principle of *duty always for duty not for any desire*. Their final principle of morality in this sense is almost similar, if not identical. In other words, the *Gita's nishkama karma* clearly anticipates Kant's ethical theory of duty for duty's sake.⁴⁰ Kant claims that a moral agent always acts from *reason* and not from the *senses* just as the *Gita* claims that a moral agent always acts from his/her nature of being a spiritual *purusa* (unbound self) and not from the nature of material *prakrti* (physical senses).

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 35.

³⁹ See Kant's *MS*.

⁴⁰ Varma (2005). p. 67.

Some may then ask how the *theological ethics* of the *Gita* can be similar to the *rational ethics* of Kant, who only postulates the existence of God. This question may be asked by those who do know that there are hidden theological elements in Kant's rational ethics. Is it not obvious that his notion of the Holy Will looks like the will of God? Varma rightly observes that Kant's notion of the *good* in formulating the supreme principle of morality and his distinction between the ordinary will (of an imperfect rational being) and the Holy Will which 'is possessed by God alone as a perfectly rational being' clearly show that his rational ethics also has a theistic side.⁴¹

Some philosophers like Peter Singer seem to have a more moderate opinion. According to Singer, *nishkama karma* or the *disinterested actions* ethics of the *Gita* 'might look somewhat like Kant's ethic of 'duty for duty's sake', or acting from respect for the supreme moral law (the categorical imperative), but the precise rational-universalizable formulation of Kant is absent here. He argues that the motivation of the *Gita* 'is not so much to make the 'good will' the determinant of moral actions but to conserve the Brahmanical cultural base (its performative ideal) while integrating the threatening asocial ethic of ascetic renunciation, and also accommodating the influence of nascent devotionism, with its theistic orientation.'⁴² However, Singer wholeheartedly accepts that the *Gita* 'does not overlook the significant role that a quasi-rational discerning faculty plays in such a process. [...]. That the 'will' could at once be intelligent and practical (i.e. socially attuned), making for its moral autonomy, is itself an interesting idea canvassed' in the concept of *nishakama karma*.⁴³

Some other scholars like Gauchhwal accept without any hesitation that both Kant and the *Gita* 'offer very identical views to account for both these realms—that of matter and spirit'.⁴⁴ He argues that the *Gita* and Kant's moral philosophy are pathways to human perfection through freedom and self-determination. He writes—

If, then, bondage, according to Kant and the *Gita*, consists in our inability to discern the law of our true being (*svabhava* or autonomy) from the law of the sensible attachments, perfection consists in so determining our actions that only our rational

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Singer (1993). p. 50.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Gauchhwal (1967). p. 94.

law fulfils itself therein, so that ultimately our self discovers itself as absolutely self-determined.⁴⁵

Despite differences in many respects of their philosophical views on human duty, both the *Gita* and Kant have shown a very close resemblance in interpreting human beings as rational and spiritual. Their perfectionist views on disinterested duties and duty for duty's sake are of notable ethical significance in terms of self-realization and self-determination since their philosophical insistence on the purity of the self or reason gives a clear moral message to the world that when one acts according to moral laws as one's duty, one demonstrates one's real nature or *svabhava*.

VI. Summary

In this Appendix, we have discussed the *Gita's* concept of *nishkama karma* in light of Kant's moral philosophy and learned that: (1) *nishkama karma* is a philosophical theory of action, more or less the same as Kant's philosophy of the categorical imperative, (2) the *Gita's* philosophical account of *dharma*, *svadharma*, and *varnashramdharma* provides a foundation for its moral theory of *nishkama karma* just as in Kant's philosophical account of universal moral laws, duties determined by one's autonomous will and duty towards oneself provide a foundation for his moral theory of the categorical imperative, (3) a disinterested doer (à la the *Gita*) and a bizarre rational agent (à la Kant) are difficult to find in the real world, (4) some duties accepted both in the *Gita* and Kant's philosophy are socially important but morally have less value if the agent performs them to fulfill his self-interests; duties of this kind are known as *varnashramadharma* in the *Gita* and imperfect duties in Kant's moral philosophy, (5) Kant's moral philosophy seems helpless in providing solutions to some serious problems in the social and moral domains of the modern world, whereas the *Gita's* moral philosophy certainly provides practical solutions to those problems (6) Kant defines morality or one's *duty* in terms of a form of transcendentalism leaving a very small place for practice, whereas the *Gita's* *nishkama karma* is a practical moral philosophy, and (7) the *Gita's* philosophy of action shows a theistic faith in a supreme entity, while Kant's philosophy shows the supremacy of reason.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 98.

It is also of moral significance that despite several conceptual and practical problems in the Gita's and Kant's ethical theories, they both convey to the world the fascinating and inspiring ethical message of non-attachment to sensuous inclinations and desires: Their message is the importance of achieving a universal moral approach to dealing with social issues like protecting righteousness, justice, and bias from unrighteousness, injustice, and partiality.

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