

## Decoding Kantian Concept of Freedom

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Man being a spirit not only values that which simply satisfies a desire but also has the capacity to evaluate desires in terms of their ability in promoting a good life. According to Kant freedom is a pure rational concept which alone has intrinsic value as it alone is conducive to self-realization. Kant claimed that rational beings are ends-in-themselves not because they have reason but because they have freedom. It is not wild liberty rather it moral autonomy that enables a human being to access the Universal unconditional universalizable supreme principle of morality is to be able to choose such maxims of his action which perfectly tune with law of freedom or law of Duty. He recognises himself as a self-legislator rather than just being blindly governed by external compulsion. Kant considered freedom as the highest value in man's life which attributes moral self-i.e. dignity to a sentient being.

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The National Council of Educational Research in one of its surveys has enlisted 82 values Freedom is one of them. When we expect that a person ought to behave in a certain way, it implies that it is pre-supposed that the person can behave that way. That is, the person is free to choose his actions. It is genuinely believed that man is born free. Man is the spirit which not only values that simply satisfies a desire but also has the capacity to evaluate desires in terms of their ability in promoting a good life. Man alone has the power to distinguish between 'living as such' and 'living well'. In this context, we may recall Amartya Sen's famous view that "Development requires removal of major sources of unfreedom..." Now what do we understand by development? Does it mean growth of GNP or rise in personal income or technological advance? In view of W. M. Urban, what is conducive to the development of self or to the development of self-realization alone is ultimately intrinsically valuable.

In the present submission I would like to analysis Immanuel Kant's claim that that Freedom alone has intrinsic value and therefore Freedom alone is conducive to self-realisation. Kant holds that if rational beings can be ends-in-themselves that is not because they have reason but because they have freedom. Kant argued that rationality itself is so valuable precisely because it is means to Freedom. Kant writes, " In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. If it has a price something else can be put in its place as an equivalent. If it is exalted above all price and so admits of no equivalence, then it has a dignity. What is relative to Universal human inclinations and needs has a market price, what even without presupposing a need, accords with a certain taste, that is satisfaction in mere purposeless play of our mental powers has a fancy price; but that which constitutes the sole condition under which anything can be an end in itself has not merely a relative value ...but has an intrinsic value that is dignity." For

Kant man's dignity lies in exercising his moral autonomy.

Humans are potentially free agents. Kant pointed out that a man's innate right to freedom has its basis in negative freedom and believed that a person cannot be positively free without being negatively free. The negative aspect of freedom consists in every rational being's capacity to act independent of any external cause or not being determined by senses and the positive aspect constitutes the ability of the free-will to be itself practical or self-legislating. This act of self-legislation gives him dignity as a moral being. He realises that he is not only a subject to a law rather he himself is the legislator. Kant defined moral laws as laws of freedom which is transcendental in nature. In his Critique of Practical Reason, Kant firmly asserted that concepts and judgements about us and our deeds and omissions signify nothing moral if their content could be learned from sense-experience. He strongly believed that all moral maxims should be founded on a Universal and absolute standard springing from a priority principle of practical reason. In Kant's moral theory words like 'pure', 'a priori' signify the condition necessarily pre-supposed in all moral experiences and is never a product of any such experience.

In *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant actually laid down the foundation of the supreme principal of morality which would justify the maxims acting behind one's actions as moral. In course of his search Kant discovered that man's good-will alone may be said to be morally good, i.e. possesses intrinsic moral worth as it is directly

issued by our reason universally and absolutely. Thus, Kant argued that about all moral matters one should always appeal to one's reason and not to a subjective moral sentiment.

From above discussion it seems Kant would not consider objectivity of moral standard as illusory. Only he had used it in a sense completely different from that of his predecessors. Kant argued that such a standard should never exist independent of human understanding. There is a moral necessity for the moral will to be self-governing. Kant asserted that unless that law in the form of a universal, unconditional standard of legislation is cognised by every human being as a matter of self-imposed necessity rather than being God-given or existing in nature of things, man's rationality cannot be proved to be practical. Kant distinguished between two kinds of reason. One is speculative or theoretical reason and the other is practical reason. For Kant speculative reason is descriptive which gives us knowledge of necessary, eternal truths while practical reason is prescriptive in nature. It is our rational faculty which tells us what we ought to do.

Kant conceived universal principle as moral requirement existing inherently in every human being by virtue of human capacity for reasoning. He pointed out that what man finds by an appeal to reason is a denial of the principle generates absurdity since by appealing to this authority alone one could appeal to the principle of non-contradiction. Hence, it justifies why everyone could assent to such principle irrespective of other moral beliefs that he or she may entertain.

Objectivity in Kant's theory of freedom stands for an impersonal, unconditional and universal law of oughtness which acts as a postulate for man's practical reason and at the same time can be accessed only by this practical reason. Thus, Kant rejected both pre-established human essence and even Divine commands as moral laws. With such a discovery Kant transformed the whole architecture of ethics and gave rise to Kant's radicalism. Thus, for Kant, objectivity of moral worth consists in the will of a rational agent to choose freely to act in accordance with the order of the a priori practical reason out of the right motive. Kant clarified that right motive consists not only to act according to the Law but also in doing so out of a respect for the moral law. Here

Kant claimed that although a moral agent has rational awareness of his moral obligation, he however has the freedom to choose own maxims of his actions which in certain occasion are issued by hypothetical imperative. 'Maxim' is defined by Kant as subjective principle acting behind a human action. Kant opined that man being susceptible to self-interest and inclinations, it therefore leaves possibility that the maxim one chooses may not be congruent with the Moral Law. Even if it is found to conform to the Law of Duty. Kant would not consider such actions to be moral. For Kant man's moral life is a continual striving to become more perfectly rational and, in this regard, Kant points out that only concept of necessitating can lead a sentient being to the path of morality. Hence, Kant opined that man alone is exposed to the tension between inclination and obligation.

This precisely gives rise to the 'Idea of Duty' in man's life. Kant labelled the 'Moral Law' or 'Law of Duty' as the Categorical Imperative. Thus, concept of duty is central to Kant's moral Philosophy. Thus, morality is conceived by Kant as inner consistency of actions not as a pursuit of some preconceived value-object.

In *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant inquired into the fundamental purely rational pre-requisite for all principles that would justify valid moral judgements and eventually came up with the Categorical Imperative which states thus, "Act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will become a Universal Law." According to Kant such moral command applies equally to all men and in every actual or possible moral situation. And it is on account of the criterion of universalizability of the rational will that Kant found it appropriate to uphold Categorical Imperative as the Moral Law. He asserted that this Law alone should be accepted as the foundation of a universal principle of legislation. However, Kant also admits that, as a matter of fact, human beings often adopt different moral maxims for actions as in his view every situation is unique. But at the same time Kant maintained that this does not prove morality to be relative. In his view, all principles which properly control moral judgements are universally the same because they are generated by the one and absolute Categorical Imperative. Thus, Kant explained that the Categorical Imperative does not exist as a guide to our actions rather it stands for a general moral formula regulating individual maxims lying behind every action. For this reason, in the history of western moral

tradition Kant is regarded as an ethical formalist.

Kant also maintained that 'universality' alone cannot reveal the true nature of a priori foundation because certain Precepts grounded in experience are also found to be universal in certain respects. Thus, Kant proposed that any precept may be a practical rule but to be a moral law it must be deduced from a priori pure reason. From this Kant inferred that the supreme principle of morality cannot be contingent in nature. Such necessity on the part of the agent explains why a moral law is binding on a rational being. For example, when a man recognises a conclusion as valid, he no longer denies its logical claim just because its self-validity carries with it the binding force. Similarly, insofar as a man's will is guided by self-validating rational principle it carries with it an obligatoriness. Kant held that the concept of moral obligation in life of a sentient beings thus presupposes an 'idea of necessitation'. Thus, for Kant Idea of obligation does not merely involve practical necessity but also the Idea of necessitation.

According to Kant, necessitation should be conceived in terms of the Idea of constraints. On Kant's view, an action is morally right if its maxims are rightly chosen keeping idea of constraint in mind even if such maxims do not lead to successful consequence. In Kant's moral framework, when the subjective principle of human action perfectly agrees with the universally valid supreme principle it assumes a moral character and on account of this it is considered lawful. Kant opined that all moral principles that a free-will deliberates are self-legislated. Thus, Kant

purported that the act of self-legislation without any external compulsion makes a rational being enjoy freedom. By freedom Kant signified moral autonomy.

In formula of Autonomy Kant thus expressed the thought that in moral realms every human being is indeed an end -in-itself and firmly believed that man could only claim his right to freedom as the sole innate right belonging to him internally. Humans are potentially free agents, and the realisation of their freedom is a matter of greatest moral importance. From such a view would follow that an action that is consistent with the autonomy of the will is permitted and one that does not agree should be considered as forbidden.

Kant firmly believed that a civil society alone secures such rights though it does not create it. According to Kant, outside the state " we only have wild lawless liberty". In this context Kant warned us that although there can be society in a state of nature, nevertheless, there can be no guarantee of property here. He explained that the civil society is authorised by means of public legislation to coerce anyone who infringes upon another's right under laws of freedom. Kant held that moral aspect of external actions deals with moral obligation. He called this "ethics". Thus, in Kant's moral framework, conforming to positive laws or juridical laws of the state constitutes the legality of an action whereas, conformity with ethical laws justifies the morality of the action. The freedom to which the latter refers is freedom in both the external and internal use of choice, insofar it is determined by laws of reason.

We may conclude our discussion by saying that throughout his ontological enquiry of morals, Kant emphatically maintained that since human freedom is the highest value therefore, it stands for the limiting condition of all other values. An individual's civil and political freedom becomes meaningful when they are derived from man's right to freedom or in other words, from the concept of moral autonomy.

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