

# **The Nature of Practical Reason: A Philosophical Understanding**

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## **Dedication**

I hereby dedicate this thesis to my beloved mother Smt. Rina Mitra, whom I lost two years back in the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic. She has continuously been an inspiration since my childhood.

Love you and miss you forever...

## **Acknowledgement**

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# **Introduction**

## **Introduction**

In the field of morality, practical life problems occupy the centre stage of discussion. A human being is evaluated as good or bad on the basis of his own moral decision and finally by the initiative he takes to actualize his decision. The justification of an action performed by a person is decided as morally right or wrong on the basis of the nature of his intention that is present in the background of his decision. It means that the reason that guides the person to take the appropriate moral decision has a necessary and significant impact in the sphere of morality. The discussion of practical reason thus becomes prominent as it is the reason that insists to take moral decisions. In this thesis, I am going to focus on the discussion of the nature of practical reason as it seems that the problem of moral justification is one of the perennial issues in the arena of Western ethics. Before digging deep into the ocean-like structure of practical reason as explored by philosophers of the historical epoch, I need to discuss some crucial points here.

The discussion on the nature of practical reason comes under the domain of metaethics or the second-order ethics. Because here my concern is not to talk about what we are doing, but about why we are doing that. Western ethics basically consists of two kinds of discussions: one is the discussion on evaluating specific practices and principles of action that guide us to decide what should I do; what makes action good or bad; what makes people virtuous or vicious; what does it mean to have reason to do something? etc. This is the field of normative or first-order ethics. But there is another area of discussion where the attempt is made to answer the fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of the ethical theory itself that we apply to evaluate the goodness, to distinguish morally good action from bad ones, to find out the reason behind an action. These kinds of questions are discussed under the head of metaethics or second-order ethics.<sup>1</sup> In my present discussion I will explore the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Markovitz, *Moral Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

practical reason that we use to decide the moral standards that are considered as ready reckoner for practical life problems. My discussion will focus on the possibility and the nature of moral knowledge of the agent that provides the justification in favour of his moral claims. My aim is to understand what kind of psychological qualities empower an agent to formulate moral claims? My discussion will cover the nature of the motivational state that is helpful for making moral judgments. So my thesis is not about what one ought to do, rather it is about what we are doing when we are deciding what we should do. Philosophers from ancient period to the contemporary time have designed practical reason in various shades. So it is very significant to chronologically discuss here some suitable insights about practical reason to understand the difference of opinion among philosophers of different time period from the inception of Western ethics.

The discussion of practical reason raises another kind of distinction which I must clarify now. As I am concerned about the issue of moral justification, practical reason must be differentiated from practical reasoning. Practical reason is a capacity which is governed by certain normative principles and its task is a kind of responsiveness towards reason; whereas practical reasoning is a mental process that consists of reasons as premises and from those premises a practical conclusion is derived.<sup>2</sup> To provide moral justification in favour of an action, practical reason is generally involved in the process called practical reasoning, since at the time of decision making, the agent is engaged with practical reason whereas in performing an action he is motivated to reasoning by using the reasons attached with it. Therefore, in my thesis, the notion of practical reasoning is sometimes included in the discussion of practical reason as in some issues they overlap one another and it is not possible to maintain a water-tight distinction between these two always.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Audi, "Reasons, Practical Reason and Practical Reasoning", *Ratio* 17, no. 2 (June 2004): 119.

The nature of practical reason has taken different shapes in the interpretations of different philosophers from past to present days. In the history of Western ethics, we find that not only the terminology, but the meaning of the term has changed its connotation several times. I must mention here that my discussion of practical reason is confined within the philosophical views that connect practical reason with true human possibilities. I am not bothered about the views that focus on the spiritual essence of man. Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 BC–322 BC), who first systematizes formal ethics, has started the discussion of practical reason in contrast to theoretical reason to give it a proper shape. So, in the first chapter of my thesis, I have started the discussion by defining the nature of practical reason following Aristotle. He advocates a pre-dominance of reason in his moral theory, though considers harmonious coexistence of reason and emotion as the prerogative of a happy life. Aristotle clearly asserts that practical reason is agent specific and related with his own good.

Without mentioning the interpretation of Immanuel Kant, discussion of Western ethics is incomplete. He has a remarkable contribution in the field of moral motivation. In the second chapter of my thesis, I have included the insights of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), the most influential German philosopher of the modern era. Immanuel Kant develops a pure practical reason based moral theory in contrast to theoretical reason which advocates normativity and objectivity in the moral sphere. Pure reason can be practical - this seems the chief thesis of Kantian moral philosophy. Kant asserts that reason is one and the same, whether applied theoretically to the realm of what it is, or practically to the realm of what ought to be. Theoretical reason and practical reason are just two different applications of one and the same reason. But unlike Aristotle Kant claims that just like theoretical laws of the factual world, there are unconditional practical laws to deal with practical moral situations. The practical laws are universal and objective in nature and so should motivate all rational beings to take moral decisions irrespective of their subjective aspects. The fundamental laws of morality are the

same for every rational being, since the ultimate criterion of rightness is deducible from the highest faculty of a rational being as such. He thinks that being a rational agent, a man is essentially a moral agent too who is capable to be motivated naturally to act in a moral way following the universal moral law. Thus he is asserting moral autonomy as our essence.

The nature of practical reason has transformed exceptionally during the contemporary era. Ethics acts as an instrument to maintain a right social environment. We follow the yardstick of ethics as we consider us as responsible agents of a moral community. Due to our responsibility we try to justify our actions and our justification also encompasses the point of view of other fellow beings. In ethical activities we cannot ignore the expectations of other persons and so justification necessarily involves at least the views of our dear ones and must be ratified by other people. In the third, fourth and fifth chapter, I am completely focusing on the philosophical views of contemporary era. In my third chapter I have discussed about American philosopher Alan Gewirth (1912-2004) who has advocated the supreme principle of morality as the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC). I thought to include his view here because though at a first glance, it seems that Gewirth opines a similar insight like Immanuel Kant as he is also mentioning about objective necessity to follow a principle, but he has a completely unique and novel perception to define this PGC. This principle is derived through a logical derivation from the nature of human action. This principle is derivable as a requirement of agential self-understanding. The principle states that every agent must act in accordance with his or her own as well as all other prospective agent's generic rights (freedom and well-being). He provides a new kind of definition of the notion of dialectically necessary method that on one hand accepts objectivity, logical necessity and universality and agential self-understanding, mutual commitments, moral understandings on the other. Moreover, Gewirthian system of practical reason has a more liberal approach towards the nature of practical reason.

There are some other contemporary moral philosophers also who have the tendency to emphasize on the inclusion of subjective aspects in the rational justification of a moral action. They realize that the social norms, moral laws are a burden of expectations and responsibilities. Better to say that these are stronger than advice or suggestions. But in spite of that they agree that these are not the last word. Agent has his freedom to analyse the situation according to his own pattern. Moral agent is considered as an embodied particular entity and possesses some desires (not egoistic ones) to fulfil. So, moral commitments, understanding, responsibility are the most significant features that a moral agent should hold. Reason for making a moral decision cannot ignore the particularities of moral agents and situations. To clarify this view the fourth chapter of my thesis is dedicated to the insight of Bernard Williams. Following the Kantian critique, English philosopher Bernard Williams (1929–2003) establishes his exegesis of internal interpretation of reason. By dividing reason under two heads – external and internal, he shows that external reason lacks motivational power and so cannot be treated as practical reason. It is insufficient to bring true reason statement in practical moral situation. To him practical reason is the motivational reason and thus his notion goes against Kantian approach as Kant approves the use of pure practical reason in moral domain. So, all normative reasons are internal for Williams. He includes agent's subjective aspects along with the reason that can objectively justify an agent's moral action. Williams' discussion here enters in the field of moral psychology.

In the fifth chapter my focus is on Jonathan Dancy, another philosopher of contemporary period. Following Williams' footsteps, British moral philosopher, Jonathan Dancy (1946- ) advocates a thesis of practical reason. Reasons holism, as advocated by him, explains a kind of context-sensitivity in the field of reason. The necessity of moral principles is ignored and empirical derivation of moral principles emerges from experience. The training of moral agents is very significant in this thesis. As a well-trained agent can choose the relevant

feature that is considered as a reason for a particular situation, though that feature may not be considered as a reason in another context. For Dancy reasons for action plays a pivotal role in determining the agent's moral character. Jonathan Dancy follows the Aristotelian insight and describes that virtuous person (or well-trained person) has a kind of harmony between reason and emotion. This notion of the virtuous person's narrative, according to Dancy, is coined as reasons holism. The considerations along with the particular context can provide the justification of a moral action. The virtuous person follows it because it is normative as well as motivating reason for him to act.

In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between the three kinds of practical reason (reasons for action) that frequently comes in the discussion of Bernard Williams and Jonathan Dancy. According to Robert Audi, normative reasons are reasons that are objectively there to perform some action. This kind of reason can be applied to anyone who is in a similar position to do some action. To study hard is the same normative kind of reason for those who want to pass the exam with excellence. Some normative reasons can be person-specific. It would help my friend in need if I give him some money will be considered as a normative reason for me to perform a morally right action. A second category is the motivational reasons for action. This is a reason that someone has; like I am motivated to join the army in virtue of serving my country and protecting my countrymen. This is a kind of subjective reason as it contains the aim of my desire fulfilment. It is called internal reason in contrast to the normative reason that is independent of what the agent wants and thus external or objective reason. Williams does not agree with Audi's interpretation of internal and external reasons. Because in his explanation internal reasons can be normative and normative reasons can be motivating reason. Dancy also thinks that the motivating and the normative reason are unified for the virtuous person as his emotions are univocal and therefore he acts successfully following a harmonious path. Presence of virtue thus helps the agent to act as a whole. It means when we act for a reason, it is not only

motivational in kind, it is motivating too, and it plays an explanatory role also. So, the third category of practical reason is explanatory reasons. The reason defines why an action occurs in the domain of morality. Generally, explanatory reasons for action are considered to be motivating in nature. According to Audi, ‘they are not only reasons we have; they actually motivate our doing something on the basis of them and thereby ground a motivational explanation of our doing it. They are explanatory, possessed, and commonly also normative. They are also kinds of reasons for which we act when we act on the basis of practical reasoning.’<sup>3</sup>

The whole discussion is divided under the following chapters –

1. *Phronēsis*: A Harmony Between Reason and Emotion
2. Pure Practical Reason: Approach of Immanuel Kant
3. Practical Reason: A Reflection of the Principle of Generic Consistency
4. Internal Reason: An Inclusion of Subjectivity
5. Reasons Holism: A Holistic Approach towards Practical Reason

We find in this journey of Western ethics that the nature of practical reason has taken different shapes as philosophers from the Greek period to the contemporary era are not unanimously explaining the nature of it. From the Greek period to the modern period of Western ethics we notice biasness towards rationality. But in the contemporary span, along with rationality philosophers are interested to include subjectivity in moral sphere. They emphasize more on the agent who being a rational person possesses freedom, rights, moral responsibility, mutual commitments and rational understanding too. These subjective aspects are not outside the domain of rationality, rather included as the weapons of justification. Thus leaving the idea of Kant’s moral law that demands transparency of objective reason, the discussion of practical

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<sup>3</sup> Audi, “Reasons, Practical Reason and Practical Reasoning”, 120-121.

reason turns toward the domain of moral psychology where subject's personal choice is considered as an objective benchmark for the justification of a moral action. Along with maintaining the normativity, approaches of the contemporary thinkers are pragmatic too. Aim of the contemporary philosophers is to construct ethics as a self-directive discipline. Moral knowledge is thus not imposed on us as an order; rather it is a capacity that makes us aware about the demand of rationality when we require responding in a practical situation.

## **Chapter 1:**

# ***Phronēsis: A Harmony Between Reason and Emotion***

## Chapter 1

### **Phronēsis: A Harmony Between Reason and Emotion**

Moral judgments are neither the outcomes of our personal taste and prejudice, nor the result of cultural training only. We formulate the judgments following the path of argumentation. Thus, moral judgments are made in consultation with reason. We claim that our judgments result from our knowledge about truth. Greek philosopher Aristotle, a disciple of Plato, thinks that this kind of knowledge has a property to guide people to perform actions. Though this knowledge mirrors the truth, but it is not like the knowledge of universals as advocated by Plato; in contrast, Aristotle claims, knowledge that we use to form moral judgments can be changed as we use it to decide how to act in a particular situation. Here the agent is doing the right thing at the right moment for the right moral reason that is relevant for that very particular situation. Aristotle has incorporated the theory of Natural Law according to which everything in nature has a purpose.<sup>4</sup> Human being as a natural being also has a specific purpose or function. His function is to perfect his capacity to choose what is good for him, what is right thing for developing his moral excellence. It means in a practical situation the agent decides according to his responsiveness to moral reasons. The reason for action is the same reason that justifies the action as right. Reason is the most significant conception that has dominated moral domain for a long period of time.

According to Greek stalwart Aristotle, practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) deals with practical life problems in contrast to theoretical wisdom (*sophia*) that describes the factual world. The task of practical wisdom is to evaluate things in regard to what should be the case rather than describing things as it is. Though he uses the term wisdom instead of reason, but deep analysis

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<sup>4</sup> James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill International Edition, 2007), 58

shows that wisdom is very much like what modern moral philosophers understand by practical reason. However, in this chapter, following Aristotle's coinage we would like to use the term practical wisdom or excellence instead of practical reason, but in the course of the discussion we will try to show that the unique feature of his moral theory matches with the main tenets of practical reason. The enquiry here is to clarify the notion of practical wisdom -- whether in practical wisdom reason is considered as utterly segregated from emotions or there are some overlapping areas where reason and emotion can work together to justify a moral action. Does wisdom consist of rational ability only or as a natural being we are allowed to exhibit the feelings, emotions and natural tendencies in our conducts? Does practical wisdom approve reason as the autonomous source of human conduct or accepts association of subject-specific abilities with reason to motivate the moral agent to take moral decisions? In this regard, we need to assess his notion of virtuous man since this concept of virtue is ingrained in his discussion of practical wisdom and also helps to solve the reason-emotion dichotomy. However, we are not going to enter into the detail discussion of his virtue theory, only will mention some important illustrations of his virtue theory as required. It is also necessary to mention here that Aristotle incorporates emotion in the rational discourse. He advocates a predominance of reason in his moral theory, though considers harmonious coexistence of reason and emotion as the prerogative of a happy life. His comprehensive elucidation of the notion of practical wisdom would make these points explicit. Here in this chapter, I would like to mainly concentrate on the Aristotelian exegesis of practical reason or practical wisdom (termed by Aristotle as *phronēsis*) since he is the pioneer of formal ethics.

## I

### Concept of Excellence

In Aristotle's ethics, doing right is not important; its focus is the character that the agent develops through achieving the requisite dispositions, motivations, and emotions. He recommends acquiring virtues in character as virtue is equivalent to the good state of human soul and it encourages the soul to do its proper functioning. In this theory goodness or rightness of action is a derivative concept that is derived from the character of the agent. It means a good person always does the right thing. We, human beings normally think to do well, because we try to be good. Aristotle's virtue-based ethics is not concerned about action, but about emotions, dispositions and moral habits. Richard Taylor understands virtue-based ethics as an aspiration rather than an ethics of duty.<sup>5</sup> It aspires us for being an ideal person. Virtues are excellences of character and trained behavioural dispositions that result in habitual acts. Here we are concerned with the moral virtues like honesty, benevolence, kindness, gratitude and so forth. It is appropriate to reason about what to do, but such reasoning or deliberating should provide significant attention to feelings as sympathy, loyalty etc. The primary focus is not any abstraction of reason, but on the concept of ideal person or actual ideal person. The life of a virtuous person is a model for us and that inspires us to become an ideal person.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle thinks that the goal of human life is to acquire some ends, and the main objective of his moral theory is to discover the nature of the end at which human being ought to aim as his well-being is related with that. A human life becomes successful when it actualizes its rational nature. The end of human life must be something that is self-satisfying, needs no supplement beyond itself. According to him, this end of human being is termed as *eudaimonia* which is usually translated

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1985)

<sup>6</sup> Louis P. Pojman, "Virtue Based Ethical Systems", in *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), 114-135

as happiness.<sup>7</sup> Happiness is a state of feeling, but by the term *eudaimonia* he means ‘a certain kind of activity of the soul in accordance with virtue’.<sup>8</sup> He seeks to search for the unique function of human being that can differentiate humans from other animals. The life of nutrition and growth is shared by plants; the life of sense-perception is also shared by animals. The uniqueness of human being is to have a thinking soul. It is the humans who only acquire the rational element in himself. Thus the human good lies in the activity of the soul in the sense of being obedient to a rational principle or of the capacity to understand such a principle. Happiness can be achieved through acting in accordance with reason. Moreover, he claims that the good life of man is ‘an activity of the soul in accordance with excellence’ (virtue).<sup>9</sup> I would like to use the term ‘excellence’ rather than ‘virtue’ as this term is used in the traditional translation.

To clarify the excellences of the human soul, Aristotle has discussed about two elements of the soul. Conflict in human soul generally arises as a clash between these two elements, between the rational and irrational element of the soul. The rational element is one that is capable to discover the rational principle for itself. The irrational element is also divided into two parts: the first is the nutritive or the vegetative part of the soul which acts independently of any such principle and by which the living beings live and grow. It is vegetative in nature and is the cause of nutrition and growth. This is common to all full-grown creatures and not considered as any special power of human beings. It is the nutritive faculty of the soul which seems to function most in sleep where goodness and badness are hardly manifested. But a small extent of this faculty is manifested in dream and makes the dream of good man better than

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<sup>7</sup> Though modern Aristotelian translators think that it is not a satisfactory translation. Living well and doing well seems to be a correct English translation of the term

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. & ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), 24

ordinary man. The other irrational element of the soul, however, shares a rational principle. This part is the appetitive or the desiring part of the soul. It is praiseworthy that the soul of the continent and the incontinent person both have that part of the soul which consists of such a rational principle. But beside the rational principle, this part consists of emotions and desires as natural element. This irrational element of the soul may follow a rational principle or it may try to disobey reason. The impulses of the incontinent person move this element of the soul in the contrary direction which is termed as the faculty of desire.<sup>10</sup> Even this part of the soul has the capacity to follow the rational principle, but the person may not follow reason spontaneously as his desires contradict his reason. Continent person (or the self-controlled man) obeys the rational principle out of obligation, but in the temperate or brave man (or the virtuous man) the natural element or impulses are virtuous and so follow the rational principle without any conflict. It is a kind of harmony between the rational and the desiring part of the soul in case of the virtuous person as both synchronises with each other.

Depending on the elements of the soul, we can now explore the Aristotelian division of the soul that can be distinguished into two parts:

- (i) The ‘reason-in-itself’ part or the virtues of intellect
- (ii) The ‘listens to reason’ part or that ‘partake in reason in a way’ or the virtues of character

The appetition in general is termed as emotions characterizes as ‘feelings (*pathē*) accompanied by pleasure or pain’ that includes desire (*epithumia*), anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hatred, jealousy, pity etc.<sup>11</sup> This feeling part of the soul may contradict with reason-in-itself part of the soul as it has emotions and desires, the part which is not capable to have reason, though it can follow reason. Simple bodily desires (*epithumia*) such as hunger, thirst which

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 24-27

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 35-36

arise from bodily states are contained in feelings. But the notion of feeling must be clarified. Feeling does not denote the desire for food or drink only. Feelings, in Aristotle's terminology, has a more complex denotation; for it arises in reaction to a thought of specific kind which gives rise to a desire of a specific kind of action and at the same time are accompanied by a feeling which is associated with a physical state. These physiologically based, appetitive desires are the instances of non-rational desires. Capacity for having such desires is a unique rational capacity of human beings (but not other animals) because it is capable of possessing rational power of the soul. It means two things: firstly, a person can experience these desires which has got its shape through his reasoned judgements. So, these desires are reflected by the rational capability. Secondly, the non-rational desires also follow these reasoned judgements that conforms to the substantive standards and thus requirements of reason are correctly employed here. When these two factors are achieved, then the non-rational desires experienced by a person can be properly described as rational activities since their experience are grasped by our rational ability. Therefore, reason is being exercised in two distinct faculties: first is the 'reason in itself' where reason acts in pure form following its own standard and second is in addition of the appetitive desire itself. The appetitive desire is considered as an exercise of reason since it follows reason.<sup>12</sup> The capability of experiencing non-rational desires following the path of reason is coined by Aristotle as practical wisdom that considers reason in calculative and deliberative sense and it also engages in action. It belongs to the virtuous character of the soul where the capability for experiencing non-rational desires itself qualifies as a rational power. Virtues of character, according to Aristotle, are neither acquired by nature, nor by teaching, but by habituation. The term 'character' (*ēthos*) is derived from habit. There are three things that can occur in a soul: feelings, capacities and dispositions or states. Virtue is considered not as a feeling, or a capacity, but as a state or disposition. These occur in that part

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<sup>12</sup> John M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

of the soul which can listen to reason or that has feelings but does not have ‘reason in itself’. However, the nature of reason (both theoretical and practical) is elucidated in the virtues of intellect, but the application of reason with emotion (that is the sphere of morality) is included in the virtues of character. So, to explore the nature of practical wisdom (*Phronēsis*) in the Aristotelian framework, I would like to investigate both virtues of character and virtues of intellect part of the soul.

In a conflict between reason and desire two faculties have their own ways. Reason wins in case of a self-controlled (strong-willed) man; desire wins for the man who lacks self-control (weak-willed). But both of them cannot be considered as virtuous person in the Aristotelian framework. To be a virtuous person, he has to maintain a harmonious psyche. There must be a harmony between reason and emotion. As he possesses rational emotions, there cannot be any conflict between his reason statement and his emotions. But the weak-willed person always be driven by his emotions and cannot identify the reason statement. For strong-willed man (*enkratēs*), as emotions are not virtuous, it can guide him to one direction though reason pulls him to another direction. He is not a wise person, even if he always obeys the reason, but there is every possibility to be misled by his emotions. These emotions are not rational emotions and so the conflict remains for him. Since he is self-controlled, his reason always wins at last. Being a self-controlled person, he always makes his choices based on his reason statement and disobeys the call of emotions. Though certainly he occupies a higher rank than a vicious person and a weak-willed person, but he cannot be considered as a virtuous person as his reason and feeling do not cooperate with each other and a clash between them always persists. As virtue is a disposition with regard to feelings, these feelings should be in harmony with reason and then it spontaneously leads to the right action. Bostock interprets that “virtue of character is,

then, a disposition to have the right feelings, and at the same time for those feelings to be in harmony with reason, so that they lead naturally to the right actions.”<sup>13</sup>

Aristotle opines that the moral activities are the functions of the desiring part of the soul. The desire part does ‘partake in reason in a way’ since it can oppose reason and can also obey it and for the virtuous person, it is in harmony with reason. Unlike Aristotle, David Hume has a quite different attitude towards this conflict of reason and passion. He advocates that reason is entirely different from passion, where passion consists of any kinds of desire. Reason, according to him, can calculate the desired consequence of action, but it cannot by itself motivate a person to choose the way of acting as it does not include any kind of desire for these consequences. So, for Hume, there cannot be any kind of conflict between reason and desire (termed as passion by Hume); rather ‘reason is and ought to be the slave of passions’.<sup>14</sup> But Aristotle thinks conflicts between reason and desire is obvious if the dispositions of the agent are not virtuous. Suppose I desire to drink, but my reason instructs me not to do it since it is harmful for my health. Though this desire part of the soul does not have reason-in-itself, but it is capable to listen the reason. It can be said that Aristotle places Humean passion (or desire) under reason so that the pre-dominance of reason can be established easily. For virtuous person emotions does not contradict reason, rather acts harmoniously with reason. Aristotle defines appetite (*orexis*) both as physical (bodily) and rational desires: physical desires consist of desire for food and drink; however rational desires include long-term desires for honour or virtue.<sup>15</sup> To outline the framework of practical wisdom or excellence (*phronēsis*), Aristotle begins his discussion with the distinction between theoretical and practical excellences. These are the two main excellences or virtues of the reasoning part of the soul and Aristotle frames

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<sup>13</sup> David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38

<sup>14</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. ed. L.A. Selby -Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 217

<sup>15</sup> David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 33-34

these two in an independent manner as in principle they are quite self-sufficient. It is evident from his magnum opus *The Nicomachean Ethics* that it is practical wisdom or excellence and not the theoretical excellence that is relevant to determine the conduct in a practical situation. Practical excellence, for him, is also quite different from the technical reason that is employed in a craft or skill (*techne*). Now, we are going to deal with virtues of intellect part of the soul which is subdivided by Aristotle into theoretical knowledge or theoretical reason and practical knowledge or practical reason. *Sophia* and *phronēsis* respectively refer to theoretical and practical parts of the reasoning soul. The distinction between theoretical and practical part of the soul is necessary since each deal with different objects - theoretical reason deals with the facts that are necessary and universal truths only; whereas practical reason concerns with the particular and contingent circumstances as it deals with practical life actions.

## II

### ***Sophia* or Theoretical Excellence (or wisdom)**

The reason which we apply to obtain the knowledge about the possible world or phenomena is defined in terms of *sophia* or theoretical wisdom. Socrates considers this wisdom as the divine part of the soul which resembles to God, because this part actually helps to know the agent himself as well as the world.<sup>16</sup> Aristotle restricts the term to the virtues of theoretical part of the soul. David Ross, one of the eminent translators, prefers the term as ‘philosophic wisdom’<sup>17</sup>, but David Bostock translates the term as theoretical wisdom or reason. Both these translators have their own interpretations of the term which is intertwined to each other and have quite similar connotations. In my understanding, there is a hierarchical difference between the two as theoretical knowledge is derived from philosophic wisdom. Philosophic wisdom,

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<sup>16</sup> Burkhard Reis, ed., *The Virtuous Life in Greek Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 43

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 144-146

according to Ross, is the union of intuitive reason and science. The most finished form of knowledge, philosophic wisdom, not only follows from the first principles, but must also possess the truth of the first principles. It is the task of the scientific knowledge to search for the truth of the first principle that is considered as the highest objects by nature and obtained through intuitive reason. *Nous* can be used as a synonym of philosophic wisdom that means thought or understanding. Its task is to reach the 'first principle' or the ultimate premise or axiom from which theoretical knowledge starts. Philosophic wisdom or *Nous* is the capacity of acquiring the highest knowledge of the truth of the first principle. The *epistēmē* or knowledge, according to him, is termed as knowledge proper since it is always about the knowledge of the universals, and not the particulars. Thales, Anaxagoras and philosophers like them have philosophic wisdom as they are concerned with the concept of good rather than seeking human goods. It is not the art of politics or practical wisdom that is considered as the highest knowledge. It means that what is practical wisdom may vary from man to man, but wisdom (the concept) is always same to all, objectively true. Practical wisdom is possessed by those who have the power of foresight with regard to their own life. All animals cannot possess philosophic wisdom as it is the highest form of knowledge in combination with intuitive reason.

Theoretical reason is concerned with matters of fact and their explanation. It helps to decide future on the basis of analysing the past. It treats the issues in impersonal terms or in principle that are accessible to anyone. Objectivity is certainly sustained when we are dealing with impersonal attitudes in the field of reasoning. This kind of reasoning finds paradigmatic expression in the natural and social sciences. An instance of theoretical reason, such as '7+5=12' gives one a reason for believing something. Theoretical reason, according to Aristotle, deals with necessary truths and so concerns with universals. The main areas of

theoretical reason are natural sciences, i.e., mathematics, physics, biology, psychology etc.<sup>18</sup> It involves two main abilities: first the ability to deduce the conclusions from premises and second the ability to grasp those ultimate premises from which the deduction starts. So here the knowledge is gained following the method of deduction. In geometry, mathematics, physics, biology knowledge starts from necessary axioms that reflect universal truths and proceeds purely by deduction from these axioms. So the conclusions are also necessary and it cannot be otherwise. The knowledge of the conclusion is deduced from the universal and necessary premises. That is why theoretical knowledge is concerned about universals only, and not particulars. This knowledge is necessary that holds for everyone, for all places, for all times and so it cannot be otherwise.

### III

#### ***Phronēsis* or Practical Excellence (or wisdom)**

Apart from the world of limited phenomena there is another intelligible world which is the world of morality, where we initiate to act on the basis of assuming something. If we are only capable to possess theoretical reason for experiencing the world of limited phenomena, we would not be able to cope up with the moral standards and as a result, moral activities would be impossible. Practical wisdom is concerned with things which are possible to deliberate. Practical wisdom is possessed by those who are capable of deliberating well about the good that can be attained in future by performing moral actions. No one deliberates about the things that are either invariable and necessary or impossible to deliberate. Therefore, since scientific knowledge includes demonstration and one cannot demonstrate things of which the first principle is a variable (that can be otherwise), and since it is impossible to deliberate about

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<sup>18</sup> David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 75-76

things that are necessary, practical wisdom is different from scientific knowledge. Practical wisdom cannot be similar to science because there is always a chance for being otherwise; it is not compared with art also as it is related with an action that brings moral good. Practical wisdom is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act in regard to the things that are good or bad for man.<sup>19</sup> Aristotle emphasizes only on practical reason and not on theoretical reason since he considers life not as a mere disposition to believe certain things, but as an activity that manifests that disposition. The good man, according to him, is one who lives his life well with virtue or excellence (*aretē*). Virtue is the perfect disposition of the soul that constitutes the rational power or the ability to reason. However, morality deals with human character and that is the reason of inclusion of the ideal or ‘ought’ as the main object of discussion here. Moral laws are prescribed as ‘ought’; here actions are not compelled, but suggested as ‘ought’. So a person’s character and his outlook towards the society seek much attention and care. To deal with this evaluative attitude of morality, we need to possess practical reason apart from theoretical where the latter is not at all sufficient for morality. The task of practical reason is to formulate arguments to determine actions. In the moral sphere practical reason of a person has the autonomy to formulate the law for him. This is the necessity of practical reason in the field of morality. It plays an important role in moral decision-making procedure. It ultimately leads the agent to do some act guided by the moral standards. Aristotle defines it as that deals with facts which are contingent and could be otherwise, since it must take into account the particular situation of an agent. Practical wisdom is not at all concerned with universals only, it must also recognize the particulars, since it is practical and practice is concerned with particulars. Ross explains its character very nicely. He thinks it is the reason that designates an experienced person as more practical than a person who only possesses theoretical knowledge. Knowing how is more important than knowing that in the arena of morality. For instance, a man knows

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 142

that light meat is digestible and wholesome to maintain good health, but if he does not know which meat is light and wholesome, then he would not be able to apply his knowledge to keep good health. The practically wise man must know that chicken is light and wholesome to protect health. Thus practically wise man is capable to apply his knowledge.<sup>20</sup> But to apply the knowledge he must have the theoretical knowledge too. So though both the knowledge have their own independent area of application, but they require the assistance of one another for living a good life.

Practical wisdom is concerned with action and so it is more or less associated with agent's intention, desire, decision which lead to action. The main difference is that in theoretical reason, the aim is simply truth but in practical reason it is 'truth in agreement with correct desire'.<sup>21</sup> According to Aristotle, the presence of desire (*orexis*) makes the difference between theoretical and practical case and this happens since action follows from choice which is a combination of reason and desire. To Aristotle these desires are essentially based on beliefs. The belief that the agent has about a situation influences him to take the decision. These beliefs are operative and motivate us to choose our actions. The literal meaning of the word 'choice' is 'choice-beforehand' and Aristotle explains it as a 'thought-out choice'. The reason involved in choice is what he calls *deliberation*. This deliberation is the mark of practical wisdom that distinguishes it from what Aristotle calls knowledge (*epistēmē*). *Epistēmē* is entirely concerned about what is demonstrable and that is why it cannot be otherwise; whereas practical wisdom includes deliberation and that can be otherwise.<sup>22</sup> There are two things given in deliberation: an end or goal, and the circumstance in which the agent is presently situated – these make certain courses of action possible and others not. The deliberation is then an enquiry about

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<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 146

<sup>21</sup> David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics*, 79

<sup>22</sup> Norman O. Dahl, "Aristotle on Action, Practical Reason and Weakness of the Will", *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Georgios Anagnostopoulos, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 501-506

which action is possible in a particular circumstance to bring out the desired goal. So desire becomes very essential because to say that something is an end or goal is to say that it is desired. When the deliberation is completed and points towards a particular course of action, then this also is desired, because it is now seen as the only way of achieving what is desired. That is how a deliberative choice, in its true sense, combines both reason and desire that directly leads to action. In practice Aristotle speaks of something ‘chosen’ even though nothing can be called ‘deliberation’. Virtuous person chooses an act where he does not need any kind of deliberation at all, since there is no contradiction between choice and deliberation for him. He emphasizes on the ‘virtues of character’ where he defines virtue in terms of disposition.

Aristotle distinguishes between virtue and practical wisdom because he opines that virtue provides an agent the right ends whereas practical wisdom yields the right means as well as the right ends. Virtue is a disposition that manifests in habitual actions which is necessary to choose what is in a mean. But the possession of only such a disposition leads to inaction because virtue is neither a feeling nor a capacity. A person needs something else before acting on a given virtue. The agent must recognize that there are particular means at hand for acting on that virtue. He needs to acquire those means that are, in spite of other ends, necessary to pursue on that occasion. This belongs to the scope of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom, thus, involves means in a way which is different from virtue. This allows Aristotle to differentiate between virtue and practical wisdom by pointing out that virtue is always concerned with the right ends, whereas practical wisdom (in part) provides the right ends with the right means.<sup>23</sup> Though Aristotle distinguishes between two excellences – intellectual excellence and moral excellence; one cannot conclude that theoretical and practical excellences are completely dissociated from each other. Making a belief of what is the right action and to act towards the

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<sup>23</sup> Norman O. Dahl, “Aristotle on Action, Practical Reason and Weakness of the Will”, 502

end are interconnected and so theoretical and practical reasoning simultaneously lead to perform the action. Here reasoning is the act of applying moral reason to justify an agent's moral action. From this Aristotelian account of the reasoning soul, the theory of virtue establishes the objectivity involving agent's own consideration. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides us some fixed virtues including courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, pride, honour, good temper, friendliness, truthfulness, wit, friendship, justice.<sup>24</sup> Here his contention is to show that these are the dispositions one can acquire in his character to be a virtuous person. The idea of the virtuous person or the ideal person suggests that there are some kinds of dispositions which every person should acquire to make a moral decision. He opines that a virtue of character is a disposition in which there is a harmony between reason and the correct feelings. Practical reason, as it deals with particular actions, is one of the most essential conceptions in Aristotelian virtue theory.

#### IV

### **Distinction between *Sophia* and *Phronēsis***

From the previous discussion, we have come to know that *sophia*, *nous*, *episteme* are all rational states; whereas *phronēsis* differs from them in this respect, as it is not merely a rational state. To rephrase it, there is something more in *phronēsis* than the cognitive meaning. According to contemporary interpretations of the Aristotelian thesis, moral utterances have both emotive and imperative meaning. Attitude to consider ethical utterances having an emotive-imperative meaning rejects the view that believes that moral utterances have cognitive-descriptive meaning. Although Aristotle does not consider these two as contraries; but he thinks that while conveying an emotive-imperative meaning the ethical utterance also

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<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

describes the truth value of the statement and is also accepted by the agent as ought. In this respect, Aristotle can be compared with Kant, as we know that Kant considers ethical sentences as imperatives where the agent should have respect for the moral law. Thus an impartial ethical utterance expresses respect and also reflects the absolute truth. From the emotive sense, Aristotle opines that we can forget the scientific or theoretical propositions; but it is impossible to forget moral propositions as morality is deeply rooted in human nature.<sup>25</sup> It means that we cannot forget virtues, although we can forget scientific propositions. One may forget dates, parts of the multiplication table, but we do not find a man who has forgotten his moral convictions. It can be said that a man has abandoned his moral conviction, but who has abandoned his moral conviction may still remember his propositional content. Abandonment does not indicate forgetting. Abandonment is a ceasing of belief that does not imply forgetting of moral convictions; since moral conviction involves caring for something.

Aristotle criticizes Socrates for reducing all moral virtues to instances of *phronēsis* and thinks that moral virtue and *phronēsis* are different, rather they are actually interdependent. There is no moral virtue without *phronēsis*, nor does *phronēsis* exist without moral virtue. Here this second part of the proposition is interesting; since the dependence is intrinsic, and not causal. *Phronēsis* consists of some aspects of virtue. As Aristotle declares, virtue makes our ends right. It does not mean that the rightness of an action depends on our subjective attitudes; rather it is because “moral virtue is a disposition which is in accordance with the right rule. This right rule is that which is in accordance with practical wisdom”.<sup>26</sup> So, virtue contributes an emotive element to *phronēsis*, i.e., virtue prepares us to prefer the good, and such preference is a part of *phronēsis*. There is another faculty called cleverness which is not a moral virtue. In relation to *phronēsis*, Aristotle distinguishes between the two, yet *phronēsis* cannot exist

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<sup>25</sup> Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 143

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 157

without cleverness. *Phronēsis* seems to be a transformation of cleverness and this conversion is occurred due to moral virtue. Cleverness is intelligence without any sense of good; virtue converts cleverness into *phronēsis* by attaching a sense of good with it.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, by explaining the notion of preference as the component of *phronēsis*, Aristotle tries to explicate that moral utterance has emotive components.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explicitly characterizes ethical sentences as imperatives. *Phronēsis*, in contrast to theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), commands, tells us what to do and what not to do. It means that with the help of moral wisdom, we decide our moral procedures. *Sophia* is concerned with affirming and denying, whereas *phronēsis* with pursuing and avoiding. *Sophia* is a kind of speculative excellence, embodying the spectator's attitude, but *phronēsis* is practical that aims at action. Theoretical excellence aims at discovering what is the case, but practical excellence is concerned with what to do to attain moral values as ends. According to Aristotle, the purpose of *phronēsis* is not to develop our theoretical understanding, rather bringing changes in human conduct. In his magnum opus, he is not explaining ethical problems with the help of a purely theoretical approach; his intention here in this regard is always practical. He draws an analogy between the moralist and the carpenter as both of them are intended to bring changes. The carpenter deals with figures whereas the moralist with actions and both of them have practical aim. In contrast to both of them, the student of geometry is only a spectator of his subject matter.

*Phronēsis*, according to him, makes utterances which are conclusions concerning moral decisions like what I should do here and now. Conclusions are basically deductions from a moral syllogism. Raphael Demos emphasizes that the imperatives are conclusions; in other words, they are rational, rationally justifiable and based on reasons. There is a general premise

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<sup>27</sup> Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Ross, 156-157

stating a rule and the minor premise is factual and its task is to bring a particular action under the general rule. As a reason, minor premise is an empirical reason and the major premise is a universal imperative. Major premise is a moral principle, for instance, courageous action is good. Thus, the justification of a particular imperative consists in the appeal to moral principle and not deduced from an empirical fact. The question is how do we get the moral principle? Is it a result of empirical generalization? In Aristotle's system it is not at all clear whether moral principles are derived at all or not and secondly, Aristotle cannot even prove the causal connection between moral principles and the considerations relevant to the human happiness. According to Demos the question is what would be the major premise? Is it empirically constituted? 'All men desire happiness' – from this statement the supreme moral principle or imperative has been drawn as 'All men have a duty to seek happiness'.

Aristotle indifferently speaks of two kinds of conclusions: one is imperatives and the other is decisions or choices. Sequentially, imperatives come first in order as I should act like this; then I have to take decision that I will act like this and then finally I perform the action. All these three steps would seem to be necessary and in Aristotelian doctrine of moral syllogism also these steps are considered as necessary. Yet Aristotle sometimes speaks of the action itself as the conclusion, ignoring the imperative and the decision steps. But perhaps it seems that Aristotle is not denying the existence of these intermediary steps, he only means that these steps occur implicitly. If there are no external hindrances, *phronēsis* necessarily leads to right action. It is based on the relation between theoretical and practical reason as by applying reason on the right facts we get the conclusion necessarily. Moreover, possession of *phronēsis* guarantees knowing, believing and doing the right thing. It is a fusion of believing, feeling and willing. *Phronēsis* is neither innate nor given by nature. It is something acquired by human endeavour or practice. There is no inborn light of conscience. *Phronēsis* is a *hexis*, habit or an

acquired attitude; basically, it is a result of trying. It is necessary for the existence of virtue and in turn depends on virtue, though is itself considered as intellectual virtue or excellence.<sup>28</sup>

From the above discussion, now I can conclude that this chapter consists of the ancient view of the Greek philosopher Aristotle regarding the nature of practical reason. As he formally framed ethics, his analysis occupies the beginning of my thesis. Although he uses the term wisdom or excellence instead of reason, his main contention is quite clear and it is plausibly a contrasting thesis in comparison to the modern and the contemporary theses regarding the nature of practical reason. *Phronēsis* (practical wisdom) has a very significant and remarkable role in the sphere of moral decision making. He defines *phronēsis* (practical excellence) in contrast to *sophia* (theoretical excellence). In the moral sphere, practical excellence of a person has the autonomy to formulate the law for him. Thus practical excellence ensures the freedom of the agent who himself is capable to decide his own way of living following his own desires that are immensely connected with his own belief system. This is the necessity of practical wisdom in the field of morality that initiates decision-making procedure. It ultimately leads the agent to do some act guided by the moral standards. It is more or less associated with agent's intention, desire, emotions that motivate the agent to perform an action. Though in the contemporary interpretation of the Aristotelian exegesis has drawn a unique picture of his notion of moral syllogism, *phronēsis* occupies the significant place in his thesis. It is also necessary to mention that Aristotle advocates a pre-dominance of reason in his moral theory, yet considers harmonious coexistence of reason and emotion as the prerogative of a happy life. It is also necessary to mention here that Aristotle incorporates emotion in the rational discourse. In spite of prescribing a fixed list of moral virtues, he is presenting a context based moral theory where a moral decision is made based on the demands of the particular situation and the good

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<sup>28</sup> Raphael Demos, "Some Remarks on Aristotle's Doctrine of Practical Reason", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22, no. 2 (December 1961): 153-157, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2104836>

life of a particular being. In his theory, rational justification is decided on the basis of the evaluation of the agent's moral character. However, Aristotle distinguishes between these two excellences; one cannot conclude that theoretical and practical excellences are totally dissociated from each other, because to decide what is right, we need some factual inputs that are provided by theoretical wisdom. Practical wisdom is a reasoned opinion about variable issues; capacity to decide what is good for one's own sake. Virtue is a psychic power or soul power that motivates the agent to fulfil the deliberated goal. A significant change occurs in the behavioural pattern of the person when as a possessor of practical wisdom his virtuous disposition directs him to choose the right thing. But before having the intention to live a happy life, we need to know the meaning of happiness and here lies the importance of theoretical excellence. It is clear that neither theoretical nor practical reason is capable to act independently. Finally, we can comment that he emphasizes much on *phronēsis* since he considers life not as a mere disposition to believe certain things, but meaning of life can be fulfilled through acquiring virtues for upgrading his dispositions. *Phronēsis* is thus can be considered as the source of self-caused moral development because it helps to restructure our beliefs by enlightening us. In the next chapter, I will try to maintain this line of thought and will enter into the discussion of the modern era where German philosopher Immanuel Kant starts his discussion from a different angle. It is also necessary to mention here that they both have started their philosophical exploration of the nature of practical reason from the distinction between theoretical and practical reason, yet they differ from one another in several insights. This is just a glimpse of my 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter and at the time of addressing Kant's thesis I will discuss these notions vividly.

## **Chapter 2:**

# **Pure Practical Reason: Approach of Immanuel Kant**

## Chapter 2

### **Pure Practical Reason: Approach of Immanuel Kant**

In the modern era the issue of practical reason has taken a unique shape in German philosopher Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy as he explains practical reason as a different application or aspect of pure reason. Pure reason can be practical - this seems the chief thesis of Kantian moral philosophy. It means that just like natural laws of factual world there are unconditional practical laws in moral sphere too. In this chapter, my main objective is to understand Kant's interpretation of pure practical reason to show how this reason provides a faculty of unconditional law for guiding voluntary moral actions. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will try to formulate some arguments in favour of Kant's thesis of pure practical reason that might seem to be contrary to both of his predecessors' theses: firstly, the Aristotelian approach which states that reason alone cannot move us towards action, rather virtuous soul insists to do good and secondly, the Humean thesis that suggests that reason is and ought to be the slave of passions.<sup>29</sup> Kant's thesis is completely different from these two views since apart from reason, he does not entertain any other motivating factor in the arena of morality. To be more specific, Kant accepts reason as the only means for moral evaluation. This chapter is divided under four sections. Before entering into Kant's exclusive understanding of the nature of practical reason, his concept of morality should be clarified. He believes that there is no foundation of morality other than the critical examination of practical reason. Practical reason is ultimately one and the same reason as pure theoretical reason (speculative reason) which only differs in its application.<sup>30</sup> So it is also necessary here to understand Kant's notion of theoretical reason.

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<sup>29</sup> Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 41.

<sup>30</sup> Jack Glickman, ed., *Moral Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 395.

Immanuel Kant advocates a comprehensive picture of his moral theory in his pioneer works. His elucidation of pure reason makes the first impression of his moral theory in his first critique. Later in his other significant writings also, he has successfully developed his unique ethical framework. Here, in this chapter, I would like to discuss Kantian moral thesis that is founded on his conception of practical reason. Kant, in his ethical theory, considers agent's intention of moral action as the main object of moral evaluation. He aims to establish the concept of universality in ethical conduct and so objectivity plays an important role in his moral philosophy. He presents a ground-breaking argument that the rightness of an action is determined by the character of the principle that a person is obligated to follow for performing an action. He advocates that reason is the source of morality which is also the motivating factor for being moral. His aim is to impose an obligation on all rational beings for accepting the same moral law as categorical imperative. Categorical imperative directs one to act only according to that concept which is considered as a universal law.<sup>31</sup> Reason by itself yields an objective principle of conduct that is applied independent of individuals' preferences and empirically given aims. It is a principle that is formulated by Kant as the fundamental principle of morality which shows that practical reason is not an instrumental reason, rather it depicts what should be ideally right even if it fails to produce the desired goal. In defining Kantian conception of practical reason, it is very necessary to start the philosophical discussion by elucidating his thesis of theoretical reason following his first Critique as in this Critique he introduces the practical use of reason. In the next section, I would like to discuss about the conception and kinds of practical reason and elaborate a detail exposition of Kant's conception of pure practical reason. Furthermore, it would be necessary to discuss the unity between theoretical reason and practical reason as it is the same pure reason applied differently in two distinct fields. Finally,

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<sup>31</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton, (London: Hutchinson University Press, 1948), 67.

to conclude, it is necessary to show Kant's arguments regarding the primacy of practical reason in the sphere of morality.

## I

### **Theoretical Reason**

The term 'critique' has a significance as it is a critical examination of a cognitive faculty that sets out its powers and limits, and in particular establishes the legitimacy of any a priori concepts and principles. The first Critique is a critical examination of the entire faculty of reason (both theoretical and practical). But the importance of this work has transformed over time. After writing *Groundwork*, he intends to consider it as a critique of pure practical reason. He opines that a critique of pure practical reason is the only foundation for a metaphysics of morals, just as the critique of pure speculative reason is of metaphysics. At the time of dealing with morality, human reason should be elevated to a high degree of correctness and accomplishment, while the theoretical use of reason oversteps its limits to make illusory speculative metaphysical claims.<sup>32</sup> My understanding here is that whenever theoretical reason tries to go beyond its boundaries to acquire knowledge of the noumenal world, the categories which are applied there are the same categories applied within the realm of experience. Various kinds of illusions arise in the knowledge of the noumenal world as there is no corresponding objects to those categories for verification. The detail elaboration of this portion has been done later in this section. The first Critique is considered to be a negative critique as it rejects the pretensions of traditional metaphysics; while the second Critique is concerned with denying the empirical practical reason.<sup>33</sup> In the second Critique, he clarifies that pure practical reason

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<sup>32</sup> Andrews Reath and Jean Timmermann, ed., *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Traditional metaphysics possess the belief that we have knowledge of objects beyond the scope of science. However, speculative metaphysics is not a legitimate part of knowledge; the only metaphysics possible is the

does not require any critical examination. Rather here Kant claims that pure reason can be practical. In order to clarify this, he opines that it suffices to examine practical reason in general. The result of this examination shows that the existence of pure practical reason (not empirical practical reason) is inevitable for morality. It is that kind of application of reason which can provide a proper foundation to morality.

Immanuel Kant, at the time of describing knowledge in his first critique, introduces the concept of reason. *Critique of Pure Reason* focuses on obtaining scientific knowledge as a priori. It is “a critical inquiry into the faculty of reason, with reference to the cognitions to which it strives to attain without the aid of experience.”<sup>34</sup> Empirical knowledge consists of a priori elements. He explores forms of intuition, categories and schemas that organise experience. Nature comprises of various series of phenomena in space and time which are infinitely extendable. The world of which we are conscious, whose framework is constituted by the categories of understanding and whose material is provided by the senses, is the phenomenal world. We locate events and objects of this phenomenal world by two forms of sensibility – space and time. The principle of causality governs our search and arranges the events and facts in a temporal relation. Principles like causality cannot be established with the help of experience. The assumption that every event necessarily and universally has a cause is a prerequisite for science which is hardly proved by experience. For every phenomenon there is other phenomena before it and after it; all of which determine its spatio-temporal position and empirical character. Every cause is likewise an effect and every law seems to be a special case of a more general law. In Kant’s view these principles are fixed forms provided by reason itself and the indispensable basis of any possible experience. The sensory material comes to us

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immanent metaphysics; i.e., the systematic exposition of the a priori principles within the scope of experience and of the regulative Ideas are possible. Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*, 24.

<sup>34</sup>Abraham Edel, Elizabeth Flower and Finbarr W. O’Connor, ed., *Morality, Philosophy and Practice* (New York: Random House, 1989), 326.

from outside, but it seems blind without forms; similarly, forms are empty until provided with sensory material.<sup>35</sup>

In Kantian metaphysics, knowledge about the world of experience is acquired through pure reason. The nature of this knowledge is synthetic a priori. Knowledge, apart from sensibility and understanding, also requires reason to explore the experiences of the world. Reason systematizes thought and removes all its incompleteness and other drawbacks. In reasoning, we travel from partial knowledge to complete knowledge. In his work, Kant is trying to determine the limit and scope of pure reason which is the source of principles of understanding and of speculative metaphysics.<sup>36</sup> In his view, pure reason helps to grasp the ultimate, systematic and absolute understanding of phenomenal objects. Pure reason does not depend on empirical knowledge to formulate the categories of understanding; it is that intuitive form of knowledge which is capable to articulate the highest form of knowledge. This reason is the foundation of the unconditioned knowledge which is self-justifying; it justifies everything and not conditioned by anything else. In his magnum opus *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant uses it as theoretical reason which defines scientific knowledge as a priori. To acquire knowledge, categories can be applied to the sensible objects. Science has the biggest opportunity and capability to explore the world of phenomena, as well as the different faculties have the capacity to participate in the construction of the phenomenal world. Theoretical reason, in the field of science, attempts to organize our knowledge into a logically rigorous system which provides us explanations for phenomena. Science works with fewer assumptions as the most successful scientific theory explains facts with few assumptions. But the science of nature has explained everything with the help of assumptions. The fundamental propositions

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<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Preface), (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1929), 93.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence C. Becker & Charlotte B. Becker, *Encyclopaedia of Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, II, (New York & London: Routledge, 2001).

in the science of nature are considered to be fundamental as we do not know how to explain them and we accept them as assumptions. Nature cannot provide any final answer to the questions we usually ask her as it is based on assumptions. Science defers from nature as it is said in the sphere of nature that this is the way things are; things might be otherwise, but there is no ultimate reason for things to be otherwise.

For searching the final answer, philosophers always think to go beyond the knowledge of nature. To get the complete knowledge, theoretical reason must become speculative reason and leaving the sphere of physics, it enters in the realm of metaphysics. Metaphysics is the product of speculative reason, and it consists of knowledge of things as they are. It is the noumenal world that can explain the reason of being things appear as they are. Speculative reason that goes beyond the phenomenal world has no connection with the empirical knowledge of the world. But as it is a way of thinking, it still uses the categories of thought. The result, however, is the emptiness of thought without perceptual content (things). It cannot be considered as knowledge, for a category can be applied in a definite way to an object only through sensuous representation. The categories, therefore, while insist us to think of the supersensible objects, do not permit us to know them. So, we have to accept that knowledge of a world of reality, i.e., the world of noumena, is not possible without the knowledge of phenomena, though our thinking of the noumenal world is not an idle fantasy. The categories themselves and their systematic unity determine the concepts of objects that are used to complete the search for ultimate principles which is capable to explain everything. We are not just permitted to think of the soul, God, and the world as a whole as objects of our experience; we are compelled to do so if we can apply the principles of our experience to the supersensible realm. The categories become Ideas of reason in the supersensible world and are considered as pure reason. Ideas are concepts to which no object of the senses can be adequate; but they are not useless. They regulate the orderly pursuit of the whole. But if they are thought to be the

Ideas that correspond with objects as they really are in the sensible world, there arise various kinds of illusions.<sup>37</sup>

Kant in his first *Critique* elaborates and examines these concepts and principles of pure reason. It is the limitation of our capacity to gain knowledge about the world which is beyond our experience. The impossibility of acquiring knowledge about the unknown and unknowable noumenal or transcendental world is considered as the limitation of our knowledge capacity. This limitation of our knowledge delimits the scope of morality and also of the scope of religion as Kant thinks that it is a realm of faith. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says that “I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith.”<sup>38</sup> The knowledge of the existence of God, immortality of the soul and the freedom of will is not permissible since at the same time speculative reason lacks the perceptual content and for its pretensions of having transcendent insight. We have to believe about the limitations of our knowledge capacity. These are the demands of morality and religion which are later considered to be the three postulates of morality. Kant speaks of the moral law and argues that religion alone cannot give it to us. Because knowledge of the moral law is based on purely rational grounds and is presupposed by the knowledge of God, the perfect moral being. Kant’s ethical exposition is not mainly the formulation and the application of a single basic moral law; it is a rich, detail discussion in which morality demands improvement of our own character as well as of our relationship with others. It cannot be achieved in one cycle of life and so he admits continuous life cycle. It is a continuous process in which we try to make us perfect beings by controlling our emotions and performing duties for the sake of duty. It is a progression or becoming of self that presupposes the immortality of the self. There are two goals that can be achieved by the moral idea of Kant – the perfection of our own self and to bring happiness for

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<sup>37</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*, 23-24.

<sup>38</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Smith, 29.

others.<sup>39</sup> Such idea reminds us about Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* and John Stuart Mill's idea of well-being for all. Though all these three philosophers belong to different camps due to variance in their basic moral concepts, but in their systematic understanding of ethics they all have tried to answer a vital question 'how we ought to live'. The main task of morality, according to Immanuel Kant, is to distinguish between the two aspects of one and the same reason – theoretical aspect and practical aspect and to show the significance of practical reason in the sphere of morality. We, human beings, are not only knowers, but also agents. We perform actions and these actions can be justified as morally good or bad. Kant actually thinks that all beings act due to some instinct which is governed by the natural law. But the distinctive feature of human beings is that they inherit rationality or reason. The question of morality arises only for the human beings since they are the only beings who can exercise reason or rationality. But we are not perfect rational beings, rather we are imperfect beings because we have desires, inclinations. Because of these subjective inclinations, we sometimes perform wrongly. Kant also admits that we have moral consciousness and that is why we have the sense of 'ought'. We usually understand that we ought to do it, though fail to do it due to our inclinations. The question of duty coexists with moral consciousness in us and the sense of ought belongs to us.

There are contradictions regarding the nature of self in the phenomenal world, whereas in the noumenal world the very same self does not entertain any kind of contradiction. In the second edition, Kant opines that in the phenomenal world, everything is determined by causality which is a law of nature. Psychology is the study of mind that is guided by the law of causality; therefore, there is no room for freedom. But morality demands freedom, because without freedom, we cannot be regarded as a responsible agent for an action. Action cannot be justified as morally good or bad without the freedom of the agent. Now a self can be free and

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Heath and J.B.Schneewind ed., *Immanuel Kant: Lectures on Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Introduction, XVI & XVII.

cannot be free at the same time. Here lies the contradiction. Kant opines that the Copernican revolution prescribes two different aspects that can solve this contradiction regarding freedom. From the theoretical aspect, the phenomenal self is guided by the natural laws for acquiring knowledge of the phenomenal world. As this is guided by unchangeable law, self cannot be considered as free. The same self, on the contrary, can be considered as free when we observe this self from its practical aspect. The self is considered as the real self or the noumenal or transcendental self from the practical aspect. This is the field of morality where it is legitimate to think that 'I am free'. Here freedom is a possibility. "Morality does not, indeed, require that freedom should be understood, but only that it should not contradict itself..."<sup>40</sup> Thus the same self is free as well as lacks freedom. My understanding is that as self has two different functions – knowing the fact and performing action, in actuality there is no contradiction since these two aspects of self are considered from two different perspectives. The theoretical self, as bounded by the law of nature, is unfree. However, the Idea of freedom is engrossed in the realm of morality which belongs to the practical self (real self). This real self cannot be known, but can be a subject of faith. We cannot know the freedom of the real self, but it can be contemplated. Morality does not claim that the Idea of freedom should be understood (known), rather it should not contain any kind of contradiction in itself.

These illustrations are necessarily re-examined by him in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* and later in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant regards it as essential to his purpose to show that there are consistency and mutual support from the doctrines of *Foundations* and *The Critique of Practical Reason* and these texts provide additional support to his findings of the first *Critique*. Therefore, by re-evaluating the main concepts and principles of pure reason, the thesis of pure practical reason emerges. Practical reason can be

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<sup>40</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans, Smith, 29.

compared and connected and also can be properly distinguished from the theoretical reason. In this way the unity between theoretical and practical reason can be established. Kant in both his works *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* shows that there is an unconditional necessity in the moral law which is an a priori synthetic practical proposition. It is possible if and only if the will is a free cause; “there really is freedom, for this idea is revealed by the moral law”.<sup>41</sup> Freedom is an indispensable foundation of morality. Free will is implicit in the moral judgement. If a person is not able to act otherwise, he cannot be considered as responsible for his action. If the nature of his action is entirely regulated by a causal affair, just as science explains the nature of every phenomenon, then morality has no scope to evaluate that and in that case moral judgements become meaningless, irrelevant. Freedom is an integral part of practical reason in the realm of morality. In connection to freedom, he defines the postulates of a practical and rational faith which are necessary to make the moral experience fully intelligible. They are rational and there is no possibility of subjective interventions.

## II

### **Pure Practical Reason**

The striking feature of Kant’s ethical theory is his uncompromising insistence that moral judgement must always be based on reason alone. According to him, morality provides the ground for religion. For him, moral being is rational being and to be a religious being, one should be a moral being. So, Kant tries to find out the supreme principle of morality and reason is considered as the ground of morality. We can say that acting morally is equivalent to acting rationally. Kant’s entire system of morality is based upon a rejection of Hume’s claim. Hume

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<sup>41</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*, 27.

argues that reason is subordinate to feeling and reason has only an instrumental role in practical deliberation. It is the desire that sets our goals and reason simply enables us to choose the means to achieve those goals. For Kant, reason makes us capable to be moral. Animals who possess instincts rather than reason are not capable to be moral. Denying Hume's claim Kant argues that only reason can set goals and that reason is particularly required to achieve those goals independent of our desires. He finds Hume's naturalism as thoroughly unacceptable since in Hume's view moral judgements are grounded on human sentiments. If it is so, Kant argues, then what is morally right would vary depending on individual's sentiments. Kant maintains that the fundamental principle of morality must be same for all rational beings regardless of their particular feelings, desires and situations. The conviction underlying Kantian thought is that any moral theory (e.g., Hume's theory) that is grounded on sentiments, neglects the question of freedom of action. Morality presupposes human freedom. A person's duty is to act morally means there is a kind of free will of that person to perform his duty. Kant opines that the person is not compelled to do the right action, rather he is naturally motivated by reason since he is a rational being. But if morality is founded on sentiments rather than reason, Kant thinks, then we are not really free and autonomous moral agents; instead, we are slaves to our inclinations and desires and our actions are entirely conditioned by our psychological and physiological makeup and the environment. Kant believes that morality is a priori and to investigate morals, we need to look at pure practical reason. Morality would hold not just for beings like us, it is for all rational beings. The moral law must be sought a priori, independent of the peculiarities of our nature.<sup>42</sup> In this section, we will try to elaborate the Kantian thesis of pure practical reason to understand the role of this reason as the foundation of morality. It is evident that the moral laws must be applied to every rational being, and therefore must be derived from the very conception of a rational being as such. The fundamental laws of morality

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<sup>42</sup> Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals* (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 81.

are the same for every rational being since the ultimate criterion of rightness is deducible from the concept of a rational being as such. We will discuss here how Kant's exposition of pure practical reason relates rational compulsion to freedom of will of the agent.

**II.1 Freedom of Will** - Kant advocates that the action is a product of choice or decision of the agent which goes through the process of rationalization.<sup>43</sup> After the choice is made, laws may be cited to justify the intention and expectation of the agent. There might be agreements and disagreements regarding the inner thoughts and struggles of the agent, but the laws are sufficient to prove that his action falls into a pattern that applies to human beings in general. Decision of the agent is the result of his deliberation. This deliberation proves that he is free and not wholly determined by causes beyond his control. The agent has a control on things and events. The conception of an objective law of nature leads an agent to act in accordance with his belief; a person will not jump from a hill, for he is aware that if he jumps from a certain height, he will be injured. Freedom plays a prominent role in establishing the authority of the moral law. Process of deliberation for making moral choice by involving moral law reflects the rational, autonomous controls of one's own mind. Morality has authority only for those who are capable of acting rationally that reflects values. Only being with free will possesses such a capacity; consequently, his authority on morality presupposes his possession of free will. Kant conceives of freedom as independent from natural capacity and also denies the possibility of cognizing freedom.

Kant's demonstration of freedom is associated with its proper dialectical context. He is not worried about the metaphysical doctrine of freedom that undermines the possibility of morality. In his first critique, he has discussed about the metaphysical possibility of freedom which is not applicable to moral sphere and thus has not discussed here. The main tenets of

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<sup>43</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 30.

freedom in his second critique aims at the importance of the authority of the moral law. More specifically, this critique's demonstration of freedom responds to the worries of our will that is empirically conditioned. An empirically conditioned will is limited to means-end deliberation where ends are grounded on sensible interests and motivations are boosted by those ends. We perform actions just to fulfil the wished ends, for the sake of the end only, for the fulfilment of subjective interests. Such wills lack the capacity to act on the basis of pure practical principles. So, Kant's response is that if we are controlled by empirically conditioned wills, we cannot act morally. Then moral obligation would be a mere illusion. In the second critique, Kant identifies freedom with the capacity to regulate one's will by pure rational principles and to act independent of sensible interests. Since acting morally means acting freely by constructing a moral will, it focuses on our capacity for freedom. Pure reason is practical, when it determines a will; and as Kant defines, a free will is determined by pure practical reason. Pure practical reason can normatively determine the will as it consists of pure practical principles which involves choice. These choices, independent of sensibility, are guided by pure practical principles. These choices are capable to move us to act in a way specified by the principles.<sup>44</sup>

It is not enough to ascribe freedom to our own will. We must have sufficient reason to announce that all rational beings are free. Freedom of will must be equally valid for all rational beings, since it is derived from the property of freedom. Since freedom is a property of the will of all rational beings, it is not enough to demonstrate freedom from certain alleged experiences of human nature. It is necessary to prove that it belongs universally to the activity of the will of rational beings. From the practical point of view, every being who acts from this idea of freedom is actually free.<sup>45</sup> Moral action is equated with free action and in turn with rationally

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<sup>44</sup> Benjamin S. Yost, "Kant's Demonstration of Free Will, Or, How to Do Things with Concepts", *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 2, no.02 (2016): 291–309, <https://doi.org/10.1017/APA.2016.12>

<sup>45</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 108-109.

caused action. For Kant, there is no contradiction between moral obligation and free choice. Rather the former implies the latter, as moral obligation means to be obligated to the pure practical principles which are grounded on choice. If moral right and wrong is determined by moral obligations for humans, then it cannot be determined by inclinations. Acts of desire are not the case of genuine freedom. Desires and inclinations, according to Kant, are thoroughly a part of the causally determined nature as we experience it. Free action cannot be determined by desire, but it is performed with the guidance of reasons. Free action is a rational action as it is not happening by chance or accidentally without any presence of law. Free action is intelligible and can be understood in terms of reasons. It is initiated with the strength of reason to follow law. Though it must conform to laws, but the nature of moral law is different from the physical laws of nature. Contrary to natural law, these laws provide the scope of selecting the right option. In this sense freedom of the will is nothing but autonomy, autonomy to cultivate the will as the law. To act or will according to law, for Kant, is to act rationally and thus free will is a rational will. Morality implies freedom which implies rationality. So, moral actions must be rational. A rational person must be free from the suppressive force of desires and so he is impartial to act morally. In Kant's view a free person is never moved by objects that satisfy his particular desires, but acts on the grounds of such reasons that are equally valid for all rational agents.<sup>46</sup> As all rational beings acquire freedom of will, they are being motivated to act on the same ground. Such impartiality in morality is evident in Kantian moral thought. Thus, rationality implies freedom and consequently it leads to morally right action.

**II.2 Identification of Will with Practical Reason** – It is clear from the above discussion that only rational beings possess free will as they are capable to act morally following impartial, universal, rational laws. In this section, my intention is to find out the nature of the moral reason

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<sup>46</sup>Alan H. Goldman, *Moral Knowledge* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988), 99.

that inspires our will to follow the law by avoiding desires. This rational capacity determines the nature of the will as this reason designs the will as a good will. In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant thinks “Will is the faculty of acting according to a conception of law, which is not a product or discovery of understanding but of reason”.<sup>47</sup> Only a rational being has the faculty of acting in conformity with the idea of moral law or principles and so only a rational being has a will. As without reason actions cannot proceed from laws, will is identified with practical reason. Reason is conceived as interest, a motivating force; whereas will is understood as a rational power. Initially will is structured by the form of law which strives for reaching the goal of universality and shaping the outside world in that manner. For such a will, being rational means to be autonomous, self-regulated and self-made that seeks rationality as end-in-itself. Thus the immanent human will becomes a valid source of norms and values in the field of morality and religion. The finite rational being through such will forms moral precepts. The human will is capable of being conceived as practical reason as the self-guiding, self-motivating rational will strives to actualize the universal structure through his own actions. As practical reason, the will does not recognize a pre-determined thing as good. It constitutes the good as the rational will’s own object. The good does not precede the will rather good is derived from it, as it is an inherent object. The rational will does not simply obey a good passively given to it. Rational will constitutes the good as its own inherent structure and so spontaneously obey it. Kant believes that good will can only be intrinsically good and it is good in the absolute sense. The good becomes inherently good as it is derived from the rational and self-universalizing will.<sup>48</sup> The idea of such a will and the value it possesses is the basis of the scheme of values upon which he lays his foundation of morality. Although Allen W. Wood thinks that the concepts like ‘categorical imperative’, ‘end in itself’, ‘autonomy of the will’,

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<sup>47</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*, 38.

<sup>48</sup> Yirmiyahu Yovel, “Kant’s Practical Reason as Will: Interest, Recognition, Judgement, and Choice”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 52, no. 2 (December 1998), 267-294, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20131140>.

‘end which is the same time a duty’ are far more important than the concept of good will in Kant’s ethical theory,<sup>49</sup> but I think that Kant is successful in developing all these important concepts only because he considers good will as the basis of his moral thought. Good will plays a fundamental role in Kant’s theory of moral duties. Kant elaborates it as unconditionally good: a good will is considered as good neither because it has achieved some accomplishments nor because of its ability to achieve any proposed aim. This good will is considered as good only by virtue of its willing, i.e., it is good in itself. It is not a mere wish, even if there is nothing to accompany it, this good will still shines as a jewel on its own. It has its complete worth in itself.<sup>50</sup>

Kant thinks that courage and temperance which are treated as virtues in traditional ethical theories are estimated as virtues only if present in a person with good will. Intelligence, temperance, courage, judgements etc. (which are called character) are good only when the will is good; but these can be utterly bad or even worse without good will. Kant thinks that ancient philosophers mistakenly put courage and temperance (along with wisdom and justice) on their list of the four cardinal virtues. Courage, self-control etc. are distinct from the unqualified goodness of the good will. So these are conditionally good, not absolute good. But good will is the only good that is intrinsically and unconditionally good. “It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation, except a *good will*.”<sup>51</sup> The goodness of good will is not derived from the goodness of the results it produces. Deontologist Kant is not ready to judge the goodness of good will on the basis of its consequences. The good will is good even if it fails to produce good. So the

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<sup>49</sup>Allen W. Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20.

<sup>50</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of the Morals*, trans. A. Zweig, T. E. Hill (Jr.) & A. Zweig ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

<sup>51</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*. trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.

concept of good will, as elaborated by Kant, suggests that without good will there is nothing to motivate an agent to act for the sake of duty. Kant's idea of moral action, based on good will, expresses a will with unconditional value. The good will is manifested in a person's duty. It reflects a sense of moral obligation towards others. Good will therefore is the principle of adopting only those maxims which one can will to be laws. Kant calls maxims a subjective principle upon which a rational agent acts. Subjective maxim may not be expressed in language. But if we know what we are doing and the decision of our action springs only from our own will then our action follows a subjective maxim. A principle is a subjective maxim if the motive involved in obedience to it is a motive only for that person who actually embraces this maxim as his own policy in life. A principle becomes formal maxim or the objective law if the motive which it formulates is recognised as a will of every rational being. A maxim is thus some sort of general principle under which we will a particular action. These subjective maxims are material maxims which generalise a particular action with its particular motive and its intended results. It contains a practical rule determined by reason in accordance with the conditions of the agent. Subjective maxims are spontaneously followed by the agent as these are material maxims and connected with the interest of the agent. But imperatives may not be followed wilfully, though the agent ought to obey those imperatives to fulfil his rational purposes. The agent's spontaneous will is absent here as the purpose is not directly satisfying his inclinations. Only his reasoning capacity can insist him to do his duty. Reasoning only insists us to do what we ought to do in order to carry out the policy expressed by the maxim. But human beings are not guided by reason only and hardly perform his duty without conflict. Objective maxim is not associated with a particular action; it is the maxim that turns an action to a moral action. The subjective maxim may become an objective principle if and only if considering it as his duty every rational agent accepts its validity and necessarily acts on that maxim. In this way the subjective maxim is treated as a universal law which, universally and

objectively all rational agents are obligated to follow. This formulation of the supreme principle of morality is the ultimate condition of all particular moral laws and all ordinary moral judgements. Kant is considering morality as autonomous since in his theory the ultimate benchmark is the universal moral law. Though moral worth is associated with the sense of obligation to follow universal rational law only, Kant ensures the freedom of the particular agent by admitting that rational beings have the power to determine action in accordance with the idea of certain laws. The *end* serves as the subjective ground of self-determination of the will and if it is given by reason alone it is equally valid for all rational beings. It means by determining one's own will, the rational agent is capable to decide law for the entire human race. The *means* is the ground of possibility of an action whose effect is the end. Due to his rational will every rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use of the will. Rational beings are termed as persons by Kant who are not merely the valueless subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has no value for us; but they are objective ends as they are considered an end in itself. Kant emphasizes on the rational power of the agent as this power helps him to master over the situation. He is not an easy prey of situation, rather capable to direct his will towards the right goal as his inclination does not mesmerise his will. In this sense he is an end-in-itself as his will is not used arbitrarily due to subjugation of his emotions.<sup>52</sup> Then a categorical imperative becomes a supreme practical principle concerning the human will. The idea is that it is necessarily an end for everyone since it is end-in-itself which forms the objective principle of the will and consequently serves as a practical law. This principle as an end in itself is not derived from experience since firstly it is universal, applicable to all rational beings without exception and no experience can determine its universality; secondly because humanity is conceived in it not as a subjective end (as an object of the fact), but as an objective end. For our ends may constitute the subject of all ends

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<sup>52</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 91.

and that is to be found in every rational being as an end in himself springs from the pure practical reason.

The upgradation of the maxims to law is constituted by good will as good will is guided by practical reason. The will in association with practical reason turns a rational being to a moral person, because his rational faculty internalises the moral law in his will as its own structure and as end-in-itself. On the basis of reason's practicality, Kant accepts our ability to design our inherent rational goals as our personal interests that are pursued by our own motivational power. This motivational drive is neither a natural instinct nor a utilitarian interest, but the person's own drive towards rational self-realization or autonomy. Kant also links autonomy with the moral law as he claims that a free will with the property of autonomy and a will under moral laws are one and the same.<sup>53</sup> Kant's attempt to identify will with practical reason ensures the possibility of having obedience to the moral law along with the autonomy and freedom of the agent. From this we can say that human will is free only if it is motivated by the respect for the law. Moreover, when the will is determined by reason, the action of a rational being becomes subjectively as well as objectively necessary. But if the will is not invariably determined by reason alone, rather guided by any subjective conditions, then objectively necessary action becomes subjectively contingent. His predecessors consider will as a rational desire, i.e., a clear rational representation of the object of desire. But Kant thinks that they failed to differentiate between lower and higher faculties of desire and single out the unique features of moral willing. That is why he rejects their conception of a universal practical philosophy which he thinks is inconsistent with their ethical views.

**II.3 The Notion of Duty** - A person who acts from the motive of duty does the right thing in virtue of his recognition to be sincere to what morality demands and, in the background, his

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<sup>53</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 95.

rational commitment demands to do what is morally required. When we act from the intention of performing duty, we act with the sense of obligation towards duty. It is not just the inclination of narrow interest, but sincere attempt to collect all the means to do the right thing. Because it is the right thing to do, no matter what we feel like doing, no matter what it produces. The motive of duty is important not only because it is the morally good motive, but also because it is applicable to all who are capable of being motivated by duty, i.e. the rational beings. There is an important distinction between making a mere wish or desire to do the good and the will to do the good. A person with good will employs all his powers and self-control for bringing the good.

Kant distinguishes between actions done from duty and actions in conformity with duty. An action conforms to duty if it complies with what duty requires, the motive of doing it is not important. The action done from duty has moral worth or moral content. Acting from duty is not a matter of fulfilling certain purposes from inclination, but having a good purpose of helping others only from the motive of duty. The distinguishing feature of a duty proper is that it is necessary for the agent to act without thinking of any personal interest or from any feeling. Duty is devoid of all specific purposes. It is necessary to decide whether the action that accords with duty has been done from the sense of duty or from some purpose of self-interest. This task is very difficult since there are several instances where the action accords with duty, but the subject has performed that from some of his immediate inclination to perform the action. In Kant's view, it is a duty for a grocer not to overcharge his customers, even not to the inexperienced customers. The shopkeeper tries to practice honesty and refrain from doing so (overcharging his inexperienced customers).<sup>54</sup> But what is his motives? Maybe he is taking the fair price due to his fear of losing his customers to his competitors. We cannot say that the

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<sup>54</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 63.

grocer has done it out of any immediate inclination, i.e., out of love for his customers; but he has done it solely from the purpose of self-interest. In other case, preserve one's life is a duty and everyone has an immediate inclination to do so. But preserving one's life out of love or fear has no moral content in itself. Most of us protect our lives in conformity with duty, but not from the motive of duty. When a person wants to finish his life due to sufferings and miseries of life, and still preserves his life without loving it or without any inclination or fear but only from duty, then his maxim has a moral content. To act from duty is to recognise the inherent moral value of the act, and that is the motivation which gives rise to a direct desire to perform the action for its own sake.<sup>55</sup>

**II.4 Moral Motivation** - Kant's contention to introduce the concept of duty is more technical in its sense: "An action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the maxim according with which it is decided upon; it depends therefore, not on the realisation of the object of the action, but solely on the principle of volition in accordance with which, irrespective of all objects of the faculty of desire, the action has been performed."<sup>56</sup> Kant's justification of morality or especially the authority of the moral law, stands with the success of his theory of motivation. Because Kantian morality places agents in a very stringent position where they have to be motivated without their subjective interest. His attempt to vindicate morality requires him to explain how he ought to act on the basis of moral grounds without the influence of self-interest. Moral agents, according to him, are moved by a special kind of intellectual pleasure or a feeling that originates from his free choice. Kant's assertion is that the will (*Willkür*) "cannot be determined to action through any incentive except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim."<sup>57</sup> A sensible interest and a felt attraction

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<sup>55</sup> Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, ed., Allan W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24.

to an object, can play a role in willing only if the agent considers it to be a sufficient reason in virtue of a maxim or a practical principle. Kantian theory of moral motivation places him in the internalist camp that enables the necessary connection between moral judgement and motivation. The most important thing is that Kant's understanding of moral obligation is a unique vision as for Kant obligation is not equivalent to compulsion. His such view makes his theory an internalist vision as he has successfully made a balance between law-abidingness and the freedom of will. When the agent follows the universal law as his duty, he is not doing that out of compulsion or due to hegemony of the law. Rather he follows the law as it is confirmed by his own will. His will is giving the universal law as his own will is capable to be guided by practical reason by ignoring his self-centred desires. Such will provides the moral command to the person.<sup>58</sup> This is called the formula of autonomy of the will. This is the supreme condition of the will which is in conformity with universal practical reason. Concept of autonomy is founded on the will of every rational being which makes universal law.<sup>59</sup>

His explanation about the relation between pure reason and will is based on the practical synthetic a priori proposition. Practical syntheticity is treated as the pivotal concept for his account, since it means to be motivated by principles of pure reason. Kant's motivational theory construed a relation between universalizable maxims and the moral interest to act upon them as necessary. There exists a necessary connection between normativity and motivation in the internalist realm of thesis. The form of Kantian internalism can be formulated as 'if *A* has a

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<sup>58</sup> "If we look back upon all previous efforts that have ever been made to discover the principle of morality, we need not wonder now why all of them had to fail. It was seen that the human being is bound to laws by his duty, but it never occurred to them that he is subject only to laws given by himself but still universal and that he is bound only to act in conformity with his own will, which, however, in accordance with nature's end is a will giving universal law. For, if one thought of him only as subject to a law (whatever it may be), this law had to carry with it some interest by way of attraction or constraint, since it did not as a law arise from his will; in order to conform with the law, his will had instead to be constrained by something else to act in a certain way. By this quite necessary consequence, however, all the labor to find a supreme ground of duty was irretrievably lost. For, one never arrived at duty but instead at the necessity of the action from a certain interest. But then the imperative had to turn out always conditional and could not be fit for a moral command." Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Gregor, 40-41

<sup>59</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 93.

reason to  $\emptyset$ , then, because of this, he could be motivated to  $\emptyset$ .<sup>60</sup> The moral reasons that are presented by an agent becomes the ground of the moral motivation. Kant acknowledges the primacy of pure practical reason over motivation that serves a basis of his understanding of the precise way in which they are necessarily related. The objectively binding moral law necessarily motivates the will. For Kant, there must be moral motive which does not aim to some particular end. Nor can it consist any ordinary feeling that moves the agent to act; since moral obligation must apply to all rational agents regardless of their feelings. The pure moral motive is the will of performing an action only because it is morally right, consistent and obligatory. He opines that only the formal principle of the will in accordance with practical law or the moral law determines the rightness and moral worth of an action.

One may be inclined to attribute moral goodness to right actions solely from immediate inclination, i.e., done from a direct impulse of sympathy or generosity. Here two cases of motives can be discussed: we consider first an action done solely out of inclination and not from duty, and another action done solely out of duty and not from any inclination. Then we find that the action done from any inclination, i.e., out of sympathy, is praiseworthy, but it does not have moral worth. The same kind of action done solely from duty does have moral worth. Kant's position may sound rather extreme, but the insight that is present here is very important. A morally admirable motive is one that will make you do the right thing, no matter how you are feeling. Suppose, a person gives money to charity simply because she is sympathetic towards the victims of a natural disaster. It is not that she believes this is the right thing to do, nor that she is concerned to do the right thing. She is just feeling sorry for the people she saw on television and responding from her gut. Certainly, she is not doing anything wrong, but is it admirable? Consider that her sympathetic motive might be quite whimsical. When the

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<sup>60</sup> Triantafyllos Gkouvas, "The Practicality of Pure Reason: A Normative Defence of Kant's Theory of Moral Motivation", *Eidos* [online]. no.14. (2011), 152-191.

television is in switched off mode and it stops showing the suffering of those people, she does not feel sympathetic to them and stops helping them. On the other hand, if those suffering of people on television, belonging to different region and from different religion, may not draw her sympathy, she may not be motivated to help. Again, when her sympathy is replaced by annoying feeling at her boyfriend for forgetting her birthday, she will not donate. All these different alternatives show that the motive of duty is much more dependable and consistent than this. If that person helps those victims from the motive of duty rather than from sympathy, in all the above alternatives, without any exception she would help them. The motive of duty can motivate us even when performing that act becomes tough; because it is independent of our feelings and desires. Duty can motivate us to perform the action even when we want to do something else. Intuitively, this motive of duty sounds more praiseworthy in the Kantian framework of morality.

From Kant's discussion it seems that rightness of action is related only to purity of motive. But it is probably not what Kant tries to convey. Motives are important for Kant in a sense that he differentiates between right action and morally worth action. The right action is one that conforms to the supreme principle of morality or the categorical imperative which tells us to consider others as unconditionally valuable ends in themselves, never merely as means to achieve our ends. Morally worthy actions are right actions done from the motive of duty. But we can do right action from an unworthy motive also. For instance, if I keep my promise to meet someone for dinner, I have treated that person as a rational being, and according to the categorical imperative, I have done the right action. But I may not be motivated by duty; instead, I might have kept my promise because I wanted to eat at that restaurant anyway. In this case, I have done the right action by keeping the promise, but not from morally admirable and worthy motives, rather to satisfy my interest. Keeping my promise for the wrong reason does not make the thing wrong; but Kant does not approve it as moral. Kant's moral perspective

only prescribes to do the right thing for the right reason and that reason should be the motive of duty.<sup>61</sup> That is why pure practical reason has the maximum weightage in dealing with practical moral situations. ‘Ought’ here is considered to be as ‘will’ because it is inherently associated in harmony with the law. The subjective imperfection of the will of each and every rational being must have a relation with the objective laws and imperatives are the consequence that formulate this harmony. Moreover, in case of the divine will, there are no imperatives associated with the divine will or the *holy will*. In case of holy will harmony reaches to the highest perfection and there seems no difference between subjective will and objective law.<sup>62</sup>

**II.5 Obligation: Subjective, Not Objective** – Kant claims that pure philosophy is founded on the universal, necessary, morally valid objective laws. Here the sense of validity is considered as a ground of obligation. Therefore, to formulate moral judgements rational beings should follow these moral laws which are a priori concepts of pure practical reason. Long before the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant identifies obligation as the fundamental concept of moral philosophy. Obligation, in terms of *ought*, has two meanings: one is considered as a means to achieve some end (I ought to do something if I want something else), and other is immediately as an end (I ought immediately to do something else and make it actual). The former may be called necessity of the means and the latter the necessity of the ends. Here Kant advocates that the first kind of necessity does not indicate any moral obligation at all. It is merely a prescription as the solution to the problem concerning the means to achieve certain ends. In morality, all the actions which are prescribed to achieve certain ends are considered to be contingent. They cannot be called obligations as long as they are not

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<sup>61</sup> Valerie Tiberius, *Moral Psychology: A Contemporary Introduction*, (New York and London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2015), 32-33.

<sup>62</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 78.

subordinated to an end which is necessary in itself.<sup>63</sup> Kant's exposition of pure moral intentionality is the foundation of moral obligation to follow the moral law. Moral obligation, in Kant's theory, is applicable to all human beings as they are considered to be rational beings and so moral beings. The concept of obligation can be analysed as unconditionally necessary action indicates towards the principle of the moral law. Since a universally obligatory action is required or necessary, the maxim on which the action is performed must be conceived as a law. The will to perform an unconditional necessary act is not bound to any particular law; it is however the idea of the law in general that obligates us. So, the principle of the categorical imperative advocates that the principle of obligation is therefore the principle of acting on those maxims which we conceive to be the laws. Everything in the nature works according to the laws. Only a rational being has the power to act in accordance with his own idea of laws or principles and for that he has a will. Since the reason is required in order to derive actions from laws, the will then is nothing but practical reason. So, law is a very essential concept in Kantian ethics as moral decisions are always deduced from the highest autonomous normative principle of rational moral law or the categorical imperative. Due to the obstacles created by our unruly impulses and desires, this law appears to us as a law that we ought to obey for its own sake and so Kant calls it the categorical imperative. If reason infallibly determines the will, then in a rational being the actions are recognised to be objectively as well as subjectively necessary; it means that the will is then a power to choose only that which reason independently of inclination recognises as morally good. The conception of an objective principle as it is necessitating a will is called a command of reason and the formula of this command is termed as imperative. An imperative tells us which of my possible action would be good. Imperative formulates a practical rule for an agent when his will does not directly perform an action

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<sup>63</sup> Immanuel Kant, *An Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Ethics* (the "Prize Essay"), ed. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1764).

because of its moral worth. The agent may not be motivated to choose the right act either because of his ignorance about the moral value of the act or because he is controlled by the maxims contrary to the objective principle of practical reason. All imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. Hypothetical imperatives command a possible action as practically necessary on the ground of attaining a desired will. If a principle is really a maxim where the motive for action is in accordance with some subjective condition, the corresponding imperative is considered to be a hypothetical imperative which tells us what a reasonable man would do in order to satisfy his desire. It commands a man only if he has a particular desire to fulfil an end. A hypothetical imperative thus says that an action is good for some purpose, either possible or actual. This is considered to be a problematic practical principle. Because principles that are based on any object of desire are applicable only to those who actually have that desire. These principles are mere maxims and not considered as laws. These are not treated as laws even for the people who apply these to secure their desires. Desire has a diverse range of application and it cannot be subsumed under any general desire for happiness; it always varies in connection with the diversity of men and circumstances. Every principle or rule that attempts to achieve some specific desire ultimately falls under the general principle of self-love or the desire for one's own happiness. According to Kant, those philosophers who emphasize on the desire for happiness and consider it to be the proper motive for morality cannot derive from it any universal precepts, since each person's happiness differs in nature from others. At the same time a single person's conception of happiness also varies from time to time according to his state of specific desires.<sup>64</sup> Any rule that is derived from the desire for happiness is analogous to a hypothetical imperative because it lacks the quality of a priori necessity – which is the essential character of a law. It follows from this that the desire for general welfare or happiness of others cannot be regarded as universal law, since the material of the maxim refers to the

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<sup>64</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 72.

object or the purpose of the agent's subjective will. If the material or goal of desire is presupposed in principle, whatever it may be, there is no universality in the principle and the corresponding imperative is not categorical. Imperative does not focus on the material of the maxim, rather it expresses the form only by using the term 'ought', just as the term 'is' is used in assertive propositions. As form, it is independent of any specific desire which constitutes the content of specific maxims. If we abstract the content from an imperative which is characterised by a specific subjective desire, we are left with the skeletal form of 'ought'. The form can be applied universally without its content. So, it is the form and not the content of a maxim that determines whether it is a law or a mere maxim.

A categorical imperative, on the contrary, is one that represents an action as objectively necessary for its own sake without any connection to the end. This principle is an *assertoric* or *apodeictic* practical principle that declares an action as objectively necessary without any reference to the consequence.<sup>65</sup> A categorical imperative or a law, such as 'lying is wrong', is not appropriate only to a man who wishes to earn honour or for gaining some other specific subjective goals of his own. The categorical imperative becomes an imperative or a law for a person who does not obey it by nature. It does not tell us to avoid lying if we would like to obtain a good reputation; it rather tells us that we ought not to tell a lie in general without any condition to be fulfilled. It seems to be addressed to rational beings in general, not just to those having some specific desires that can be satisfied through obedience to it. If a principle is a law, its form must be such that it applies to all rational beings and the corresponding imperative must be directed to all rational beings who do not, naturally, observe the law automatically. Thus only a categorical imperative is formed which commands a partially rational person to act upon a maxim, whereas wholly rational being would act on it without being commanded to

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<sup>65</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton 78.

do so. A rational being can decide upon his actions under a maxim simply because the maxim is a law and valid for all rational beings. Such person obeys the categorical imperative and then only pure reason can be practical. When a person obeys the categorical imperative, Kant shows that the will of this person must be free in its strict transcendental sense. It cannot be entirely determined by the person's conception of any sensuous impulses, for this would make his actions only an effect of natural phenomena. Only reason can represent the conception of a universal law as a motive, and the being who acts upon that motive is considered as a free agent. The form of the law is free from the empirical mechanism of nature whereas the content is constraint by it. Hence, the concept of freedom and the universal practical law reciprocally imply each other. We are not always aware of freedom, but it is present in us as our consciousness of the moral law. It presents in us as the binding quality of the universal law. The moral law thus inevitably leads us to assert the existence of freedom. Kant thinks that freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law and at the same time the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. The former means the moral law that acts on reason is the actualization of that freedom and the latter means that through moral law freedom can be known.<sup>66</sup>

For being a moral person, we should have respect for this law and should act according to this law, because it is constructed as a universal law on the basis of our pure practical reason. A purely rational being acts only on those maxims that he would will to be the maxims for all rational beings. The good thing is that the law determines the will by the command of pure practical reason and therefore not by subjective causes through the medium of sensation, but objectively, i.e. on the valid ground for all rational beings. Thus pure practical reason, as a source of its own law, is autonomous or self-legislating. In this way, pure practical reason can

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<sup>66</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 73.

be completely dissociated from empirically conditioned practical reason. Though this law is not determined by the desires of the moral agent, Kant formulates the form as “A man is morally good, not as seeking to satisfy his own desires or to attain his own happiness, but as seeking to obey a law valid for all men and to follow an objective standard not determined by his own desires.”<sup>67</sup> Moral law is considered to be objective as its validity does not depend on its acceptance by individuals. Imperatives are only the formulae for expressing the relation of the objective laws of willing to the subjective imperfection of the human will. At the time of conceiving hypothetical imperative in general, we may not know beforehand what it will contain. But in case of the categorical imperative, we are aware at once what it contains. In Kant’s view the categorical imperative does not prescribe any particular action which is morally good; it only imposes on us law-abidingness for its own sake which prescribes the principle to the will by conforming the action to the universal law. Kant formulates the categorical imperative as “I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law.”<sup>68</sup> Some may opine that this conception seems to be empty, but this law has travelled from any ordinary moral judgements to the highest level of philosophical notion and it has an unchanged common form to all moral actions, whatever the situation may be. Beside the law, this imperative contains only the necessity that the maxim should conform to the universal law. The law is not limited by anything else or there is no alternative thing over and above the universal law with which the maxim would establish any conformity. This is the conformity alone that the imperative properly asserts to be necessary. There is only a single categorical imperative from which all imperatives of duty can be derived and the formulation is: ‘act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become

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<sup>67</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 67.

a universal law.<sup>69</sup> Imperatives, reduced from law, are definite and specific, yet universal in application. For example, to fulfil my need I am borrowing money knowing that I cannot repay it. But I also know that if I do not make a firm promise to pay it back within a certain time, I shall not get any loan. I am inclined to make such a promise; although the question remains that is it not unlawful and contrary to the sense of duty to solve my problem in such way? Suppose I resolve to do so and then my maxim would be whenever I feel shortage of money, I will borrow it against a false promise. Here this principle of self-love and personal advantage can benefit my future, but the question can be raised about the moral quality of my action. Now Kant thinks if I transform the demand of self-love into a universal law of nature, we have to understand the consequences of it. What would be the result if my maxim becomes a universal law? It would be seen that this maxim can never be formed as a universal law of nature and be self-consistent, but must necessarily contradict itself.<sup>70</sup> Because Kant thinks, for the universality of law we have to accept that everyone can borrow money in need by making a false promise. As a result, very purpose of promising will be in vain.

Kant here shows that a formal maxim is sufficient to determine the will only if the will is not wholly determined by the material of the maxims. A rational being follows a formal principle, because his will is free from empirical determination. Since a will requires some determination from the law, such a being must follow a law not given by nature. Such law is completely given by reason itself and not based on any experiential data. Hence, the will must be self-determining or free in a positive sense. Thus, Kant concludes that a free will, a moral will and a pure practical reason are identical. If reason is not capable of prescribing the law, the agent has to borrow that from nature, and such a law would be an empirical maxim that can

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<sup>69</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton 84.

<sup>70</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton 67-68.

support only a heterogeneous imperative. A self-determining law of a rational being, therefore, can support the phenomena of Kantian morality.<sup>71</sup>

**II.6 Inadequacy of Empirical Practical Reason** - Kant advocates that the existence of pure practical reason needs some defences to answer the criticisms raised against it. Once the existence of pure practical reason is established, we will be able to understand the limitations of empirically conditioned use of practical reason. Its inadequacy lies in its capacity of supplying the grounds of choice.<sup>72</sup> Now we are going to concentrate upon the two kinds of practical reason as suggested by Kant – contingent or empirical practical reason and pure practical reason. However, empirical practical reason does not come under our purview of discussion regarding pure practical reason, because of its inadequacy to be a basis of morality. The principles of the empirically affected will are based upon the contingent fact that certain desires are to be felt. These are not the products of the autonomous lawgiving power of reason and consequently, they are not absolutely obligatory. According to Kant, there are no empirical laws of practical reason, only empirical maxims. Laws can never be empirical – that is the objective of Kant.<sup>73</sup> A law is always prescriptive, whether it is a theoretical or practical law. That is why, Kant is arguing against considering any empirical principle as a law. His assertion is that practical laws must be a priori and prescriptive, whereas empirical laws are a posteriori and are not prescriptive. All moral systems (excepts the one that is based upon pure reason) provide motives as heteronomous and they are unable to account for the absolute, unconditional, universal, necessary factors that we experience in moral obligation. Pure practical reason and will, for Kant, are generally synonymous terms, but the functioning of empirical practical reason creates the difference between them. Will more directly suggests the

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<sup>71</sup>Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 122-123.

<sup>72</sup> Reath, Andrews and Timmermann, Jean ed., *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 83.

dynamic impulse involved in action; while practical reason suggests some deliberations without any compulsion.

Empirical practical reason guides human behaviour for the sake of satisfying some desires. “Desire is the faculty of a being, through its ideas, to cause the reality of objects of these ideas.”<sup>74</sup> Desire is always directed towards some objects which are pleasurable to the agent. It is the idea of the connection of an object or action with the subjective condition or desire of the person. Kant distinguishes between lower and higher faculties of desire, which, in turn, derives from the classical distinction between passion and will. Kant, by making this distinction, does not completely deny the role of desire in morality; rather through this distinction, he clearly shows the inadequacy of empirical practical reason as the source of morality. Kant brings here the epistemological generic difference between sensibility and understanding in this regard. The corresponding ethical thesis is that there is generic difference between any sensuous desire and its empirical maxims in one hand and a higher faculty of desire and its principles on the other. The higher faculty of desire is not determined by desire for pleasure at all. Moreover, this generic distinction has a deep impact in Kant’s morality than in his epistemology; since knowledge is always a joint venture of sensibility and understanding, whereas morality depends solely upon the determination of the will by rational faculty. Empirical practical reason is inadequate in moral sphere as it is always concerned with the satisfaction of the lower faculty of desire, whereas pure practical reason involves higher faculty of desire which is not concerned with the satisfaction of any empirical and animal nature. The highest faculty of desire is completely different from the lower faculty of desire in both its structure and function.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*, 90.

<sup>75</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason*, 95.

**II.7 The Nature of Pure Practical Reason** - Pure practical reason is completely different from empirical practical reason since the latter has a theoretical formulation. Practical reason generally prescribes a law valid for practice, but not derived from our experience of the world. When we attempt to satisfy some specific desire, this law is applied which is completely different from the theoretical formulation. The practical laws, though it is essential for intelligent practice, are always contingent since they are meaningful in relation to some experienced situation. From all the actual laws of nature, we choose those laws that provide us the satisfaction of specific desire in a specific situation. These laws in their theoretical formulation may be necessary, but when formulated as practical rules, they are always contingent because our desire is being satisfied by the successful application of our knowledge of those laws. But pure practical reason, on the other hand, is intrinsically practical which discovers unconditional practical law. This reason does not have a theoretical counterpart which is only extrinsically and contingently practical. Pure practical reason is such a kind of reason which is always prescribed without considering the presence of desires or the demands of the situation. This kind of intrinsically valid practical reason is called pure practical reason. The chief thesis of Kantian moral philosophy is that pure reason can be practical which asserts that there are unconditional practical laws. Kant elaborates two kinds of use of reason. First one is the logical use, i.e., reason is not concerned with the determination of our choice to achieve some desired end. Reason alone motivates us to do the right thing. Second use of reason is the real use. It establishes the goals of action through the formulation of an intrinsically practical and unconditional law. Pure reason is always concerned with unconditioned condition. Faculty of pure practical reason provides laws for voluntary moral action, that demands direct obedience or obligation. As the notion of obedience is attached with such law, it is unconditionally valid for all. This kind of unconditioned condition cannot be found in empirical or contingent practical reason since it is the slave of passions. If pure reason is practical, the

practical laws are intrinsically valuable and the motives to follow such laws are independent of the contingent and empirical human desire. This motive must be our knowledge of the law or imperative itself with our respect towards it. An action having this motive of respect is a moral action and a being who acts from this motive of duty is a moral being having a good will.

Kant opines that there can be nothing derivable from a universal conception of imperative, since it does not have any particular form of its own. A particular form is given in theoretical reason. There is always a theory that has a particular shape and one can apply it to the practical situation to solve a particular kind of problem. Practical reason, on the contrary, is completely different from it. It involves analysis, evaluation, choice that form the universal law. In practical reason, what we can do is to examine the material maxims of our actions and accept or reject it according to the formulation of the universal law. A moral agent does a morally good action following the formal maxim which must be valid for all rational beings independent of their particular desire. In this way the universal law becomes a command to us which we should obey. There is a mixed feeling associated with it, i.e., a kind of respect and fear which is imposed by our reason on us. "Reason must look upon itself as the author of its own principle independently of any alien influences. Therefore, as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, it must be regarded by itself as free; the will of a rational being can be a will of his own only under the Idea of freedom, and such a will must therefore – from a practical point of view – be attributed to all rational beings."<sup>76</sup> The law of action springs as the subjective principles of action or maxim of rational beings from this Idea of freedom. These subjective maxims are always adopted in such a way that can be considered as objective, universal law; then only 'I ought' becomes 'I will'. Whenever a person deliberately makes his

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<sup>76</sup>Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 109.

choice of doing something, he is only concerned about whether the reasons for which he has made this choice is considered as sound reasons.

**II.8 Nature of Impulse** - Most of the time we act deliberately, we evaluate the soundness of reasons. Kant argues that at the time of taking a decision for action in a situation an agent can attempt to use two very different, but interrelated factors - the first is impulse. This is a dynamic moving factor that includes want, need, desire, or wish.<sup>77</sup> Human beings certainly feel a push or pull by their wants, needs, desires, or passions. But it is also true that these needs are not always appropriate, though available to lead the agent automatically to the action. Action may be postponed if needs are denied. Sometimes an uncontrollable force of these wants lead him to do an action going against his prudence and wisdom. When this occurs, the person is no longer considered as a moral agent; he does not have any control over his actions and he even disclaims responsibility for these actions. In such cases he becomes a spectator in a drama who is involved in an action without any effective deliberation, choice, conscious purpose, decision. Effect of such forces working on him is either unknown to him or uncontrollable for him. But behaviour is not always automatically triggered by impulse, rather it may be the result of moderated, directed, redirected by thought-out impulses. This thought helps to shape the phenomena which comes from some plan of life projected by reason. This thought about the phenomena is itself a necessary part of our psychological makeup. In the course of experience impulse becomes a factor in conduct. The internal drive and the responses to it associated together through trial and error to satisfy that need.<sup>78</sup> If the action is not an automatic response to a stimulus and if there is a scope for deliberation, the agent acts on a policy that will help him in future experiences and he does not deliberate to act on an impulse, though the impulse is always there. This is possible only because impulse can be integrated into and controlled by

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<sup>77</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 32.

<sup>78</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 33-34.

interest. Interest has a dynamic character. It emerges from impulse, but interest is more permanent than impulse. It also has a dispositional character which contains knowledge of the situation and consequences of alternative actions. When impulse is conceptually weighed and conceptually directed, it becomes an interest. An agent's action is considered as an intelligent action when his motive that springs from his interest is guided by appropriate conception and not by a blind impulse. Interest comes in a defensive form. While impulse is just a momentary outburst without regularity and certain interest that leads to actions is guided by certain policies and plans. Policies that are formulated through a very specific process of deliberation may express a specific habit that represents consciously chosen or invented aspiration for a life integrated with the respect or reverence for an ideal value. The being who has the capacity to reason can act from an interest. "Interest is that by which reason becomes practical, i.e., a cause determining will."<sup>79</sup> From this we can say that only rational beings may have an interest in something and are capable to act accordingly, whereas irrational creatures can only feel sensuous impulses. A person who acts on a policy or on the basis of a conception of a law must have a will. A voluntary action differs from an impulsive act in the sense that the agent has a control on the action. On the basis of his understanding of the situation, the consequence of the action, he formulates a policy to regulate the same. The will is never directly determined by the consequence or by our conception of it; it is rather a faculty which makes a rule of reason or the efficient cause of an action that makes the consequence real. Policy that is expressed in the form of rule or the conception of law gives direction and stability to a complex life. Such life could not undergo the uncertainty of passion. To have will means that the person has the full knowledge about all the possible alternatives and their effects in the context of his own life. Such a conception results from our ability to reason. Keeping this thought in mind, Kant

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<sup>79</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 35.

identifies will with practical reason. He is concerned with the cognitive or conceptual factor of willing.

Kant advocates a unique thesis regarding the foundation of morality which is completely distinct from his predecessors. He is of the opinion that reason alone should serve the basis of morality. He thinks that sentiment is an unsure and unstable foundation for ethical conduct. Benevolence towards others should not be based on a feeling of love or sympathy for others, but on the sense of duty of benevolence. He considers rationality as the only ground of morality and opines that self-centred motives and inclinations cannot motivate a person to act morally; although Kant insists on a certain kind of moral feeling bound up by a sense of duty and respect for the law. It is important for Kant to pinpoint the role of moral feeling. Sympathy can serve as a motivation for acting benevolently, a purer incentive is respect for the law. In order to be pure, moral feeling must be produced by reason. So moral feeling should not precede and serve as the rational basis of moral principles, rather should be the effect on the agent as a result of his consciousness of the moral principle or law.<sup>80</sup> Moral sentiment or moral feeling, according to Kant, is solely connected to the sense of duty. He claims that the feeling of duty precedes our consciousness of obligation and suggests that the willingness to cultivate this feeling comes primarily through rational processes. Reason, according to Kant, is not concerned with the choice which leads to some end projected by desire. It establishes the goals of action through the formulation of an intrinsically practical and unconditional law which is termed as the moral law. Practical reason is simply a certain application of pure reason to the human will. This means that pure practical reason determines the will in an unconditioned way without regard to anything else. We find that in Kant's explanation role of practical reason is remarkable as it not only constitutes the moral judgment on the basis of deciding rightness of

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<sup>80</sup> James Jakob Litzka, *Moral Competence* (New Jersey: Princeton Hall, 1999) 54-55.

the issue, but its presence is also compulsory to form a good will, to upgrade a maxim to a moral law. Practical reason, the cognitive factor of will, is the source of motivational power as due to its reflective capacity we internalize the reason-directed end as our own end. It means that presence of practical reason interprets the notion of obligation, the fundamental concept of Kant's moral theory, in a different sense as it provides the agent the scope to act with his free will. Practical reason arouses the sincerity in the person that recognizes demands of morality. Will of a rational person is not just capable to see his desires through the lens of rationality, but his will is reason driven as it is governed by practical reason. This reason is pure as it does not provide importance to self-interest of an agent. If a person A does a right thing because of his happiness, then his will to do that thing is conditioned by his own well-being, i.e., by his self-interest. But if he does it only because it is the right thing to do, then he is acting in an unconditional way. The will of an agent can act according to the guidance of unconditional pure reason only if the will determines his principle of action from universal objective moral law. Moral principles are very important in Kant's moral theory. Nature of action depends on the nature of the principles. The knowledge of practical propositions plays a part in determining the will to make a specific choice among possible actions. These propositions when applied generally are called principles. Rules are subsumed under and derived from these principles in their application to specific circumstances. A principle is emerged to be a moral principle if it is derived from pure practical reason. So Kant considers it as an autonomous source of normative principles. He advocates his moral philosophy as pure philosophy; pure in the sense that it is entirely based on a priori principles. He calls it metaphysic of morals which is indispensably necessary for morality and not merely emerged from motives of speculation. Unlike pure theoretical reason, pure practical reason can justify or direct human actions. This is the only reason that provides justification for determining the nature of the action. The consequence of an action has no role to justify the action. This is pure practical reason as

opposed to empirical practical reason that are conditioned by some sensibly determined goal or consequence derived from the human actions. The willingness to determine one's actions purely on the basis of the rational principles other than the end or consequence of the action can be termed as the proper use of pure practical reason. For Kant application of the highest form of practical reason or pure practical reason is possible only by the moral agents who are capable of transcending the personal interest they possess. The ideal moral agent is one who is impartial in this regard. When this kind of impartiality is achieved without giving importance to the consequences of actions and preferences of individual plans then such maxim is called a priori and this kind of philosophical system is known as deontological.<sup>81</sup>

### **III**

#### **Unity between Theoretical Reason and Practical Reason**

Kant asserts that reason is one and the same, whether applied theoretically to the realm of what it is, or practically to the realm of what ought to be. His view that theoretical and practical reason are two different applications of one and the same reason is coined as the doctrine of the unity of reasons. The main contention of this section is to discuss about some significant views provided by different Kantian scholars who are trying to grasp Kant's own intention regarding the unity of reasons. I will try to point out the significance of these views and provide sufficient arguments to make Kant's views more clear. Kantian scholars are not unanimous regarding this unification of reason. Susan Neiman and Klaus Konhardt argue that Kant presents a coherent account of the unity of reason in his first two critiques. Following Kant, they also admit the unity of theoretical and practical reason. But apart from the structural unity, they believe that there are also functional similarities between theoretical and practical reasons.

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<sup>81</sup> Liszka, *Moral Competence*, 281.

Konhardt adds that Kant's account of the unity of reason is reflected in their essence as both are pure in nature.<sup>82</sup> This account of unity of reason ascribes to theoretical and practical reason by stressing many similarities between them. Without arguing for this explicitly, Neiman and Konhardt think that the similarities between these reasons prove that theoretical and practical reason are one and the same reason that is applied differently. These similarities are as follows:

- a) Both theoretical and practical reason strive for systematization. The notion of systematisation, according to Kant, means exhibiting the interconnection of the composite parts in conformity with a single principle.<sup>83</sup> Theoretical reason strives for the systematic unity of knowledge while practical reason for the systematic unity of our maxims for action. Kant assumes that a systematic order can be achieved when a person employs an antecedent idea of such order. It means that this unifying idea cannot be derived from nature or from our subjective maxims; it is derived from reason itself.
- b) Some common ideas are involved in both the reasons. In the theoretical realm, ideas like soul, world, God are employed as regulative principles. In the practical sphere, these very ideas are considered as the postulates. Here, in its systematizing efforts, practical reason constructs the idea of an intelligible moral world as a systematic whole or as a realm of ends. There lies a harmony between our own moral maxims and those of others.

It is worth noting that there are similarities in the use of ideas in both theoretical and practical reason, though the epistemic status of these ideas is not similar. Theoretical reason considers the ideas as regulative principles to guide us through empirical investigations. From the moral perspectives, the ideas can be given the stronger epistemic status of practical postulates. But such similarities are not sufficient to prove that they are the same entity

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<sup>82</sup> Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 105.

<sup>83</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans, Smith, 534.

employed differently. There could be two separate but similar faculties each of which are operating in their own field. Theoretical and practical reason could be two similar kinds of reason or two different reasons that act similarly instead of being two modes of application of a single faculty of reason. More investigations and arguments are needed in order to prove that they are two applications of one and the same reason. The question arises what could it actually mean by saying that these two reasons are united? The very notion of unification presupposes an antecedent disunity. Kant opines that theoretical and practical reason are united through the idea of purposiveness of nature that suggests an original disunity.<sup>84</sup> That is why he defends the incompatible claim regarding the unity of reason: theoretical and practical reason are one and the same reason; they are united but applied differently. If one assumes that the theoretical and practical reasons are two different uses of one and the same reason, the conflict still continues. Kant also mentions that the possibility of a conflict would arise if theoretical and practical reasons are arranged side by side. In this scenario, theoretical reason would choose its borders and allows nothing from the practical reason into its purview; while practical reason would extend its boundaries everywhere and when required would seek to comprehend the former within it. Reason, in the theoretical use, strives for systematic knowledge of what is. It would reject the normative moral claims of reason in its practical claim and thus would reject the postulates of morality. Theoretical reason has nothing to do with the claims about what it ought to be or the moral postulates. Practical reason, on the other hand, determines how we ought to act and it would not confine itself to what can or cannot be known. It does not disregard the limit of knowledge, yet considers the postulates as facts. Given Kant's line of thought, we can conclude that theoretical and practical reason do not always contradict each other, they merge on various propositions. In the first critique, it is about the unification of theoretical and

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<sup>84</sup> Paulin Kleingeld, "Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 52, no. 2 (December, 1998): 311-339, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20131142>

practical reason, in the second critique it is about their combination in one cognition. To support that theoretical and practical reason are in harmony, Kant points out the assumption that nature is ordered and owes its rational order to a highest intelligence. In the first critique, he discusses about the importance of nature for theoretical reason.<sup>85</sup> Later, he argues that morality too leads to this assumption and this makes possible to regard nature and morality in a systematic harmony. In the second critique, he brings similar view and states the purposive harmony between nature and morality and thus develops the unity with theoretical reason. Thus, it establishes the harmony of the two uses of reason (theoretical and practical) and not the singleness of one faculty who uses both the reasons.

Lewis White Beck, an eminent Kantian scholar, comments that Kant believes that theoretical and practical reason are just two applications of the same faculty, pure reason. Beck thinks that whether it is theoretical or practical realm, Kant develops the unification of the entire faculty of reason and only reason has the ability to derive everything from one principle. In Kant's view, practical reason provides universal moral principles.<sup>86</sup> Morality, according to him, contains practical concepts or principles that are founded on pure reason. Reason is the highest faculty that structures our thought through understanding the highest unity of thought. In moral sphere, if there are valid practical principles where necessity is not derivable from universal and necessary principles conceived by reason, then the internal unity of practice would be contingent. Non-rational grounds for decisions to act are neither necessary nor universal in application as they are not internally consistent. Practically they are divisive rather than unifying and thus no moral order can be constructed on non-rational foundation. Such actions are not considered as duty proper in Kant's opinion. For him, this is not a conceivable ground for taking decisions; only reason can supply universal and necessary principles whether

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<sup>85</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Smith, 641-642.

<sup>86</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 47.

to the field of knowledge or conduct. Moreover, reason serves the same function in the practical realm as well, i.e., systematizing, integrating, universalizing and rendering necessity which seems to be contingent at the first impression.

Reason always makes a demand to establish the unconditionality in all situations. In experience this demand cannot be met, and reason leads to the theoretical speculation about an unconditioned thing-in-itself and an unconditioned cause. But in speculation, these Ideas are only assumptions and not cognitions. No theoretical conclusion can be drawn from the fact since we assume them for our inquiry. In the practical realm, the unconditioned necessity is the outcome of reason's own causality that is revealed as duty to us through insuring freedom. The command of reason's imperative may not take place in the phenomenal world. There is always a distinction between 'what does' and 'what ought to happen'. Practical reason deals with the latter whereas theoretical reason establishes the former notion. 'What ought to be' can be actualized by the reason's will and human behaviour. This conceptual distinction is drawn for reason only because of the peculiarity of the human mind.<sup>87</sup> If our reason is an autonomous and sufficient cause in favour of an issue, then the disparity between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' would never arise. There even may not be a distinction between the actual or necessary world and the merely possible world. Because of our subjective constitution of minds we fail to understand that there is a single reason in two different relations. Reason, as a cognitive faculty, is an application to objects only under the condition of the sensible data. The same reason, while acts as a practical faculty, is independent of what our sense has given to us. For an intuitive understanding, this distinction would not arise. It is a contingent fact that our reason is discursive that it begins with data and move towards universals and is not capable of producing data only by thinking of them. This fact is as contingent and inexplicable as we grasp objects only from our experience of objects in space and time. Without space and time our

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<sup>87</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 49.

limited intellect cannot experience any data to turn it into understanding. Apart from the human mind, we can imagine about another kind of mind for which pure reason would directly provide knowledge of objects as they are and not as they appear. We do not have proof of such an intellect, although there is a mere possibility that is sufficient to furnish the distinction between what is and what ought to be, the necessary and the possible. The theoretical and practical can be thought of as difference of relation only. By describing the oppositions of theoretical and practical reason, it is believed that there is one reason that carries the same function in two different applications and this function supplies unconditioned conditions for all that is empirically conditioned. In the empirical world, everything is conditioned by the laws of nature and the only unconditioned condition is the realm of noumena. In morality, everything belongs to the realm of noumena and as the Idea of freedom determines everything, nothing can be conditioned in such a way. Therefore, pure reason is the one and only reason that can provide the unconditionality to the realm to empirically conditioned as well as to the realm of morally unconditioned also.

Soul as a possessor of all mental powers represents itself as a single fundamental power. As theoretical and practical reasons are two mental powers, soul represents them as two manifestations of a single power, instead of two independent entities. Hence, Kant's claim that they are different modes of application of one and the same reason should be regarded as an expression of this general regulative idea of the fundamental power. But the problem of unity of reason is itself a theoretical and not a moral problem and so the unity of reason is a regulative idea and not a practical postulate. Thus it is possible to show that theoretical and practical reason are one and the same reason applied differently. Here the objection arises as Kant expresses his hope to demonstrate the unity of reason some day. He also claims that the unity of reason has the status of a regulative idea of the soul. For he thinks that the idea of the soul transcends the limits of possible experience. This insight of Kant makes the previous claim

incompatible that we can demonstrate this unity one day. This objection can easily be answered. Complete conformity with the regulative idea of the soul will never be found; one cannot know a priori to what extent things will turn out to conform to it as practical reason transcends the world of possible experiences. Therefore, one should not set the limit on a priori to what insight might be gained, except a demonstration that such an insight is impossible. The unity of reason cannot even be achieved by empirical means, as reason itself is not a possible object of experience. Kant leaves the possibility open that this unity may be discovered by philosophical means. The regulative idea of the soul has a much wider scope and so the establishment of the unity of reasons cannot exhaust it. Accordingly, in discussing the idea of the fundamental mental power, Kant suggests that there cannot be one absolute fundamental power, rather there are comparatively fundamental powers. The problem of the unification of reason can be addressed if we take Kant's statement of one and the same reason as a regulative claim. In justifying the regulative ideas of the soul, the world, and God, Kant generally appeals to the systematic unity of the theoretical reason. His basic thought is that although it is impossible to prove or disprove the existence of things objectively that correspond to the transcendental ideas, we are nevertheless justified in using those ideas as regulative principles, since their use is necessary to guide reason's effort to establish a systematic unity of knowledge. A systematic unity is achieved only when one employs an antecedent idea of such order. Thus Kant defends the use of the idea of God as a regulative idea which gives reason its right to use this idea. Now if systematic unity becomes a hallmark of reason, then it would be natural to extend reason's scope to develop the insight of the entire pure rational faculty including theoretical and practical reason which is an unavoidable need of human reason. It finds complete satisfaction only in a perfectly systematic unity of its cognition.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Paulin Kleingeld, "Kant on the Unity of Theoretical and Practical Reason", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 52, no. 2 (December, 1998): 318, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20131142>

## IV

### **The Primacy of Practical Reason**

Although Kant talks about the unification of theoretical and practical reason, but that does not mean that they have equal weightage in the field of morality. Some arguments trigger the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason in the Kantian moral framework. In the first critique, Kant has discussed about transcendental illusion that arises whenever reason “spreads its wings in vain”<sup>89</sup> and from our attempts to draw inferences about various unconditioned objects such as free will as uncaused causality, soul as immortal entity and God as the necessary being from our potentially unending experiences of the natural world of space and time. These ideas are regulative or transcendental in the realm of knowledge, as they are the objects of pure faith. So theoretical reason draws an illusory conclusion and rules out the possibility of the existence of God, the idea of freedom and immortality of the soul from its domain. Nevertheless, Kant advocates that a true a priori metaphysics of nature must have a priori grounds of lawfulness and objectivity of the phenomenal universe in space and time – the single unified nature that is the object of all possible human experiences belongs to the domain of theoretical speculation by pure reason. The purely intelligible noumenal object or ultimately unconditioned cause is delusive by its very nature, as it is beyond our capacity to acquire knowledge. All such theoretical speculations ought to be abandoned as they are not understood by any speculative theoretical reason. Rather our rational nature considers them as a priori principles of morality and ideas of pure practical reason. The obligations and ideals of practical rationality show themselves not in any speculations, but Kant argues that the moral framework is the very basis of our free intentional actions of the sensible world. Such principles of practical reason are ultimately based on the undeniable ‘fact of reason’ concerning our rational moral

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<sup>89</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Smith, 500.

obligations and moral freedom. At the end of the first critique, in a section of The Transcendental Doctrine of Method entitled “The Canon of Pure Reason”, Kant elaborates: “if there be any correct employment of pure reason, in which case there must be a canon of its employment, the canon will deal not with the speculative but with the practical employment of reason.”<sup>90</sup> The ideas of God, freedom and immortality are the objects that constitute the final aim to which the speculation of reason in its transcendental use is directed. The use of such pure reason cannot be speculative, rather it would be considered as the practical use of reason.<sup>91</sup> There are some important roles of practical reason that reaches beyond the limit of theoretical reason. From the moral point of view, we believe in the harmony between morality and nature and in the existence of God as justified unconditionally. Because these beliefs are directly related to the notion of duty and duty is always unconditional. Theoretical reason, on the contrary, justifies the use of the idea of God and the systematicity of nature, since these ideas are only justified with respect to the immanent use of reason in the process of the study of nature. As we always conditionally examine nature in the light of causality, the use of these ideas is also conditionally justified and we do not require unconditional justification to examine nature and its order. It is only justified with respect to the phenomenal use of our reason.

According to Kant, in the study of theoretical reason we start with senses and end with the principles. But in practical reason, this order is just the opposite. Here we begin with principles and proceed towards concepts and then, if possible, reach at the senses. In the field of morality, we deal with a will and not with knowledge of objects. It follows from the definition that will is determined by the principles and not by the concepts of objects. It also seems easy to establish the principles first, because there is a recognition of the principle as a

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<sup>90</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Smith, 630

<sup>91</sup> James O’Shea, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: An Introduction and Interpretation*, (Durham and Bristol: Acumen Publishing Ltd., 2012).

law. These principles are present in every natural human consciousness which is completely a priori and independent of all the senses and therefore is also free from the concepts of objects. The concepts of the objects of practical reason cannot be given prior to or independently of this principle. If these concepts can be given prior to the principle, then we have to admit that either we have no a priori knowledge of good and evil, i.e., we have no a priori knowledge of the empirical objects of desire or else we should possess a priori intuition of moral value. But Kant asserts that the principle is prior to the concept; since the concept can only be drawn from the principle or from a priori intuition of the moral sense. There is a formal relation between the principle to the concept which is compared to the relation of the major and the minor premise in a syllogism and not of the generalization to the fact of observation. But practical reason is not concerned with the relation of knowledge to objects as Kant denies the cognitive validity of the moral sense. Hence it is proved that the principle comes first and then the concepts and then only we can proceed to the object of the senses.<sup>92</sup>

Practical reason leads to much stronger assumptions than theoretical reason. It justifies the belief that as God exists as a practical postulate and due to the associated beliefs of freedom and immortality, the nature is purposively ordered. Theoretical reason justifies merely the use of the idea of nature as systematically ordered by a highest intelligence or a regulative principle. As practical reason justifies the belief in the existence of God as the postulate of morality, theoretical reason cannot reject it. "Our practical interest (in morality and the conditions of its possibility) is entitled to override our speculative interest in avoiding ungrounded claims and the latter must therefore submit to the former."<sup>93</sup> What Kant tries to mean here is that theoretical reason is subordinated to practical reason in the sense that theoretical reason must accept the

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<sup>92</sup> Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, 66-67.

<sup>93</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19.

justification of practical reason, in spite of its admission of the Ideas of the noumenal world, viz., the existence of God, the idea of freedom and immortality of the soul as those are justified by practical reason. The justifying position of these regulative ideas transcend the capacity of theoretical reason.<sup>94</sup>

Kant realizes that the universal and necessary moral laws that are the basic of morality, are independent, self-legislating reason. Hence, the identification of the moral law and maxims, identification of the method of application of the moral contents to particular actions and identification of the motive of the moral agents (or obligation) occupy Kant's attention in the pre-critical period. Later, he feels the need of a moral law which could satisfy first two components simultaneously. The moral law has to meet the criteria as it is the highest principle of morality and at the same time must provide a method of application to particular actions in experience. The third component obligation cannot depend upon various feelings in one's character as feelings cannot ensure certainty. Kant first reveals an uncertainty regarding the ability of moral feelings to produce a moral law valid for all human beings. This universal moral feeling has a very subtle force, though nature has given human beings sympathy and kindness to perform good actions. Moral feeling is unable to provide both the moral law and the motivating factor, as to achieve the universal validity of the moral law, all rational beings must possess this universal feeling necessarily. But this universal feeling varies due to the nature of the people and the situational constrains. That is why Kant raises his doubt against having universal moral feeling to constitute the universal moral law. Variations among people restricts the moral law for being necessary. So, Kant considers that a morally good should necessarily be good for everyone, it cannot be related to feeling. Rejection of moral feeling as the ground of the moral law is not because of its irregular presence in human beings, rather because the feelings may take different forms in different people in different situations. So, the

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<sup>94</sup> Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 95-113.

very nature of moral feeling is its irregularity; this disqualifies moral feeling as a source of a necessary moral law. Obligation, according to him, must stem from reason, a more stronger and dependable source. Kant's early moral theory excluded reason as legislator of the moral law. Only after revising his conception of reason in other non-moral philosophical grounds, Kant incorporates reason into his conception of morality. Kant concludes that theoretical reason as a rationalist conception of reason relates concepts that cannot generate moral obligation. Moral obligation stems from a different kind of reason, grounded on the fact of obligation and the moral point of view (the ought) rather than merely the relation of concepts (the is). The moral law must be necessary and universal in order to be valid necessarily and must be valid a priori in order to obligate us.<sup>95</sup> Hence in the arena of morality, it is impossible to make any water-tight distinction between practical reason and theoretical reason.

The ancient conception of theory undergoes a radical transformation in the modern times following the thought of Immanuel Kant. Kant undertakes theoretical reason not as contemplative of essences, but as how does nature possible. Though he still wonders how reason can be practical, i.e., how reason can, by its law-giving function, determine a will. He is the first philosopher in the modern western tradition who brings the fundamental concept of morality under the idea of practical reason. Pure reason becomes practical by determining the will independently of natural causality. Setting aside all the impulses that can move the will and the empirical contents, Kant advocates that only the idea of law in general serves the will as a principle. In both theoretical and practical philosophy, the reason is one, i.e., the pure reason. There is a basic difference between these two kinds of reason: in theoretical field, pure reason has to deal with only one subject, no plurality of nature is presupposed (everything is

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<sup>95</sup> Frederick Rauscher, "Pure Reason and The Moral Law: A Source of Kant's Critical Philosophy", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 13, no. 2 (April 1996): 255-260, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27744703>

regulated by causality); whereas in practical reason there is plurality of rational agents as suggested by 'a kingdom of ends' in the formulations of the categorical imperative.<sup>96</sup>

To sum up the discussion we may say that Kant believes in the moral competence of the rational beings through their capacity of reflective self-control. This capacity also provokes to internalise the moral justification lies behind the moral demands ignoring the non-moral demands focusing the fulfilment of the self-interests. Agent's deliberative authority that springs from his capacity to apply practical reason helps to justify things from normative standpoint. But one can claim that the Kantian moral framework is a very stringent formulation where each and every rational being is naturally considered as moral being. They cannot be otherwise; they cannot even choose otherwise. Following the universal moral law and the notion of duty, every rational being makes the same moral decision as the basic presuppositions of rational agency is unchangeable for everyone. It seems that one rational being can be replaceable by another rational being as they, depending upon the same faculty, make the same decisions in all circumstances. If this is the case, then Kantian morality will turn into a troublesome theory to follow and rational beings will become robots; where human beings are no longer be considered as an important part of morality. They will no longer be called human beings. But it is not so easy to eliminate Kantian moral system as Kant's moral theory emphasizes on 'obligation' as he is aware that we are imperfectly rational and fulfilment of moral demands require imposition of constrains. But this compulsion is nothing external, but the agent's rational will carries a goodness to value the moral demand legitimated by universal moral laws for the benevolence of the mankind. Kant also admits that human beings are called humans because they have emotions and importantly, they have a choice due to their freedom. The role of emotion is very crucial as in the Kantian framework of morality pure practical reason encourages the agent to act morally through the practical principles and the freedom of will. In

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<sup>96</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton 95.

morality, human beings are the main components whose actions are justified by various norms and principles. So, the definition of human being needs to be clarified very prominently and cautiously. According to Immanuel Kant, human beings are rational beings and they make their decisions depending upon reason alone. Pure practical reason guides them to cultivate their emotions and good will keeps their emotions in a harmonious way in synchronisation with reason. Their emotions are also governed by reason as it neither revolt against reason nor chooses something going against reason. This interpretation is compared to the Aristotelian notion of virtuous person as at the time of taking decision such person requires no deliberation at all since there is no contradiction between choice and deliberation for him. He spontaneously takes the correct moral decision as there is a harmonious collaboration between reason and desire. I can point out a similarity between these two notions. They belong to different era, although these two notions are basically indicating the same idea of beings. In the *Groundwork*, Kant famously claims that the rational agents naturally wish to get rid of emotions. Again, in his *Doctrine of Virtue of The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant claims that we have a duty to ‘cultivate the compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us’<sup>97</sup> I can comment here that Kant is not critical about all the emotions; he is only critical about emotions when it is overpowering and challenging the authority of reason. Kantian scholar Baron points out that Kant’s negative remarks about emotions are actually the critiques of sentimentality, which occurs when we are passive towards our emotions and allow ourselves to be influenced by them.<sup>98</sup> Such emotions, for Kant, cannot be considered as the basis of morality. The primacy of the motive of duty constraints the role of emotions in morality. Emotions can never take the position of duty as the primary moral motive. We can interpret Kant’s intention as properly cultivated emotions

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<sup>97</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. & ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205.

<sup>98</sup> Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 196.

are subordinate to or compatible with reason. So, cultivated emotions can thus play a valuable role in Kantian morality.

Kant retains the framework from the Aristotelian scheme as *techne* concerns man's relation to the external world and *praxis* concerns man's relation to man. Nature, according to Kant, is a theoretical concept and the highest concept of practical reason is freedom. Again, for Kant, not every action in relation to other person is *praxis*, but those are considered to be *praxis* which follow the universal principles. These principles are theoretical and when applied in a practical situation they become practical. The agent, by his act of judgement, has to decide whether some principles or maxims turn to be a rule or not. The faculty of judgement connects theory with practice which is corresponding to the concept of Aristotelian *phronesis*. For Kant, practical rationality is identical with ethical normativity. Reason not only judges what is practically good, rather the good is the rational. Reason not only tests the law, but it is also a law-giver. The question arises how reason can be practical. The Kantian solution gives up the Greek assumption that reason is concerned with the choice of goal and of means to achieve that goal. Rather in Kant's view reason, as practical, is directed upon the maxims or rules of action that the agent imposes on himself. These maxims must be conformed to pure reason. Content of the maxim is not a moral quality such as goodness; reason aims at universalizability, i.e., what can be willed as universal. Reason becomes practical through these universalizable rules of action. But concrete rules of action such as interests and ends, being impure, are banished from the realm of pure practical reason.

**Chapter 3:**  
**Practical Reason: A Reflection of the Principle of**  
**Generic Consistency**

## **Chapter 3**

### **Practical Reason: A Reflection of the Principle of Generic Consistency**

In the previous chapter we have noticed that Immanuel Kant's moral theory, which is grounded on objectivity, validates only those self-addressed moral claims that are the outcomes of pure practical reason. The purity of practical reason initiates a different notion of desire where all rational agents ought to possess the desire to perform duties that are chosen due to respect for the universal moral law. Kant's notion of respect for the universal rational law comes in the disguise of individual psychology, but it is truly an agent-neutral notion and rejects anything that includes agent specific features. In the explanation of Kant's moral theory justification of the statements does not depend on the practical life experiences. Such view goes against the realist approach as the explanations in favour of a statement are not related with the fabric of the world. To consider moral demands as inescapable Kant has removed all situational and psychological conditions of life from moral requirements and defines practical necessity as an unconditional necessity that is governed only by pure reason. In his view practical necessity converges with moral necessity and turns as essential to the agent. Laws that are propounded by pure practical reason are formal and are independent of practical life scenario. But it is the nature of human mind that it always prefers to experience whatever is conveyed to him by his rational faculty.

Following the Kantian insight, contemporary moral philosopher Alan Gewirth has construed a new version of rational justification. The uniqueness of his theory lies in his attempt to incorporate social requirements within the logical justification of moral claims. His insight towards the relation between practical reason and morality has advocated a unique kind of thesis to justify a moral action. Practical reason, for him, is confined to the realm of both deductive and inductive logic. So, the novelty of Gewirthian exegesis is the formulation of the

logical derivation of a substantial normative moral principle from the nature of human action. As rational agents are only responsible to formulate this moral principle, it is necessarily based on practical reason. Although the action of an individual (being a rational agent) is very significant in the sphere of morality, but Gewirth has found a more fundamental connection between these two. He opines that every agent, at the time of performing an action is logically committed to accept certain evaluative and deontic judgements. Finally, he is committed to a supreme principle of morality, the Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC). This principle clarifies how morality is rooted in action and its generic features.<sup>99</sup> In spite of accepting the necessary presence of the principle of generic consistency, he incorporates in morality the self-understanding of a particular agent. According to Gewirth, every agent is committed by his very notion of rational agency to acknowledge a universal right to freedom and basic well-being. This principle ensures the duty of every individual to respect the generic rights of other persons as well. In his seminal work *Reason and Morality*, he tries to formulate a solution to the most difficult problem of justifying moral claims through practical reason. The aim to formulate the principle is to aware every agent that he must accept the supreme moral principle to strengthen his own status as a moral agent. All the people must have certain fundamental or generic rights that cannot be violated by any means. If an agent violates the generic rights of other recipients, then he cannot be considered as a moral agent any more. It has a stringent rational as well as practical justification since it is associated with the very notion of moral action. Though the performance of the action is not a matter of concern in my present thesis, but in the course of discussion we cannot completely ignore that normative ethical discussion from our understanding of the nature of practical reason. In this chapter, I would like to focus on this kind of Gewirthian exposition of practical rationality to solve the problem of moral justification. In its first section, I engage myself in discussing the nature of action which has a

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<sup>99</sup> Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1978), Preface x).

substantial connection with morality. In this section, I would like to explore the Gewirthian notion of goodness, the significance of the agent's purpose. In this context I would also mention about his ideas of freedom and basic well-being (the generic rights of an agent). The second section is dedicated to the structural development (logical derivation) of the PGC and its application to resolve the conflicts of human right by the exposition of the PGC-inspired relation between individual, family and community.

## I

### **The Normative Structure of Moral Action**

The notion of morality has diverse connotations in the history of moral philosophy. Gewirth defines morality as a set of categorically obligatory requirements for moral action that are addressed at least in part by every actual and prospective agent, and that are concerned with furthering the interests of the agent as well as the recipients. Morality, for Gewirth, revolves around three significant questions: 'why should one be moral?' (the authoritative question), 'whose interests other than his own should be addressed by the agent?' (the distributive question) and 'which interests are good ones or constitute the most important goods?' (the substantive question)<sup>100</sup> According to Gewirth, the answers to these questions must be specific and conclusive. Grounding morality from such a perspective he proceeds toward asserting two things – firstly, action is the necessary content in morality and secondly, the generic features of action comprise of voluntariness and purposiveness that spring from the agent's freedom and well-being respectively. The main contention of Gewirth is to establish the normative structure of action as he finds it necessary to emphasize the connection between action and morality. Thus, the argument that leads to the supreme moral principle begins with an analysis of the

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<sup>100</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 3.

nature of morality and the role of action in its fulfilment. Every agent, by the performance of his action, is logically committed to accept the supreme principle of morality that features certain determinate normative structure. Any agent who denies or violates this supreme principle contradicts himself since the principle is unchallenged. This principle is considered to be the criterion of moral rightness and conformity with its requirements is categorically obligatory.

The foundation of his thesis is engrossed into the doctrine of moral action and so it is necessary to discuss about three entailments of moral action. To extract the entailment of action and its generic features, Gewirth tries to find out a statement that would serve as a linguistic representation of action and its generic features: 'I do X to achieve the purpose E'.<sup>101</sup> Now the extraction of entailments of action from a proposition is that it applies to all human beings universally as they are engaged in voluntary and purposive action. Gewirth clarifies that both the generic features of an action along with its entailments represent the 'normative structure of action'. The first entailment of the statement 'I do X for purpose E' shows the significance of action and its generic features of voluntariness and purposiveness. Every agent has to make evaluative judgements about the goodness of his purposes. Here Gewirth enters in the periphery of subjective interest as goodness of agent's own purposes is treated as moral goal. Again this goal is taken as good if it ensures the agent's own freedom and well-being as that is considered as his generic rights. These are the necessary conditions to fulfil the agent's subjective desires (not egoistic wants as they are rational agents) by the performance of the action. The necessity of such affirmation emerges from rationality of the agent who engages into action and capable to decide his goals and the way to achieve the goal. The value which is placed in such necessity is not yet moral; hence Gewirth clarifies that the evil actions may be considered as moral at

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<sup>101</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 49.

this point of time due to ignorance of the agent. It can be possible and not so surprising that at a first stage the decision is not moral as Gewirth believes in procedural justification and not in moral autonomy. In any procedural justification a moral principle cannot itself be moral, because we have to answer the authoritative question (“why one should be moral?”) to verify the purpose. After this procedure the purpose of an agent carries most value with it as the agent, being a rational person, considers that action as good in some sense. Suppose ‘E is good’, to say that an agent considers his purpose as good according to whatever criteria are involved in his action. The purposes, for which he acts, may encompass a wide range of practical reason. Evaluation of the purpose of action on the basis of its quality to procure one’s own rights also insures the duty of the agent towards him. This should be the first criterion to be moral. If we do not learn to protect our own good, we cannot realize the need to protect the good of other people. Such approach clearly shows that we learn to value others by valuing us. Here the will to perform duty towards others is an emerging attitude that we gain through experience.

Second entailment would be a shift from the evaluative statement of recognizing the necessary goodness of freedom and well-being to a deontic affirmation of accepting the right of other people without hampering the freedom and well-being of the agent. According to Gewirth, both these two (freedom and well-being) are considered as ‘the generic rights’ of a moral agent and also regarded as a correlative duty towards other agents by not interfering in the realm of the prospective agent’s generic rights. The duty of the agent is to preserve all the other recipients’ generic rights. His notion of duty is quite different from the Kantian notion. For Kant, it is the duty of all the rational agents to follow the universal moral law for the sake of duty only. There is no place for moral conflict as each and every agent, being rational and necessarily moral, acknowledges the compulsion to follow the same moral law.<sup>102</sup> But to

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<sup>102</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 63.

Gewirth our duty reminds our social responsibility of not hampering the rights of the other people. This can be considered as the other-related ethical view that is not treating the agent and the other prospective agents asymmetrically. This theory provides equal weightage to the right of the agent and the right of other persons. Both Kant and Gewirth possess similar attitude regarding how to value other people. They are treating other people not as a means to achieve something, but treat them as the end. They both believe that each and every moral agent belongs to a moral community where a kind of equal treatment for all is demanded. Kant considers it as 'kingdom of ends' where all rational agents are members of this kingdom.<sup>103</sup> Gewirth is painting a picture of a just society where safeguarding other's right is the duty of a responsible citizen towards his fellow beings.

Someone may consider this shift from an evaluative statement to a deontic one as implausible. Our natural tendency insists to safeguard our own right. But man as a centre of egoistic attitude, emotion and passion always tries to get a better benefit for him. But Gewirth clarifies that in some contingent and practical situations judgements may not necessarily lead to deontic claims, but that does not devalue the necessity of upgrading the evaluative to deontic. The entailment in the generic and dispositional level is desirable and we cannot deny that. If Gewirth correctly argues this entailment, then it logically follows that, in the generic and dispositional level, a proportionate mandate of a supreme principle of morality would emerge. Society is a voluntary association of people and as a rational being we realize, cooperation is better than conflict for furtherance our interests. If my rights are protected by others, we feel a responsibility not to disregard the rights of other people. "This command, in Kantian terms, would have such strong illocutionary force that it would create a parallel perlocutionary effect

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<sup>103</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 95.

on other agents, leading to sanctions or severe censure for violations thereof.”<sup>104</sup> It means that if the evaluative statement turns to deontic one, then it would construct a normative principle which has an objective value applied universally to all rational and prospective agents. When it would be an objective principle or command or an imperative, it takes into consideration the standpoint of other recipients also. It would become necessary to consider other persons’ opinion, because all the other persons (apart from the rational agent himself) are treated as prospective and purposive agents. So, their opinion about preserving the generic rights needs to be evaluated. The intention of the agent present behind his principle of action has an equal effect on all other recipients. So question of agreement arises here as recipients can either accept the principle as command or can reject it due to violation of their generic rights.

These generic rights are the sufficient reasons for being a prospective agent who wants to fulfil or achieve his purposes. Thus, the third entailment shows that being a rational person, every agent must admit that equal rights of freedom and well-being for all prospective and purposive agents. Thus all will gradually accept the logical generalization that all prospective and purposive agents should have the freedom to fulfil his own desired purposes (as fulfilment of a person’s desires does not contradict with the pursuing of the desires of other people). The application of the principle of universalizability is applicable here. According to this principle, the persons who are in a similar situation must be treated similarly. If a person *S* has a certain right because of his having a quality *Q*, then all the persons who has the same property *Q*, should have the same right. Gewirth formulates these three entailments by using the dialectically necessary method which through a logical derivation will lead to the supreme principle of morality (PGC). The dialectically necessary method is a kind of indirect or ‘oblique’ approach used for the justification of moral principles. The ‘oblique’ approach is a

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<sup>104</sup> Robert A. Montaña, “Applying Alan Gewirth’s Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) to Global Policies on Human Rights in a Post-Pandemic World”, *Suri*. 10, no.1 (2022): 45-80.

kind of technique that is used to constitute the thoughts or the beliefs of a rational agent who is in a privileged position. Instead of applying directly to justify the ethical propositions, it influences the belief system of a rational agent.<sup>105</sup>

To define Gewirthian notion of rational agency, I have to mention here that agency has a subjective normative structure as he accepts the ideal observer (advocated by John Rawls) and actors in the state-of-nature (proposed by Jean Jacques Rousseau) as examples of agents in the oblique approach. In his *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls defines that in the original position, a group of rational people living in an equal position agree about the principles of justice which serve as the regulative principles of a just society. Equality is characterized by equal capacity, the rationality of the parties involved and the veil of ignorance. The individuals are rational as they try to acknowledge principles that will advance their achievement of primary social goods (things that every rational person desires to achieve). These are that kind of goods which every rational person requires to spend his life. Rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth – these are considered to be the primary social goods.<sup>106</sup> These rational persons select those principles of justice (from a list of possible alternative principles) that are applied to the basic structure of the society. Principles are decided behind a veil of ignorance (ignorant of any kind of social status, physical and intellectual abilities, moral or religious convictions) from where they cannot choose any principle which works as advantageous for some and disadvantageous for other.<sup>107</sup> In Rousseau's state-of-nature, he is considering a primitive state which is established by the emotions of human beings. Humans, like other animals, stay happily in the forest. Humans are actors who are inherently good, unselfish and nonviolent. They need nutrients and to get that they have a mutual understanding with others and thus they enjoy

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<sup>105</sup> Edward Jr. Regis, ed., *Gewirth's Ethical Rationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2-3.

<sup>106</sup> Steven D. Ealy, "The Justice of Rawls' Original Position", *Journal of Political Science*, 9, no 1, Article 3 (November, 1981): 20-31, <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol9/iss1/3>.

<sup>107</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 118-150.

animal-like happiness. No one possesses any kind of ownership of properties and share everything with others. There is a sense of equality and equal sharing of everything that is needed to live a happy life. The primitive state of Rousseau in an anthropocentric sense has acquired peace and tranquillity as a whole and it is a state of freedom, independence and equality for individuals.<sup>108</sup>

Gewirth defines rational agents as the agent who regards freedom and well-being as necessary goods that constitute the generic features of successful moral action. The agent holds that all the prospective agents including him have rights to have these generic features and they implicitly make right claims. A kind of declaration can be made here as every agent must hold generic rights as the necessary conditions of agency, i.e., freedom and well-being. Gewirth assumes to establish a conceptual connection between rights and necessary goods. This entails that action has evaluative as well as normative or deontic structures; through deontic structures, action not only encompasses the agent's evaluative judgements, he also makes deontic claims about his rights of accepting the generic rights (the generic features of action). They are generic since these are basic features of a successful moral action that characterizes one's behaviour. The right to freedom indicates non-coercion and non-interference by others so that one's behaviour can be completely controlled by own unforced choice. The right to well-being consists of three kinds of goods (basic, non-subtractive and additive) as generic-disposition so that one has the general abilities and required conditions to achieve what is good for him. Moral action as voluntary pursuit of purposes insists the agent to accept certain judgements on the requirements of the agential self-understanding. The agent is bound to follow the PGC as being a rational agent he cannot deny this principle. Gewirth thinks that refusal from agent's part here will defame or demoralise him as an agent. It would be self-contradictory if the agent denies

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<sup>108</sup> Kefei Zhang, "Rousseau's State of Nature and Its Problems", *8th International Education, Economics, Social Science, Arts, Sports and Management Engineering Conference (IEESASM)* (UK: Francis Academic Press, 2020) DOI: 10.25236/ieesasm.2020.044.

this principle of generic consistency as that is the result of an entailment from his own rights and well-being. According to Edward Regis Jr., the only difference Gewirth's oblique approach has from Rawls and Rousseau is that "the agent of the dialectically necessary method is claimed to reach the ethical conclusions by means of the logically necessary inferences from premises rooted in the requirements of the purposive action".<sup>109</sup> In Rawls or Rousseau, there is no logical necessity in the assertion of the agents. Procedures of Rawls and Rousseau are considered as dialectically contingent method in Gewirth's thesis.

**I.1 The Notion of Goodness** – According to Gewirth, the notion of goodness has a 'common illocutionary force of expressing a favorable, positive evaluation of the objects or purposes to which it is attributed.'<sup>110</sup> Goodness is a value that is attributed to the purposes that every agent aims to achieve. The ideas of goodness and purpose are implicitly connected to each other. When an object is considered as good, it must have some value or some positive attitude that establishes its goodness. In Gewirthian exegesis every agent makes an implicit judgement of the purposes that he wants to achieve as good. This goodness is an intrinsic value that is present in the purpose of every act of the agent. When goodness is attached to the purposes as a positive value, the purpose becomes necessarily good since goodness is attributed to it. Gewirthian notion of goodness is something exactly what Kant has explained as intrinsically good. Good will, according to Kant, is something which is intrinsically good and it is the absolute good. Nothing can be better than the concept of good will. Kant elaborates it as unconditionally good: a good will is considered as good neither because it has achieved some accomplishments nor because of its ability to achieve any proposed aim. This good will is considered as good only by virtue of its willing, i.e., it is good in itself. It is not a mere wish, even if there is nothing to

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<sup>109</sup> Regis, ed., *Gewirth's Ethical Rationalism*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 51.

accompany it, this good will still shine as a jewel on its own. It has its complete worth in itself.<sup>111</sup>

According to Gewirth, goodness is not something that is applied to any particular purpose, rather it has a more convincing or stronger application as it is connected to the generic features in general that characterize all the actions. These features constitute the *generic goods*.<sup>112</sup> Here Gewirth moves towards normative or first-order ethics from metaethical discussion. Since action is the means through which the agent attains what is good for him (even if it is only regarding the performance of the action itself), he regards voluntariness or freedom and purposiveness or well-being as necessary good that is the essential feature of his action. It is time now to discuss in detail the generic features of action.

**I.1.1 Voluntariness or Freedom** - The significance of freedom needs more attention as without freedom the agent is unable to achieve his desired purpose that would be good for him. Freedom consists of two kinds of choices: one is occurrent choice where he controls each of his particular behavior by his willing choice and another is dispositional choice where his ability to exercise such control is deep-rooted as it springs from his disposition. In dispositional freedom, a degree of necessity is present as without dispositional freedom, all or most of the purposive actions are impossible to perform. On the contrary, absence of occurrent freedom may debar some particular action, but cannot create obstruction in all actions. It may be the case that due to some situational twists sometimes the agent fails to achieve his desired purpose. Suppose in dilemmatic situation the alternatives are so restricted that none of them satisfy his purpose, though the agent is bound to opt any one of them. In such situations the agent is not truly free. Although freedom or voluntariness is not tied with the ends or purposes, but it is very

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<sup>111</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of the Morals*, trans. Zweig, T. E. Hill (Jr.).

<sup>112</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 52.

significant for decision-making procedure as it is a mechanism using which the agent controls his own behavior that serves as a means to attain his ends. He not only controls his behavior, but he wants to control it with such a power, so that any threat against this control is conceived as a threat to the attainment of what he considers as good for him. In addition to this instrumental value, the agent also regards his freedom as intrinsically good simply because it is an essential component of purposive action and carries with it the necessary goodness that makes the necessary condition to achieve the end or goal. This proves that in some cases where the agent is subjected to violence, coercion or some kind of physical constraint, may act negatively. Gewirth is considering the agent as a social being here as his choices are not always unforced or free, rather tied by several conditions. Due to negative emotions like anger, dissatisfaction, annoyance or because of some coercion the agent might be forced to choose something. In those cases also there seems to be some degree of voluntariness or freedom. But if it is unforced or uncoerced, then only the agent is intrinsically free. In such conditions the agent can exercise his freedom in its fullest sense that energises him to pursue what he regards as good.<sup>113</sup> Being a social person or a member of a society or institution, sometimes it might be possible that an agent intentionally gives away his freedom without any coercion or forced choice. Gewirth considers this agent as a prospective rational agent who has freedom as a generic feature of his action and can exercise his rights properly. It is a kind of intentional decision that the agent has made, but it does not mean that the agent is not free. Freedom has a necessary goodness that can be exercised by such a social person as well.

**I.1.2 Purposiveness or Well-being** – Apart from voluntariness or freedom of actions, Gewirth's theory also emphasizes on the generic purposiveness as a necessary good. The agent regards particular purposes that are considered as good for him. He tries to increase the level

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<sup>113</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 52-53.

of purpose-fulfilment by achieving the goal for which he acts. From the standpoint of the rational agent, the generic purposiveness of moral actions encompasses three kinds of goods.<sup>114</sup> First, the *basic goods* or the basic aspects of his well-being. This good indicates the most fundamental necessary preconditions for the performance of any and all of his actions. It is the physical and psychological dispositions ranging from food, shelter, clothing to mental equilibrium and a feeling of confidence of attaining one's goals. Second is the *non-subtractive goods*. Such kind of good never decreases the amount of his achieved good through his new purpose fulfilment. This good secures the quantity of the previously achieved good. The agent regards it as good as his level of purpose-fulfilment does not decrease the amount of his present good. *Non-subtractive* good is important to the agent as anyhow he is not ready to sacrifice all those conditions of his life that are already established as good. His level of wish fulfilment must not be redundant such kind of good. Suppose at time  $t$ , a person A has  $X$  units of goods. At time  $t_1$ , he possesses the same  $X$  units of goods. As he is not losing a single unit of his previously achieved good, so at  $t_2$  he can try to acquire more well-being for him. This kind of purpose fulfilment is considered as good because the agent can fulfil his desires without losing anything from his baggage. Third is the *additive goods* or the level of purpose-fulfilment which can be raised by his gaining something that seems to him as good. It is considered to be the goal or objective for which the agent acts. *Additive* good is a kind of good that the agent newly achieves through his purpose fulfilment. This kind of good increases his level of well-being. Now, if at time  $t_1$ , A has gained a unit over his present good of  $X$ , then he is in a beneficial position for having  $X+1$  units of goods. It refers to both the relation between the two states and to the added unit of good. The *basic goods* is the precondition whereas the *non-subtractive* and the *additive goods* are constitutive in nature as both of them contribute to the purpose of the agent which is necessarily accepted by the agent as good. Such good are necessarily part of purposive action

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<sup>114</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 53-55.

as they are connected with the level of purpose-fulfilment. These three kinds of goods are involved in value-judgement of goodness and in relation to the agent's well-being; these goods provide a generic-dispositional interpretation. Exceptions can be there as an agent may perform some successful action without achieving well-being. At the same time in spite of having a goal of well-being, the agent may not be succeeded in some particular action. Well-being, according to Gewirth, is a generic feature of successful moral action when such action is regularly and predictably accomplished. The normative value of practical reason is very well engrossed here in this notion of well-being. The rational agent's purview is not occurrent, but dispositional. The agent not only considers him as an agent of a particular situation, but a prospective agent as such who has desires and purposes when he is not performing any action. Gewirth focuses more on the dispositional capacities of a rational agent; it refers to the whole life span of an agent. Failure in a particular situation is just an exception, and that does not delimit the essence of a happy life and the rationality of an agent. Thus "the object of man's desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of his future desires".<sup>115</sup>

The notion of well-being is associated with the successful actions of a complete life. According to Gewirth, happiness of a person is the connotation of well-being. It is not a particular situation, not a matter of one day, or one short span of life that justifies a person as happy or not; it is rather a way of being happy, the review of the whole life of a person who has spent a successful and happy life. The similar insight we find in Greek stalwart Aristotle's thesis where human life is regarded as consisting of acquiring those ends that are valuable for their own sake, for their intrinsic goodness. The main objective of his moral theory is to discover the nature of the end at which human being ought to aim as his well-being is related with that. In his theory a human life becomes successful when it actualizes its rational nature.

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<sup>115</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 63.

The end of human life must be something that is self-satisfying, needs no supplement beyond itself. According to him, this end of human being is termed as *eudaimonia* which is usually translated as happiness. Living well and doing well seems to be a correct English translation of the term. Happiness is a state of feeling, but by the term *eudaimonia* he means ‘a certain kind of activity of the soul in accordance with virtue’.<sup>116</sup>

As every agent regards his whole well-being as necessarily good, it is treated as his purpose of actions. The goal of well-being has a significant value and so purposive actions are treated as necessary to perform. The basic capabilities of action or the basic goods of the agent are indispensable since without these the agent either would not be able to act at all or will act only in a very restricted manner. There might be degrees of voluntariness (freedom and its relation to the rational agent) that determine the level of coherence to the PGC including the rules of the principle; whereas the degrees of well-being are utilized mostly in resolving the conflicts of rights. Gewirth explains, the requirements of agency form the foundation of the agent’s well-being. He is being able to retain the good that he possesses in the non-subtractive well-being and the qualitative and quantitative development of these goods form his additive well-being. In the case of conflict among people importance would be given to the agent who has a higher level of right claim based on these degrees of freedom and well-being.<sup>117</sup>

## II

### **The Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC)**

In the previous two sections, I have tried to clarify the normative structure of moral action and the status of rational agency as developed by Gewirth. The main concern is the structure of

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<sup>116</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., Roger Crisp, 16.

<sup>117</sup> Montaña, “Applying Alan Gewirth’s Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) to Global Policies on Human Rights in a Post-Pandemic World”, 45-80.

moral action and its generic features. These features are considered to be the generic rights of the rational agent that should be preserved. This right claim implies a correlation between the agent and the other persons in two senses – firstly at the time of deciding the goal of his action, the agent decides for all as he realizes his responsibility to guard the rights of others prospective agents or for those who belong to the same status. Secondly, a mutual expectation of non-interference exists between people as freedom to fulfil own well-being is considered as generic right of us. Morality is primarily concerned with the interpersonal actions that affect other beings also apart from the agent. Gewirth refers these kinds of actions as *transactions* and the persons who get affected by them as *recipients*.<sup>118</sup> The agent and the recipient both participate in transactions; but agent does it actively, the recipient has a passive participation. The recipients are considered as prospective agents who also have purposes (like the agent) which they want to fulfil. The agent must acknowledge a generalization that the recipients' rights should be preserved. He is logically committed to respect the recipients' generic rights of freedom and well-being. This is a certain generic obligation that the agent possesses in the course of performing a moral action. He ought to refrain from harming and coercing his recipients and ought to assist them to enjoy their freedom and well-being which are considered to be the necessary goodness of moral action. The general principle from which this kind of obligations and rights emerge is termed as the supreme principle of morality. Gewirth has advocated the principle as the *Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC)*: “*Act in accord with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself*”.<sup>119</sup> It is a formal consideration of consistency and a material consideration of rights which engages with it the generic features or goods of action.

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<sup>118</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 129.

<sup>119</sup> Gewirth, *Reason and Morality*, 135.

The *PGC* is a logical principle that is derived through a deduction:

- i. An agent has adopted a purpose as good in some sense that he is committed to achieve.
- ii. He ought to have the indispensable means to achieve his chosen purpose.
- iii. Freedom and well-being are the generic features of action and these are regarded as the indispensable means to achieve his desired purpose.
- iv. Consequently, any agent having a purpose is committed to claim that he ought to have his freedom and basic well-being as a right.
- v. He must claim this right by virtue of his desired property that he believes to achieve as right.
- vi. He must concede that all other prospective agents do have the same property of freedom and basic well-being as right.
- vii. This desired property must be a generalized notion like the agency itself.
- viii. Therefore, any agent having any purpose in any circumstance is committed to accept that all other agents (recipients) have the right to freedom and basic well-being and to acknowledge that he ought to respect these rights of the recipients.

Gewirthian logical derivation has shown the formulation of the *PGC* and it must be extended by virtue of the universality of practical reason.<sup>120</sup> He thinks that the *PGC* is derivable only via a ‘dialectically necessary’ mode of argumentation. The dialectically necessary method begins from statements or judgments that are necessarily attributable to every agent since they are derived from the generic features that constitute the necessary structure of action. The mode is dialectical means that it presents the steps of the argument as inferences made by the agent himself, rather than a statement true of the world itself. Each step is a description of what the agent thinks and not what things are like in the world independent of the agent. This mode of

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<sup>120</sup> John H. Hooker, “Alan Gewirth and the Moral Law”, Researchgate, 1996, accessed November 25, 2023, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/2667290> .

argumentation is also "necessary" both in the sense that its initial premise is inevitable from any agent's standpoint and that the subsequent steps of the proof are logically deduced from this premise. The *PGC* is considered to be a necessary principle in two ways: one is that it is formally or logically necessary in the sense that for every agent to deny or violate it is to contradict himself as a rational agent. If someone denies this principle then it means that by virtue of certain qualities he is in a position to hold the rights, but other persons in spite of bearing similar qualities cannot have those rights. Again, this principle is also materially necessary or categorical in the sense that unlike other principles, the obligations of the *PGC* cannot be escaped by any agent through shifting his inclinations, interests or ideals. The sense of obligation is derived from the necessary structure of agency. The agent holds that being a prospective and purposive agent he has some rights. From this it is rationally derived that he must accept that his recipients also have the same rights as they are also prospective, purposive agents.

The *PGC* has some direct applications where it is an individual-to-individual transaction. An agent, following the *PGC*, acts in accord with the generic rights not only for himself, but for his recipients too through the principle of universalizability. Gewirth calls it the equality of generic rights where the agent pro-actively assists others to preserve and exercise their freedom and well-being or at least refrains from interfering with others' rights. It is the duty of the rational agent not to interfere and harm the generic rights of his recipients.<sup>121</sup> The obligations set by the *PGC* involves correlated modes of respect towards others. Every agent ought to respect his recipient's generic rights as well as his own. Such respect is reflected through actions as well as influences certain related dispositions of the agent. An attitude of

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<sup>121</sup> Montaña, "Applying Alan Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) to Global Policies on Human Rights in a Post-Pandemic World", 45-80.

recognizing the recipients' rights and a positive concern for their rights and a positive regard toward that person is a flow from his rational capacity that reflects the purpose.

This principle also has some indirect application as well. In the indirect application, the *PGC* deals with issues those are social and political in nature. The *PGC* justifies all the conventional social rules if they are consistent with the *PGC*. All such social and political rules become obligatory. All should respect these social and political rules as these are justified by the supreme principle of morality. This indirect application can be explained as principle-to-institution as the moral principle here helps to justify the social institution. Morality expands in other spheres of life and helps to make life a moral life in true sense. Multilateral conflicts may appear as people from diverse backgrounds follow the same moral rule of rights. But this can be easily resolved with the help of *PGC*. Gewirth clarifies that there is a critical difference between direct and indirect application of the supreme principle of morality. In the former, the agent acts in accord with the generic rights of other recipients; but in second case he is not applying the generic principle, but using the social rules justified by the *PGC*. So certain restrictions may occur in the latter application as *PGC* is not directly involved here.<sup>122</sup>

To sum up, it is necessary to mention first that Alan Gewirth's discussion of practical reason emerges following the Kantian notion of the supreme principle of morality as he is also mentioning to justify morality following a principle. But there is a remarkable difference between them regarding formation of the principle. Kant strictly follows the path of pure practical reason to formulate the principle as he is cautious about its objective applicability. Gewirth also admits the requirement to follow the same principle by all the agents (both real and prospective), but his idea of practical reason that is present behind the formation of principle develops through realization of some basic needs present in practical life platform, in

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<sup>122</sup> Montaña, "Applying Alan Gewirth's Principle of Generic Consistency (PGC) to Global Policies on Human Rights in a Post-Pandemic World", 45-80.

the fabric of the world. Practical reason is thus constituted by the active participation of the agent as the agent through his social training and rational deliberative choice realizes the required values of life. So here practical reason that is required to form objective principle is embedded in life experiences and never dishonours the social self of the agent. So though both Kant and Gewirth refer the objective principle for morality, but they have different kinds of attitudes toward the formulation and justification of the supreme moral principle. Kant, in his thesis of pure practical reason, discusses in detail the nature of the universal moral law or the categorical imperative. In this connection, he also includes the discussion of the significant notions of duty, respect toward the universal law, autonomy, freedom of the rational agent etc. In the modern period, rational agents are inherently moral. They do not have any other choice to decide anything else. An agent's emotion is considered to be a subjective inclination that only creates hindrances toward the path of being moral. Though he talks about doctrine of virtues, but feelings, benevolence, beneficence must accord to the notion of duty and universal moral law. Gewirth also takes into consideration all these notions that are very much relevant to the supreme principle of morality. His PGC serves as the foundation of moral knowledge that rejects the possibility of upholding conflicting moral judgements without making any ethical or empirical error. By logically necessary method, we can derive a true supreme principle of morality in assertoric form. In contemporary epoch, I have noticed a tendency of providing immense importance and responsibilities to a rational agent too. But philosophers of contemporary period advocate more liberal thesis of morality, where moral agent is also considered as embodied social agent who belongs to a social community and who has some rights to fulfil. Agent's freedom and choice are unforced in the sense that no one is coercing or compelling him to be a moral agent. Gewirth also includes the notion of duty, respect toward others, not interfering or harming others' generic rights as they all are prospective and purposive agents of moral action. The importance of the rational agent acquires the highest

level as they have to act in a way to preserve others' basic rights as well as his own. Gewirth's notion of the supreme principle of morality is logically derived by dialectically necessary method. But Kantian notion of the universal moral law is formulated from the maxims of the agent; these are not subjective maxims; they are formal or objective maxims. Gewirth accepts this principle on the pain of self-contradiction, i.e., it has a necessity as it makes an agent the agent. Thus his theory establishes the objectivity of supreme moral principle on the basis of living experiences.

**Chapter 4:**

**Internal Reason: An Inclusion of Subjectivity**

## Chapter 4

### **Internal Reason: An Inclusion of Subjectivity**

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of my thesis I have discussed about the notion of pure practical reason of Immanuel Kant that justifies the rightness of action on the basis of everyone's freedom to apply universal moral law. Ignoring the role of moral sense Kant is depending on the universal moral laws. His emphasis on the purity of practical reason initiates a different interpretation of desire. In his view as a rational being we possess the capacity of practical rational reflection. As a result we must have the desire to do our duties that we choose due to our respect for the rational law. This respect for the law is also the outcome of reason as reason insists us to follow the universal principle for its own worth. This respect for the rational law is the source of our rational self-constraint and helps us to overthrow the demands of inclinations. Thus we observe that Kant's moral theory focuses on some general duties that are essential to perform for being a responsible member of a moral community where all the ends of all the rational members must ensure the worth of humanity. His aim is to formulate universally valid normative principles as all rational beings are capable to follow them. His pure practical reason does not establish the validity of practical principles following the method of induction, rather ignoring the empirical features it establishes the apriority of such principles as applicable to all. Goal of this pure practical reason is to bring an objective end or an end that is good for humanity, good for every rational being in general.

Kant in his Deontological approach giving importance to general duties that ensures the objective good. In the scope of morality he is not interested to include particular duties of life that bring happiness to individual person, the person of flesh and blood. In Kant's opinion duty must be performed in the form of categorical imperative that aims to produce objective value by discarding the subjective aspects. He understands happiness as "an idea in which all

inclinations are summed up.” It is “an absolute whole, a maximum of well-being in my present and every future state.”<sup>123</sup> Happiness is thus related with our particular condition. From Kant’s standpoint it may be claimed that happiness in collective sense could be the goal of rational beings; but happiness for an individual may contradict his rational choice and may lead to irrationality, as here we have to judge the action along with the nature of the end. But contemporary philosophers are concerned about the specific duties of individual person that are decided on the basis of his own plan of life. So philosophers of now-a-days are aiming to focus on pragmatic principle instead of categorical imperative. In the previous chapter I have discussed that Alan Gewirth, in spite of admitting the PGC, puts emphasis on the agential self-understanding. Every agent, for him, must act in accordance with his or her own as well as for all other agent’s generic rights. The right to freedom and well-being of the agent along with his peers should be preserved. This kind of contemporary thought has maintained its legacy to the philosophical exegesis of Bernard Williams who becomes eminent in his innovative and thought-provoking endeavours. Thus though like Kant, Bernard Williams is also providing importance to the freedom of the agent that allows the agent to take his own decision, but his understanding of freedom is completely different from Kant’s one as the latitude of his theory is not bounded by objective values and universal principles only. He rather supports non-interference so far as it maintains equilibrium between subjectivity and rational justification. In Williams’ interpretation reason that we use in making the decisions of practical life must be generated from the womb of the agent’s own well-being, though as a morally responsible person his well-being should pass through the litmus test of rational justification. His agent-centric approach considers an agent as an embodied particular being who along with his rationality also possesses subjective aspects like desires, wants etc. that demands a scope to be realized in moral sphere too. These subjective aspects provide a more open-minded approach

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<sup>123</sup> Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Paton, 64-81.

towards maintaining universality and thus contribute to the task of redefining the nature of practical reason.

So, the significance of this chapter is to discuss Bernard Williams' approach towards practical reason and in this respect, I would like to clarify his understanding of internal and external reasons. In the first section he has constructed the Kantian critique whereas in the second section he has taken an attempt to prove the inadequacy of external reasons. In this section, I would also like to mention the exegesis of another prominent contemporary philosopher John McDowell. In his well-known article "Might there be external reasons?", he presents an interesting and significant contribution to the debate initiated by Bernard Williams<sup>124</sup> on the adequacy of external reason. My intention is to understand the status of external reason through this debate among these two philosophers. In the third section of this chapter, I would like to include Bernard Williams' own interpretation of reason, i.e., the internal reason. My aim here is to understand whether any one of these two reasons is capable enough to take moral decisions or not. Is it possible for any one of these two reasons to do the task alone? To search the answer of this question I will focus on Williams' understanding of internal reason that includes subjective aspects in the arena of practical reason without advocating relativism.

## I

### **Critique of the Kantian Morality**

From the ancient period to the modern era, most of the prominent Western moral theories have highlighted objectivity as the core concept of morality. In the contemporary span, Bernard Williams is one of those philosophers who tries to break this age long rigidity and attempts to

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<sup>124</sup> Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101.

establish a theory that proposes the inclusion of the subjective aspects of the moral agent in practical reason without the intervention of relativism. Such attempt of Williams encourages me to include his arguments against Immanuel Kant's moral theory. Williams raises objections in several aspects of Kantian moral system.

**I.1 Moral Autonomy** - Williams questions Kant's attempt to understand moral agent as an autonomous agent. By 'autonomy' Kant means the capacity of the rational being to provide him full moral guidance through the control of his impulses. This means that for acting morally (for being moral), the agent has no need to depend on any other authority. In respect of making moral decision Kant is confident about the power of rational faculty of the agent and going against the attitude of Christianity of the middle age, he denies the hegemony of divine power in moral sphere. Due to such belief he insists to follow rational law, the secular equivalent of the divine law. He prescribes to follow rational law only, without any external compulsion. Kant also rejects the interference of agent's emotions, desires etc. as that may override the rational capacity by limiting the agent's freedom of will. He suggests that autonomy of the agent cannot be established by following universal law in a passive manner, in a blind way. Rather he thinks, at the time of taking any decision, we have to be sanguine whether our subjective principle or maxim of action contradicts with anyone else or not. He admits the active participation of the agent and denies the presence of any external or internal force as compulsion, except agent's own reason. Thus he proposes to accept moral system also as an autonomous system. As he strives for autonomy in his moral system, he suggests three postulates of morality viz., the existence of God, immortality of the soul and the freedom of will. Apart from these presuppositions there cannot be any other foundation depending upon which his moral system would be autonomous. Kant thinks that morality presents itself to the rational agent as a categorical demand, because rational agent understands morality in terms of laws derived from practical reason. Kant formulates morality in a way where the agent, as

rational being, considers it necessary to follow the moral law derived from practical reason. Agent's morality springs from his rationality, as a rational being he inherits morality. Autonomy of the agent depends on his power to understand the reason, his capacity to form the rational law and to execute that law without any interference of external force. Thus autonomy of morality is based on the autonomy of the agent that justifies the capacity to use pure practical reason.

Williams criticizes Kantian notion of moral autonomy from a different perspective. He thinks that if we try to find out the reason for being moral, we have to give either moral or non-moral reason.<sup>125</sup> We cannot prove a person as a moral person on the ground that he follows some moral reason, because in that case to justify the need for being moral we are taking the help of moral reason by admitting moral reasons as valid. On the contrary, we cannot prove the moral autonomy of the agent on the basis of non-moral reason also, since non-moral reason does not include moral intentionality (obligation in Kant's terminology). We cannot prove the autonomy of morality with the help of some non-moral reason too. So, Williams opines that there cannot be any reason that justifies the autonomy, unconditionality or the notion of categorical imperative.

**I.2 Rational Agency** - Williams criticises Kant's bare notion of rational agency on the basis of which he has established the objective structure of morality. To sustain this claim, Williams is providing an alternative argument that he claims, is 'simpler and more concrete' than Kant's own. This alternative argument, Williams thinks, would help to show why Kant begins his thesis on the mere conception of rational agency as well as it would help to justify that Kant's notion cannot generate the moral point of view.<sup>126</sup> In the course of his discussion, Williams

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<sup>125</sup> Bernard Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy* (Abingdon: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 55.

<sup>126</sup> Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, 55.

opines that the Kantian approach is unacceptable. Kant begins his discussion by considering a particular metaphysical conception of the rational agent. For Kant, the self of rational agent is simply a 'noumenal' self who is free from temporal and causal determination. He abstracts the notion of rational agency from the context of embodied human beings. From this abstract level he states that the ultimate norm of morality is a principle of reason. Thus a rational agent, for Kant, is distinct from the concrete and empirically determined person. Williams begins his alternative to Kant's argument by asking: 'Is there anything that rational agents necessarily want... merely as part or pre-condition of being agents?'<sup>127</sup> Kant's intention is to make the agent free from all contextual characteristics. But Williams' argument postulates that for being a rational agent a person minimally requires to have some desires or wants and must have the capacity of fulfilling those wants. He defines a moral agent as a person of flesh and blood, who wishes to be a moral person to exemplify him in the eyes of others. The main contention is that when a person intends to act, he necessarily desires to achieve some outcome and such desires insist him to act accordingly. The person wants to produce the outcome since he believes certain things as valuable for him and on the basis of these beliefs and wants, he acts. On these occasions, we all have a general disposition of not to be interfered by other people.

Williams also emphasizes on the criterion of a rational agent as well as a moral agent. He considers the notion of rational agency in a wider sense and moral responsibility becomes one of the most vital criteria that a rational agent should meet. Williams, in terms of defining moral agency, emphasizes on being an individual embodied soul, rather than being a perfect rational agent. An individual being, apart from his individuality, is considered to have reason as a necessary condition for being a rational agent. As an individual, he has some desires, wants, needs (subjective attitudes, but not egoistic wants) that make him a responsible agent for his

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<sup>127</sup> Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, 55

decisions. There is always a scope of evaluation of the agent's moral character that provides justification for his moral decisions. So, the concept of an individual is a crucial notion in Williams' moral system as an individual's perspective has a great significance. Without his own conscious deliberation, an individual cannot be considered as responsible for his moral deliberations. Someone may accuse Williams as a relativist as he emphasizes on the deliberation from the subjective standpoint. But Williams' aim is to build an unbiased and liberal moral system on the basis of objectivity and universality, though he includes individual's subjective aspects to the moral decision-making procedure. This is how Williams advocates the notion of autonomy in his moral system which is quite distinct from the Kantian notion of autonomy.

**I.3 Freedom and Normativity** – Now the question is if moral system is normative in nature then how can it act in parallel to the notion of the freedom of the individual subject? But Williams' aim is to establish normativity through his notion of freedom. He thinks, every human being has a general want for freedom, and no one wants their choices to be limited by anything or anyone else. Norms, for Williams, present some ideal values like freedom, mutual understanding between agents, non-interference, moral commitments and the notion of good (well-being). As own freedom is entertaining for every being and treated as an ideal, it is a mutual understanding among all for not to interfere and hamper others' freedom. Thus in Williams' perspective ideals are directly connected with our feelings as following the ideals we become happy. We enjoy to follow the norms without compulsion. The agent does so as he prefers to do so. Behind his preference, Williams points out the agent's attitude to care about the interest of other people.<sup>128</sup> Williams identifies these subjective aspects as the ingredients of morality. The moral education which we internalise from the period of our upbringing act as

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<sup>128</sup> Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

our internal reason. In this way, an ideal world can be created where normativity persists automatically, no compulsion is there for maintaining it. It is also noticeable that rational agency has another vital condition that cannot be ignored in this framework. In practical life we find that some things are accessible to an agent at a given time and others are not. Moreover, what is accessible to an agent and how far it is accessible depends on both the psychological as well as the situational conditions of the agent. The world, the situational conditions of the agent (where he is, what he is and what he may become etc.) impose some significant criteria on his choices, compels him for rescheduling his plans. There are restrictions on what he can do and by incorporating such limitations in his plans he becomes a rational agent. His rationality empowers him to live his own life as a unique individual with all such limitations. Sometimes a person thinks that he is constrained to be a rational agent, but having rationality is utterly an important factor for being a particular individual agent. Williams, in his moral exegesis, never rejects the notion of rationality and to him it would be absurd to think that rationality is not required in a happier world (ideal world).<sup>129</sup>

Unlike Kant, Williams emphasizes on the notion of freedom and provides it the highest position in moral arena. For him, freedom of will is considered as the freedom to take moral decisions. These moral decisions are based on reason along with the subjective aspects of a person which justifies an agent as a morally responsible person. For that reason, moral agent decides the purpose of his action on the basis of his subjective aspects (attitudes, plans, projects) through a rational deliberative route, what he believes as good to achieve. This subjective purpose of the agent helps to maintain both individuality of the person and his moral sense.<sup>130</sup> This ‘good’ is nothing but the well-being of the agent. As a moral being, he has some

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<sup>129</sup> Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, 57.

<sup>130</sup> Roger J. Sullivan, “How Bernard Williams Constructed His Critique of Kant’s Moral Theory”, *Kantian Review*, 3 (March 1999): 107, [https://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S1369415400000376](https://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1369415400000376)

ultimate goal to be happy, to achieve what is necessary for his own well-being, without hampering others' freedom. The idea of achieving good is not at all egoistic in every case; goodness of the thing can be justified if it is acknowledged by more moral citizens as good for one who is situated in that particular position. Situational conditions as well as the role and responsibility of the moral agent are equally important in this framework. Purpose does not indicate fulfilment of some immediate wants only (egoistic wants); it can be a long-term, thought-full interests or well-being also. To value something and to make a moral decision depending upon that, has a far-reaching significance in Williams' thesis. It is not a mere want; it is always to overstep that limit of immediate desire and find something good that has a real value (well-being) in a person's life. The responsible, rational agent must have the freedom to decide his own well-being. So freedom is the only thing that has a significance in any person's life. To sustain freedom, to maintain a peaceful society, each and every agent is involved in a moral commitment and mutual understanding. Accusation of subjectivity against Williams can be overcome by rationality of the agent as well as involving in a dialogue with other persons since he acknowledges the decisions of other persons. Williams' attempt to promote agency through the freedom of a responsible individual can be compared to Aristotelian conception of *eudaimon*. Aristotle opines that ideal (virtuous) human life aspires some end that aims to achieve well-being. The end of human life is a self-satisfied life through implementation of his rational nature and virtuous character. This well-being of human being is termed by him as *eudaimonia*, translated as happiness. The term is also defined as 'living well and doing well'. Moreover, *eudaimonia* is a certain kind of activity of the soul in accordance with virtue or the excellence of character. Thus well-being or goodness connotes the goodness of the soul.<sup>131</sup> As Aristotle justifies the necessity to prepare a person's character very much, the individual virtuous being becomes very significant in his theory. Individual being is also becomes

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<sup>131</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Ross, 24.

prominent in Williams' moral thesis as he includes subjective aspects of embodied soul in the realm of applying practical reason for taking decisions. In both the philosophical views the notion of well-being provides a sense of moral responsibility to the agent as well.

**I.4 Williams' Rule of Non-interference** - Williams opines that for attaining our purposes, we all will to follow a rule of non-interference. My moral sense teaches me not to interfere in others' freedom, as I am not ready to allow other people to interfere in my freedom. It is the need for basic freedom and each agent is involved in a moral commitment not to interfere with others' freedom. In his view this prescription must be treated as a law based on the principle of universalizability.<sup>132</sup> Williams' rule of non-interference reminds us about our responsibilities – responsibility as a rational agent, as a social being. Because it starts with individual's practical deliberation which includes an agent's subjective aspects through his rational choice. Here the situational constraints cannot be ignored. This kind of practical deliberation cannot be an impartial one where agent's satisfaction is sacrificed in the name of duty and it is not derived from a universal law (as stated by Kant). Practical deliberation can be defined as individual's internal obligation as a rational agent as well as a moral agent. Individual obligation provides the justification for being a moral agent; however, obligation not only encourages to satisfy the subjective aspects of the individual self, it also suffices the criterion of universalizability. We can expect non-interference from fellow moral agents only if our decision does not hamper the interest of others as well as it helps us to progress in life. It means the decision must be full proof, rationally justified, benevolent and socially acceptable. I think Williams is focusing on the development of our rational self as well as our social self. This law of non-interference is not the same kind of universal, obligatory law that Kant has prescribed in his moral system. Both rely on reason as the foundation of decision making, though there seems to be no compulsion in Williams' notion of law as he has complete faith on individual beings. Rational

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<sup>132</sup> Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, 60.

agents willingly and spontaneously follow the law of non-interference and do not interfere in other's matter. Law, for Williams, provides freedom to the rational agents in a social scenario. This law has no external sanction and it commits equalities among beings. This is coined by Williams as *notional law*.<sup>133</sup> This kind of law reflects the fact that everyone asks for it from an equal position, i.e., there is no inequality between individuals. Each and every being would deliberate rationally and with due respect to the law of non-interference, they secure their position as social beings as well. There is a kind of mutual understanding and moral commitment that makes this law a universally accepted law. It is true that in a society we all are situated in different positions; so apparently it seems that the decisions must be individualistic and decisions differ according to the situational diversity. But Williams has clarified this nicely on the basis of rational justification. He thinks that the decision must be such that when other agents imagine them in the same situation or position, it must appear that this moral decision is the best possible deliberation (choice) a moral agent can take. Because the agent rationally deliberates without ignoring his subjective aspects.

Though Williams' concept of law differs from the Kantian notion of law, but at least like Kant Williams also believes that following rules in morality is mandatory (although the sense of that laws is completely different). The difference between their approaches lies in their understanding of moral agent in different flavour. To Kant concept of agency is an abstract concept without any embodying aspects. But in the foundational framework of his theory, Williams is connecting the agent with his own world. As a member of the complex world, he has to handle both the diversity and individual liberty. The colossal impact of his theory lies in his attempt to provide the right to the individual to take decision from his own perspective. To him agent is a concrete entity, not an abstract concept. As a result, in Kant's opinion the universal law directly prescribes what we ought to do. It makes compulsion on the agent as the

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<sup>133</sup> Williams, *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy*, 63.

rational agent ought to consider that objective law as obligatory. There is no scope to judge the necessity of the law from the standpoint of agent's own requirements. Each and every agent should make and follow the universal rules. Kant focuses only on the rational faculty of the moral being. Moral being, for him, is identified as rational being. However, he is not ready to give any importance to the agent's individual aspects or his existence as a social being. In his conception of Kingdom of ends, though he is discussing about the duties towards other fellow beings, but that also points towards our duty as a moral and rational being. Interest of the agent is subdued there under the divinity of duty. But Bernard Williams gives immense importance to the individual moral agent and his sense of responsibility. Williams, like Kant, admits that moral agents must not have egoistic wants or needs, but unlike Kant he thinks that agent has the right to aspire for his own well-being. That is why freedom to take decision according to his own criterion is the most significant basic need as well as right of every agent that must be taken care of. The rule of non-interference depends on moral commitments and mutual understanding between rational agents of a society which includes individual's subjective aspects without committing relativism. Therefore, Williams concludes that his arguments simply would not support Kantian concept of moral agency. Because he opines that if we adopt the Kantian view in which morality is based only on reason, then it follows that we are committed to an ethical life, merely because we are rational agents and nothing else.<sup>134</sup>

## II

### **Inadequacy of the Agent-Independent Reasoning**

Though Williams differs from Kant regarding the notion of rational agency, but like Kant, Bernard Williams admits that practical reason is the tool for moral decision making. But Williams has his own interpretation of reason, as unlike Kant he focuses on the motivation of

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<sup>134</sup> Sullivan, "How Bernard Williams Constructed His Critique of Kant's Moral Theory", 107.

the agent to justify practical reason. Going against Immanuel Kant's obsession to follow pure practical reason without any intervention of empirical aspects, he prefers to design reasons for morality in a different manner. In his version the truth-falsity of such reason statement must depend on the satisfaction of the motive of the agent as the agent has selected the action for his wish-fulfilment. Showing a distinction between agent-dependent reason and the agent-independent objective reason, he is trying to justify the use of practical reason that evolves from the agent's perspective. In his well-known article 'Internal and External Reasons', he introduces two kinds of reasons statements. One is 'someone has reason to act in a specific way (say  $\emptyset$ )' and the other is 'there is reason for someone to  $\emptyset$ '. These two statements are apparently allowing two sorts of interpretation. The first one is the internal interpretation of reason or agent's own reason which can be falsified by the absence of agent's motivation. Such reason can be served only by agent's  $\emptyset$ -ing. Here motive supplies the justification to the action. As this reason is motive oriented, it is called internal reason. Desire is the source of such reasoning; the justification of the action lies in the fact that it serves agent's purpose. The second is the external interpretation, in which the truth or falsity of the reason statement does not at all depend on the motivation of the agent. Bernard Williams formulates external reason as 'there is a reason for  $A$  to...' (where  $A$  is the agent of the action)<sup>135</sup> This is external reason as it is not connected with the agential aspects; rather justification is derived from the impersonal value of the action. In this explanation reason is absolute as its truth is not measured according to the benchmark of the success of the agent's motive. Reason behind the action is true in all situations, as it is non-negotiable. Such reason is valid even if no one is interested to act on it. External reason is thus absolute in nature, but internal reason is relative as its truth depends on its capacity to fulfil the desire of the particular agent. Though the external kind of reason reflects absolute truth, but Williams expresses his doubt about the use of such reason in the

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<sup>135</sup> Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", 101.

arena of morality as he is emphasising more on the reason for motivation than the reason to believe the thing. Such interpretation of reason that gives importance to agent's motivation promotes Hume's belief that 'reason is the slave of passion'. It seems that to Williams agent is not just an abstract entity who is identified by his essence of rationality following conventional sense. On the other hand concept of agency must be understood by agent's concrete existence in a moral community, as the agent being a unique individual is a determiner of his own action on the basis of his position in this world. This encourages Williams to view reason as an outcome of agent's internal belief rather than a kind of external one. He thinks that an imperative just for being categorical in nature cannot be treated as obligatory. But an imperative can be categorical and obligatory when a rational agent himself sanctions it. Moral value depends on its recognition, when it reaches at the periphery of the agent's fundamental concern as a rational being. It must be such that the agent is capable to grasp it; it must touch the disposition of the agent as well as its relevance must be supported by the state of affair of the agent. The implication is that moral reasons must be the internal reasons of the moral beings. It means validity of the reason statements depends only on the ethical considerations of the agent in favour of the action that also acts as his motivation.<sup>136</sup> The main contention of Williams is to show that practical (normative) reasons are internal reasons. The externalist may claim that a person has a reason to  $\emptyset$  means that if the person has deliberated rationally, he would definitely be motivated to perform  $\emptyset$ . But Williams denies the possibility of any such reason that could inspire everyone to follow the same regardless of their psychological make-up. So, External reason, for Williams, is inadequate to generate true reasons statement for a person. However McDowell is questioning the viability of Williams' argument. Rather denying the significance of internal reason, he is trying to maintain the sublime nature of external

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<sup>136</sup> John McDowell, "Might There be External Reasons?", *World, Mind and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams*. ed. J.E.J. Altham and Ross Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 68.

reason. I would like to discuss the issues in details that invite arguments and counter arguments between Williams and McDowell. But first I am going to clarify Bernard Williams' arguments against external reason.

**II.1 Bernard Williams' Argument against External Reason** – Bernard Williams' main aim is to show the insufficiency of external reason in case of moral decision-making procedure. Because he thinks that moral reason has no autonomous reason-giving force that can influence all rational agents to perform a particular action without any appeal to their psychological makeup. In Williams' view moral reason must have that strength to motivate the agent to act. So to him reason connotes reason for action, not just the reason for belief. Williams is clearly making a distinction between having reason to believe and to have reason for action. Orthodox rationalist will claim that we perform an action as obligatory as we believe that being a rational agent we are bound to follow the hegemony of objective reason. An agent believes that there are some reasons to do  $\emptyset$ , but that is not because he justifies  $\emptyset$  -ing as right for some fact; rather he believes that he should  $\emptyset$ -ing, since it is prescribed by reason. In these cases reason for action is similar to the reason for belief. This belief does not emerge from the standpoint of the particular agent's own life, but it is believed that the objective reason that justifies the action for its own sake indoctrinates us to follow the order. This reason for belief is what is considered in the contemporary era as the theoretical reason, whereas reason for action is the practical reason. Williams is trying to sketch practical reason by connecting it with the particular situation of the agent. Realizing the importance of the subjective aspects of the agent in moral field, Williams is countering external reason. The important thing is that in spite of his attempt to glorify subjectivity in moral sphere, he belongs to a rationalist camp as he believes that being a rational person agent's decision always follows a rational deliberative route. Such idea proves that like conventional thinkers he is not ready to admit that reason and desire belong to opposite poles always. Elijah Millgram in his article "Williams' Argument Against External Reasons"

has designed a doxastic analogue of the account of theoretical reason (reasons for belief) simultaneously to Williams' account of practical reason (reasons for action). Millgram shows that external reason is more obviously false in the theoretical domain than in the practical. I try to discuss some significant features of Millgram's theoretical account in a concise manner since Williams does not consider theoretical reason with much importance; reasons for belief, for Williams, are of secondary importance. In Millgram's explanation external reason for belief is one that does not have any kind of connection with the reasoner's  $C$ . The reason statement does not get falsified by the absence of some appropriate element from  $C$ .<sup>137</sup> The sole focus of the external reason is on the purity of the reason that justifies the action. The agent's function is only to believe the external reason. Supporters of this reason are not ready to mix up subjective aspect with this pure reason as they think that may lead to relativity. Such reason statement is intrinsically valid as such statement cannot be falsified by the absence of belief at the end of the agent. Thus the reason statement cannot be falsified by the absence of some appropriate element in  $C$ . Williams is more concerned with reasons for action and therefore emphasizes on practical reason. The basic idea would be that  $A$   $\emptyset$ 's not because he only believes that there is some reason for him to  $\emptyset$ , but because he believes that some determinate consideration constitutes a reason for him to  $\emptyset$ .<sup>138</sup>

Williams has started his discussion of external reason by illustrating an example from James' story of Owen Wingrave. Owen's family has tried to convince him about the importance and necessity of his joining the army. The family thinks that all the male ancestors of Owen are soldiers and his family has a pride to continue this legacy. So, Owen needs to join the army as

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<sup>137</sup>  $C$  is the set of things of which the agent is convinced or finds convincing. Formally this  $C$  may be called beliefs, but as taken with Williams'  $S$  (the subjective motivational set), this  $C$  contains gut feelings, prejudices, working hypotheses, larger theoretical commitments etc. This  $C$  is not fixed and theoretical reasoning can add to or subtract elements from  $C$ . Elijah Millgram, "Williams' Argument Against External Reasons", *Noûs*, 30, no.2, (June 1996):197-220. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2216293>

<sup>138</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 107.

well. But Owen has no motivation to join the army at all; all his desires lead him to another direction. He hates everything about military life and the idea of sacrificing life in the battlefield. His family expresses that there is a reason for Owen to join the army, however they also know that there is nothing in Owen's motivational set ( $S$ ), which can lead him (through deliberative reasoning) to act accordingly. His family is not at all ready to withdraw their claim as they do not think it as their misapprehension. Their reason is coined as the external interpretation of reason to Owen as even if his parents consider it as a reason; it has no impact in Owen's motivational set.<sup>139</sup> Here I formulate another example of the external reason statement following the same insight of Owen Wingrave's story. Suppose the parents of a boy Prince want that their child has to pursue his career in medical studies since his family has a medical background. But Prince does not have any kind of motivation at all to join the medical field and he also hates everything about the medical practitioner's life and the oath the medical personnel have to take at their graduation day. His parents might have expressed themselves by saying that there is a reason for their son to join medical college for pursuing medical career in spite of knowing that there is nothing in their son's motivational set ( $S$ ) which insists his deliberative reasoning to do that action. They do not admit that their claim is made under a misapprehension and not even ready to withdraw that claim. Hence the claim arises from the idea of external reason and the parents of the boy make the claim based on this sense.

From the examples illustrated above, it seems plausible to think that the external reasons statement does not provide a necessary reason for the agent to perform an action, as though there is a reason for the agent to  $\emptyset$ , but he has no motivation in his motivational set that could either directly or through some sound deliberation lead him to perform  $\emptyset$ . Considering this sense of external reason, Williams attaches the dimension of explanation to the reason

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<sup>139</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 106

statement.<sup>140</sup> For him if something is considered to be a reason for an action, then it should be someone's reason for acting in a particular occasion (A's reason to do  $\emptyset$ ) and then only it would act as an explanation in favour of that action. However, external reason statement by itself cannot provide an explanation for anyone's action. If we consider that family honour is a reason for Owen to join the army or respect towards his parents may be considered as a reason for Prince to join the medical college that fact by itself fails to explain the intended decision as the agent is not *automatically* motivated by that. If we state that there is actually a reason for Owen joining army, then that fact (e.g., family honour or respect to the parents is a reason) by itself would never explain anything that Owen or Prince desires, not even if they are *compelled* to take the decision to join the army or the medical college due to family pressure. In the view of the reason externalists the reason statement is true even if Owen is not motivated to join the army or Prince is not motivated to join the medical college. The main idea of external reason is that it can be true independent of the agent's motivations. It means nothing can explain an agent's (intentional) *action* except something that internally motivates him to act. Externalists do not think that something can be considered as reason just because it is rationally related to the agent's *S*. But Williams thinks that something else is needed beside the truth of the external reason statement to explain an action as necessary to perform and that is some psychological link, attitude of the agent which would lead him to believe the external reason. Agent's motivation to follow an external reason statement as his own reason can only be treated as explanation to him.

Now Williams is raising the question against feasibility of external reasons. Does believing a particular consideration that seems to provide the reason for something constitute a motivation for the agent to act? It can be reframed as: does external reason provide any kind

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<sup>140</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 106

of motivation for the agent to act in a particular way? This kind of question arises in the case of external reason since this reason is totally detached from the agent's own well-being, his own perspective. The connection between such reasons and the disposition to act seems plausible if the agent can create a relation between the external reason and his choice. The supporters of external reason may claim that man as a rational being supposed to follow his rational beliefs. In spite of having no association between his belief and his set of desires, he ought to act out of his respect towards the objective reason that is considered as intrinsically valid. It is very natural to follow what we believe as true. Belief in the reason statement constitutes our motivation. But in Williams' interpretation belief has a different connotation as in his version belief means internalisation. It means unless the agent attaches the reason with his own belief system, it cannot be treated as an explanation for the action. A third party belief and agent's belief are different in their sense. I may believe something as true, but an agent cannot be just a passive receiver of the truth as he plays a significant role in the performance of action by internalising the truth. Williams thinks that to be an explanation for an individual the reason has to be linked with his whole belief system. It involves the whole life of the agent – his present state, desire, wants, future plan, social status and so on. The agent with such belief possesses an appropriate motivation as that belief is linked with his motivational set (*S*). It appears that an internal reason statement can truly be made now for that person.

Williams has clarified that as practical reason internal reason acts more efficiently than external reason due to its explanatory capacity. Now he is raising another objection against external kind of reason. In his view external reason fails to justify the attitudinal changes of the agent. Let us take into consideration the case of Owen Wingrave or Prince in which an external reason statement is true about someone who is not at all motivated to follow the way he should be, and so it is a failed attempt to construct any internal reason statement. Here the agent does not believe the external reason statement and so he is not at all motivated to act. However,

coming to act on it must essentially involve acquiring a new motivation. The agent does not have a motivation previously since he refuses to believe the external reason statement as true; but now when he comes to believe this reason statement, that is due to acquiring a new motivation. However the question remains the same, i.e., how can reason give rise to motivation? It gets a negative answer from the Humean theory of motivation. "...[R]eason alone can never produce any action, or give rise to volition...Nothing can oppose or retard the influence of passion, but a contrary impulse...Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."<sup>141</sup> The external reasons theorists claim that reason (rational processes) can give rise to a new motivation irrespective of the old one. But Williams claims that they have to justify the emergence of new motivation without the help of the prior one. They have to clarify the presence of a connection between newly acquired motivation and belief for the reason statement. When after a deep thought Owen or Prince becomes motivated to join army or medical school, a new motivation is created in them from their belief in the reason statement. Owen might be persuaded by the demand of his family and so he acquires both the motivation and the belief. But the external reason theorists cannot accept it because according to them the agent should acquire the motivation because of his belief on the reason statement. Here an important element of external reason is missing. The agent must believe the reason statement first since he is considering the matter aright in some way. Without fulfilling this condition, the external reason statement would have definitely lost its essence. However, the external reasons theorists have to consider these conditions (motivation arises from the agent's belief on the reason statement), and the formulation would be like if the agent has rationally deliberated, then whatever motivations he originally (previously) had, he would come to be motivated to

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<sup>141</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Book II, Part 3, Section iii., ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978), 414-415.

$\emptyset$ .<sup>142</sup> It means that the agent previously was not at all motivated to  $\emptyset$  (he may have motivation to do some other stuffs, but not  $\emptyset$ ), but then after rational deliberation he would be motivated to  $\emptyset$  because now he believes that there is a reason for him to  $\emptyset$ . This process is just the opposite in Williams' interpretation. In Williams' view at the first level the agent identifies an act as helpful for satisfying his project and then his reasons for action entails his belief for accepting it as rational because of its moral value. Thus belief for moral reason depends on its recognition. This view has a great resemblance with the view of Sartre, who being an Existentialist philosopher holds that values are created by our choice. We do not choose an antecedent good. In accordance to the existentialist's perspective man is entirely free to decide his own norms, values and actions. Man as a centre of unrealized potency makes something good by choosing it.

Williams thinks that the externalist's formulation makes external reason fallacious. As external reason theorists do not allow the involvement of motivation to justify the reason statement, it is difficult to understand how the same reason statement would produce a new motivation to act without the help of the previous motivation. But according to external reason theorists if an agent believes in an external reason to  $\emptyset$ , and if he is rational, he will be definitely motivated to do  $\emptyset$ , regardless of his former motivation.<sup>143</sup> But in Williams' opinion as the agent does not have any earlier motivation to  $\emptyset$  (as he is motivated to perform some other action), he has no starting point to deliberate and to reach at this new motivation. One may ask why does Williams believe that reason or rational processes cannot generate a wholly new motivation? One reply would be his reliance on the Humean exegesis that reason cannot motivate without the presence of desire. There might be another kind of reply in his philosophical framework. Williams finds it difficult to imagine a process of rational deliberation that could give rise to a

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<sup>142</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 109.

<sup>143</sup> Julia Markovitz, *Moral Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28

new motivation to act ignoring the existing motivations (since Williams considers internal reason as the only normative reason where motivation and desirable ends are included in the reason statement). To him a new motivation can arise only through a rational deliberation on our first motivation. A new motivation cannot appear from the blue.

Williams believes that the claim of the external reason theorists can be justified only if they agree that rational agents can form true beliefs following the benchmark of their own reasons only and can be motivated to act accordingly as they believe that they have their own reasons to do the same. Therefore, the force of the external reason statement can be explained by the general disposition of a rational agent to do what he believes. So, when a rational agent comes to believe that there is a reason for him to  $\emptyset$ , then he would be motivated to  $\emptyset$ , even though he neither had a motive to  $\emptyset$ , nor had any motive related to his deliberation of  $\emptyset$ -ing.<sup>144</sup> The account of deliberation is also a vague concept in regard to external reason statement. It is not clear what are the issues included in the journey of deliberation. But Williams' approach allows the use of imagination to extend or restrict the content of the agent's  $S$  that he uses in the process of deliberation. So, there is an unlimited scope for an agent to arrive at a new motivation by rational deliberation from his existing  $S$ . In Owen's case, he neither had any earlier motive, nor any kind of deliberation to join the army; but later he is so persuaded by his family's moving rhetoric that he starts believing that there is a reason for him to join the army and motivated to do so. Being a rational agent, he has a general disposition in his  $S$  that makes him believe that he must be motivated to join the army. Such motivation inspires him to believe the reason.

Williams' approach of internal reason is based on two points. Firstly, reasons must explain actions. As explanation the reason involves the subjective aspects of the agent. If reason

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<sup>144</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 109.

explains the action, one must be motivated by that reason. At the same time he believes that the motivation of the agent insists him to believe the reason. When an explanation gives birth to motivation it is termed as internal reasons explanation (and not an external reason explanation). Secondly, he is making a distinction between normative aspects as opposed to the simple explanatory aspect of reason. The main contention is that reasons for actions are to be understood through their role in practical deliberation. If someone has a reason for action through practical deliberation, then it would motivate him to act. So, practical deliberation covers the motivational aspect of reason. Therefore, reasons for action must be internal rather than external.<sup>145</sup> Williams also shows that we can make sense of the idea of normative reason if we accept internal reason. When an agent finds a reason to perform an action then his decision is a derivation from a sound deliberative route. This rational deliberation ensures the normative status of the reason as well.

## **II.2 John McDowell's objection against Bernard Williams' interpretation of External**

**Reason Statement** – From the discussion of the previous section we have come to know that according to the claim of the external reason theorists the external reason statement ‘There is a reason for *A* to *Ø*’ can be true without the motivation of a person to act accordingly (*ex hypothesi*). Bernard Williams denies the approach of the external reason theorists as he does not consider the external reason statement as explanatory reasons for action. In his view this reason is not connected with the motivational state of the agent and so lacks the explanatory power. His sole interest is to dignify internal reason as that reason motivates us to act. In the field of morality, Williams thinks, motivational reason is the only reason that is considered both as normative and explanatory reason. Williams is more concerned about the process of deliberation (or reasoning) that initiates the emergence of a new motivation in a rational agent

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<sup>145</sup> Millgram, “Williams’ Argument Against External Reasons”, 197-220.

as his entire focus is to understand the nature of the reason for motivation which he considers as practical reason. Williams is also against the external reason theorist's interpretation about new motivation. External reason theorist's idea of emergence of new motivation directly from the reason statement is not approved by Williams as in his view new motivation cannot be derived from the external reason statement. To him this process of transition through which an agent becomes motivated to act according to a new motivation is a proof for the existence of internal reason. So to Williams it is important to understand the cause of the transition from not being motivated to having a new motivation. External reason theorists explain this transition as independent of the agent's prior motivation, because they are willing to subjugate agential perspective by the objective reason. But in Williams' opinion, this transition is possible through the rational deliberation that influences the psyche or the belief system of the agent. Williams' whole attempt is to establish internal reason as the only reason for morality and to dismiss the role of external reason.

But John McDowell is not ready to accept internal reason as the only normative reason. Rather in his seminal article "Might there be external Reasons?" he claims to have separate existence of external reasons. McDowell is more concerned to prove the validity of external reason, because he has objection against Williams' attempt to justify the strength of the reason on the basis of motivational force that arises in agent's mind. In Williams' interpretation, we find that practical reason is connected with the practical situation. If the agent himself realizes that a reason can serve his purpose, can fulfil his desires satisfactorily, he believes that the reason is true. Thus to him truth of the reason is related to satisfaction. So evaluation of reason depends on its purposiveness. Thus in his interpretation motivation becomes more powerful as it controls the truth of the reason. But McDowell thinks that believing or not believing a reason cannot change the impact of a reason statement. The agent has the freedom of not being motivated in a way, but that cannot make any difference in the reason statement. McDowell

opines that we can preserve external reason just as Williams' exegesis of the internal reason, because being a reason external reason is also an explanatory one. McDowell thinks it is possible to secure the position of external reason by refuting the inevitability of internal reason. For that we have to prove that some non-rational factors are responsible for this transition and only rational deliberation is not sufficient to bring changes in agent's mind. For this we have to understand the process of deliberation.

In favour of his claim Williams argues that as our motivation to act generates our belief to a particular reason statement through the process of rational deliberation, it means reason statement itself cannot create beliefs in our mind towards the reason; rather our beliefs give the sanction to the reason. In the view of the external reason theorists when an agent believes a reason statement then he considers the matter aright and this consequently would motivate the agent. Two factors are present here – reason and believing the reason as true. It means pure reason cannot motivate us; presence of belief is necessary to act accordingly. Without believing the reason statement the agent cannot act on the basis of new motivation. But the external reasons theorists are not ready to accept any other factors except reasoning within the span of deliberation. But Williams correctly points out that “the agent should acquire the motivation because he comes to believe the reason statement, and he should do the latter, moreover, because, in some way, he is considering the matter aright.”<sup>146</sup> If the agent's considering the matter aright is the outcome of the agent's believing the reason statement, then this transition is revealed as a true belief and the procedure would be of an argument or reasoning. So the external reasons theorists need to reframe their concept of deliberation. Deliberation here also includes believing the reason statement and motivation too as belief is supported by it. If the agent believes the reason statement then only the agent considers the matter aright.

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<sup>146</sup>Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 108-109.

In Williams' interpretation this belief emerges from the active participation of the agent. Williams thinks that external reason cannot give birth to motivation directly; it cannot explain the rising of new motivation too. If a person was not motivated to believe a reason statement at first, but after deliberation when considers it right then we have to admit a connection between his first and second motivation. Otherwise we cannot explain the emergence of an opposite motivation from the same reason statement. In Williams' view external reason theorists are required to accept the necessity of internal reason as explanatory reason. McDowell thinks it is a Humean approach that announces that reason alone fails to motivate us. Advocates of external reason theorists think that motivation is preceded by believing. But Williams thinks that when the agent is not motivated to follow the external reason due to absence of correct deliberation, external reason theorists must create favourable condition that motivates the agent to deliberate correctly. So in Williams' interpretation the sole emphasis is on agent's deliberation that approves the reason through creation of motivation in agent's mind. He believes that motivation is based on rational deliberation that involves the subjective perspective. Objective reason itself has no strength to motivate the agent

Now the question is why do the external reason theorists grab deliberation to justify the arising of new motivation? McDowell thinks that they avoid the motivational aspect just to maintain the purity of reason and to avoid the penetration of internal reason that is subjective in nature. But Williams thinks that pure reasoning cannot insist the agent to be motivated to act. Application of reason is important and that is possible only if the agent moulds the reason in his life frame. But external reason theorists are very rigid and not ready to allow anything that hampers the purity of reason. So they vehemently oppose the inclusion of rhetoric, implication, inspiration, conversion in deliberation. Bernard Williams claims that if the new motivation is not inferred from the existing motivation, then the external reasons theorists must advocate a justified procedure of deliberation or reasoning that gives rise to a new motivation.

Now if the deliberation depends on the existing motivations, then the reason is considered to be the internal account of reason as discussed by Williams. So, the external reasons theorist has to anticipate the emergence of a new motivation that is not shaped by the agent's prior motivations.<sup>147</sup> But the question is what is the source of this new motivation if it is not present at the womb of the previous one? Williams points out that it is very hard to believe that a pure kind of reasoning arises to generate a new motivation which is free from the influence of the pre-existing motivation.

But according to McDowell, the external reasons theorists need not be worried about this. The main concern here is to examine the transition from not being motivated by a supposedly external reason to being motivated by it. The crucial question, according to him, is why do the external reasons theorists need to put emphasis on the influence of correct deliberation or reasoning for his transition to consider matter aright, though rejected previously as unjustified for him? If we try to explain the generation of new motivation connecting it to the old one then we will definitely bypass the purity of reason. Because in the view of external reason theorists new motivation arises as the person starts to believe in the reason statement. This explanation ignores the role of the motivational effect in favour of transition since this deliberation is not controlled by any prior motivation (however that would merely consider the reason to be internal)<sup>148</sup> However, Williams rightly points out that it is not at all an easy task for the external reasons theorists to find out an application of reason that oblige people to act without their prior motivations. The argument prohibits the external reasons theorist to suppose that only rational processes can affect the transition. Because though they think that external reasons are necessarily true, but still they admit that the agent has to accept it as right. The agent needs to deliberate correctly to accept it as right. So reasoning here has no automatic

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<sup>147</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 108-109.

<sup>148</sup> McDowell, "Might There be External Reasons?", 71.

force that compels the agent to act. It is claimed that they should also include the processes like being persuaded by moving rhetoric, implication, inspiration and conversion.

In this context, it would be necessary to define the philosophical phrase ‘considering matters aright’<sup>149</sup>. McDowell here is very clear about his intention to guard the purity of external reason. So going against Williams he justifies the possibility of being influenced by the pure reason directly. He also expresses his doubt about the possibility of having internal reasons in the mind of the agent in some cases. He thinks it is true that to believe something aright is not a result of just following a universal rule. It is not a matter of a metaphysical exposition like Kant, where values and obligations are decided objectively by ignoring particularities of the agent. McDowell advocates that it is something like ethical upbringing in an Aristotelian way. It is like a process of habituation that shapes to develop a suitable mode of behavior in harmony with a suitable mode of thought. It is a method of seeing things which also includes a motivational direction or practical concerns. This is a characteristic feature of someone who has been properly brought up. Due to ethical upbringing the agent’s subjective aspects are moulded in a right way to see things in its true shape. It means the agent possesses a correct conception due to his ethical upbringing and that helps him to understand things in their actual layout. Problem does not arise regarding the motivational statute of persons who possesses ethical characteristics, as they already have a power to see things rightly. Such kind of person does not realize the need to follow a path of deliberation as suggested by Williams, because they are able to identify the right thing spontaneously just by seeing it. Due to their perfect character traits they are eligible to understand what is right at a glance. Thus in McDowell’s interpretation ethical upbringing is equivalent to consider a thing aright. In such

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<sup>149</sup> John McDowell, “Might There be External Reasons?”, 73

cases there is no need to take the help of deliberation or we may say involvements of subjective aspects are no more required in these cases.

But McDowell's concern is for those who are not properly brought up. How can they consider things aright? According to McDowell, without proper ethical brought up, no one can see things straight and cannot be motivated by inducing some pieces of reasoning only. It means believing the right thing requires a good mental set up. Without having a proper background no one can recognize what is right. It means reasoning can generate new motivations only if it appeals to something that is already inherited in the person's existing motivational makeup. In this respect McDowell's interpretation has resemblance with Williams' formulation of internal interpretation of reason. But in case of the person who is not been properly brought up, McDowell thinks, reasoning cannot create new motivation in him only through the process of deliberation. This kind of person needs to consider something like conversion that helps him to consider matter aright. By conversion, McDowell means "a schema for explanations of shifts of character, and the weight of the explanation in any real case would rest on our comprehension of the psychic efficacy of the specific converting factor (a religious experience, say)"<sup>150</sup> This is the process through which a not ethically brought up person who has failed to acquire earlier the interlocking collection of concerns and the proper way of seeing things can gradually become a properly brought up person. The person who is not properly brought up cannot identify the right thing suddenly only by deliberating with his own effort. He has missed the training to identify right thing and to take the attempt to deliberate at all for the right value. The idea of conversion here indicates an intelligible shift in the motivational orientation of the agent. But Williams' arguments suggest that the external reasons theorist may not appeal to something like conversion as they are confined only in the objective truth of the reason. There

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<sup>150</sup> John McDowell, "Might There be External Reasons?", 74

is no straightforward way to think of the operation of conversion in their theory. But going against Williams, McDowell thinks, conversion does not mean to encourage a person to discover some internal reasons (that he does not previously realize he had) by the guidance of practical reasoning controlled by his existing motivations. Because in no way the motivation of a not properly brought up person could be same to the motivation of a properly brought up person. The first task is to prepare the psyche of the person so that he could identify the right thing at the right moment.<sup>151</sup> He thinks, there is no rational route (i.e., no process which is being swayed by reasons) that would consider someone as being properly brought up. Because being properly brought up is not itself a rational route that leads to a particular way. Ethical upbringing is not a purposive effort. The person is not consciously developing his rational capacity; he is not aware about his rational capabilities. After being ethically brought up, he becomes capable enough to apply his rational capabilities to take moral decisions. Conversion is not possible by a sudden jolt; it is a result of character change. McDowell admits the involvement of internal reason in cases where due to lack of proper upbringing the person fails to identify the right reason at his first sight. For conversion of motivation they require to change their belief system. But he specifically denies Bernard Williams' explanation of conversion that starts from the previous motivation. To McDowell this conversion is possible through a gradual process. The person cannot infer his new motivation from his old one following a rational route. He has to change his attitude to see things. This process involves non-rational factors as there is no straight cut necessary connection between the upbringing in a certain manner and believing a thing aright. At the same time McDowell is denying Williams' intention to dismiss external reason. He thinks, the person who possesses an ethical character can easily see the thing aright. No deliberative route is required in his case. So believing a thing aright is not an outcome of internal reason always, external reason can pull the attention of the agent

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<sup>151</sup> John McDowell, "Might There be External Reasons?", 74.

spontaneously if the agent has a proper upbringing. So, McDowell suggests that to justify conversion the external reasons theorist may adopt this kind of explanation that admits acquisition of a new motivation by the way of acquiring correct beliefs. In this explanation the new motivation is not connected with the prior motivation.

But Williams is not ready to give up his belief about the involvement of internal reason to motivate us to act. According to him, the external reasons theorists would be able to bring a charge of irrationality against a person who is not motivated to a direction that the theorists think he should be motivated to: "...he wants any rational agent, as such, to acknowledge the requirement to do the thing in question."<sup>152</sup> But Williams thinks that the accusation of irrationality is nothing but a deception from externalist framework. Because there are plenty of explanations (as approached by internal reasons theorist) that allow someone not to be motivated by the considerations; though the theorist thinks the agent should be motivated by the external reason. If someone denies to act following external reasons due to lack of his internal reasons, the external reasons theorists consider him as inconsiderate, cruel, selfish, or imprudent. In their view "he would be a lot nicer if he were so motivated".<sup>153</sup> In the view of the external reasons theorists the agent is not properly brought up when he is not motivated to follow the external reason. So what is the point of bringing the charge of irrationality against the person who does not obey the considerations that anyone susceptible to reasons would be motivated to do? By calling a person irrational, carries with it the illicit implication that he is unmoved by something that would move anyone who is capable of being moved by reasons. It means external reason theorists are also realizing the need of internal reason as having this reason makes a lot of difference in acceptance of external reason. But McDowell thinks that this accusation of irrationality against a person who is unmoved by considerations that he

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<sup>152</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 110

<sup>153</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 110

should be moved by, does not settle the claim that Williams emphasizes in his article “that the only rationality of action is the rationality of internal reasons”.<sup>154</sup>

To safeguard his internal reason Williams is establishing a connection between the explanatory role of reason and a normative dimension that it must have. Because he has realized that the source of all our negativity towards internal reason is due to inclusion of subjectivity. As we are prone to believe in objectivity, we do not dare to accept subjective aspects in the ethical sphere especially. Realizing this Williams is analysing internal interpretation of reason. In an example he says suppose a person believes the content of the glass as gin, though that is originally petrol. Now as he believes it as gin, has he a reason to drink petrol just because he believes petrol as gin?<sup>155</sup> If he does this, then there is an explanation for his doing so. But Williams suggests that an internal reasons theorist should not say that the person has a reason to drink that stuff which is actually petrol. At a first glance, it points towards the wrong direction that the internal reason is concerned only with explanation, and not at all with the agent’s rationality. But the internal interpretation of reason is actually concerned with the agent’s rationality. What can be ascribed as an internal reason to him from a third-personnel perspective is also the same what he can ascribe to himself as a result of deliberation. The explanatory and the motivating reason would then become one and the same in case of internal reason.

**II.3 Bernard Williams’ Reply to John McDowell** – In reply to McDowell, Bernard Williams thinks that the allegation that McDowell brings against him is a result of misunderstanding. McDowell is trying to explain that the deliberation that initiates the motivation involves irrational factors, where as in Williams’ explanation for right or correct deliberation one should

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<sup>154</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 111

<sup>155</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 102-103

follow a rational route. Both external reason theorists and Williams agree in this point that the deliberation is required for motivation. From this position Williams assumes that for correct deliberation rational route is the only accepted method. To explain this rational route Williams is taking the help of internal reason as he is against externalists' approach of depending on objective reason only. He thinks we cannot reason correctly without our subjective aspects, particular situation where we are situated in. McDowell is questioning this assumption of Williams as his position is totally different regarding the nature of deliberation. He denies the possibility of rational route for deliberation. He opines that there is no rational route behind the shift of motivation. He proposes conversion as a consequence of irrational deliberation and so his theory is a counterexample of internal reason theorist's approach. He states that in the case of conversion, there is no involvement of rational deliberation. And as there is no scope of rational deliberation for action, it does not require proceeding from the original motivation that the agent possessed. This is contrary to Williams' claim that the rational deliberation must proceed from the motivation that is present in the agent's *S*. So, following McDowell's insight, we have to admit that the agent's new motivation may arise without any connection with his prior motivation. Williams states that though McDowell does not assume rational deliberation i.e., right or correct deliberation between agent's *S* and the action; but in the process of conversion, he also admits the presence of rational deliberation and a connection between the agent's *S* and the action. To Williams rational deliberation is a kind of deliberation that incorporates imagination. So, Williams thinks, McDowell's account will not go against internal reason, rather it would be considered as a kind of internal reason as McDowell is also accepting the role of the agent in the process of believing a reason .

McDowell opposes Williams' insight of internal reason as implausible and tries to make room for an intelligible account for external reasons for action. His strategy is to raise question against Williams' opinion regarding involvement of existing motivation in the process of

rational deliberation. We find two alternatives here --- one is the assumption of the external reason theorists who accept that decision of an action is the outcome of the correct deliberation without the involvement of any aspect from the agent's *S*. Second alternative is the internalist's approach according to which the decision of the agent is derived from the function of *S*, i.e., from the agent's motivational set. McDowell thinks that the issue of choosing one among these two alternatives arises because of Williams' assumption that is present behind these alternatives. McDowell thinks the assumption that is rooted in Williams' claim demands that the external reason theorists must clarify the nature of the transition because of which the agent reaches at a right state finally where he was not motivated to be at first. Williams opines that correct deliberation is the method that initiates this transition and correct deliberation to him must be reason dependent. In McDowell's view this assumption of correct deliberation forces Williams to choose one among the two alternatives: between a deliberation that would arrive at the desired conclusion without any influence of *A*'s *S* and a deliberation that is a function of *A*'s existing *S*.<sup>156</sup> Williams thinks as the external reason theorists are talking about deliberation so he is forced to choose the second alternative as the first one fails to create any impact on both Williams and McDowell. But Williams thinks that his argument is not developed because of this assumption as opined by McDowell. So, to make it clear Williams considers two statements:

- (R) *A* has a reason to  $\emptyset$
- (D) If *A* has deliberated correctly, he would be motivated to  $\emptyset$

McDowell agrees that to believe (R) is in some sense to believe (D). Williams does not make any implausible claim that to believe (D), *A* would have to come to it through deliberation. If *A* deliberates in the same manner as the spectator does (from the third-personnel

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<sup>156</sup> McDowell, "Might There be External Reasons?", 187

perspective), he would definitely arrive at the same conclusion as first-personnel. Thus (R) is definitely accepted as a result of deliberation. When A is motivated to  $\emptyset$  due to correct deliberation (D), he will accept it as his reason (R). This proves that in spite of having a close relation between (R) and (D), these are not equivalent. If these were equivalent then (D) itself could arrived in first-personnel form by correct deliberation. In the example of Owen we find the same thing. Though the parents think that he has a reason to join the army, but Owen was not motivated to do the same as he was not deliberating in the manner of his parents. If he adopted the arguments provided by his parents he was motivated to  $\emptyset$ -ing. His  $\emptyset$ -ing definitely implies his reason to believe  $\emptyset$ . Without being motivated to  $\emptyset$ -ing, the agent cannot have believe in  $\emptyset$ . Williams' argument tries to connect (R) and (D) as well as reminds us that reason itself cannot motivate one; correct deliberation is required to generate the belief. He ensures the use of correct deliberation to arrive at a first personal form of (R). Though he is denying the equivalence of (R) and (D) on the basis of correct deliberation, but that does not mean that he is favouring internal reason just to explain correct deliberation.

Williams thinks that his argument can be best approached through the converse question. Can every occurrence of (D) be replaced by (R)? Williams thinks that if we adopt the internalist's account of reason then (D) can be replaced by (R). Because when A is motivated to do  $\emptyset$  as a result of his correct deliberation then definitely his  $\emptyset$ -ing is reason based. Here the way of deliberation is not pre-designed according to the third personnel perspective. The agent can impose some constraints on 'deliberating correctly'. These constraints are neither fully determined nor certainly formal. They allow such things as the exercise of imagination. Nevertheless, the internalist idea is that there are some processes that would count, and others that would not count within the span of deliberation to arrive at the  $\emptyset$ -ing from one's existing  $S$ . Granted this, the internalist can give a reserved sense of (D) which matches with (R). Because here deliberation that motivates to do  $\emptyset$  springs from agent's set of desires. His own

deliberation gives the sanction to act in a certain way. So he can easily believe it as it is part of his own belief system. Williams thinks that his explanation of correct deliberation is not rejecting the view of McDowell as for preparing a proper set of desire  $S$  the agent must possess proper education. For correct deliberation, for arriving at the motivation to  $\emptyset$ , some unconscious obstacles should be removed. The agent must possess a distinct set of desires as this is the base of his deliberation. So it is the responsibility of the agent to create the set of desire with his own effort through subtracting some elements from his existing  $S$ , and also by adding something to his  $S$ . This might not be easy to do. This is possible only if  $A$  is a well-informed and well-disposed person (someone who is properly brought up). Such a person would deliberate correctly, would be motivated to  $\emptyset$ .

Williams makes the internalist account of ' $A$  has a reason to  $\emptyset$ ' adequate if possesses some normative force. But McDowell thinks that Williams' thesis is more of an account of psychologistic than normative. Williams accepts this point and considers it natural since in the internalist account of reason  $A$ 's reasons is partly connected to  $A$ 's psychology. Williams' argument is more against the external reason as (R) does not emerge as a statement without reference to the person  $A$ . He agrees with McDowell about necessity to have proper education and information for right deliberation, but he does not consider it as irrational. But both from the ethical and the psychological point of view, it is important that (R) should say something special about  $A$ , rather merely invoking some general normative judgement about  $A$ . An externalist account that simply bases (R) on the person who is properly brought up cannot satisfy this condition and considered as a true reason statement only without having a explanatory quality.

### III

#### **Bernard Williams' Account of the Internal Interpretation of Reason**

After the detail analysis of Williams' Critique to Kant's idea of autonomous moral system in the first section and discussing Williams' arguments for insufficiency of the external reason in the second section, now I am focusing on the main contention of this chapter, i.e., the internal interpretation of reason as developed by Bernard Williams. For him, the only rationality of action springs from the rationality of internal reasons.<sup>157</sup> From the previous discussion, it seems clear that he rejects external reason as true reason statement since it lacks the motivating capacity by which a consideration would become a reason to perform an action. Therefore, all normative reasons for action, according to Williams, are internal reasons.<sup>158</sup> Internal reason is the only sort of consideration that can provide a rational justification in favour of an agent's conduct. Williams formulates the model of internal reason as follows:

“*A* has a reason to  $\emptyset$  iff *A* has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his  $\emptyset$ -ing, and if this turns out not to be so the sentence is false: there is a condition relating to the agent's aims, and if this is not satisfied it is not true to say, on this interpretation, that he has a reason to  $\emptyset$ ”<sup>159</sup>

Following this interpretation, I understand that an agent *A* has a reason to perform an action  $\emptyset$  only if he would be motivated to  $\emptyset$  through deliberative reasoning. Alternatively, I can comment that the agent *A* has some desire, the satisfaction of which, *A* believes, will be served by his performing the action  $\emptyset$ . *A* could reach the conclusion that he should  $\emptyset$  by a sound

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<sup>157</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 111.

<sup>158</sup> Philip Pettit and Michael Smith, “External Reasons”, *McDowell and His Critics*, ed. Cynthia Macdonald and Graham Donald (USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 2.

<sup>159</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 101.

deliberative route from the motivations he has in his motivational set – the set of his desires, evaluations, attitudes, projects and so on. The formulation of the internalist account of reasons for action provides a necessary condition of its being true by saying that *A* has a reason to  $\emptyset$  only if he could reach the conclusion  $\emptyset$  by a sound deliberative route from his existing motivations.<sup>160</sup> We have already mentioned that McDowell comments, Williams' motivation-based approach is a Humean approach. Williams also accepts that this model has a similarity with the Humean interpretation; and so, it can be termed as *the sub-Humean model*.<sup>161</sup> In any model of the internal interpretation of reason, the reason statement must have a close connection to the agent's *subjective motivational set* (the agent's *S*) (by definition). The question arises here: does the statement 'A has a reason to  $\emptyset$ ' being falsified by the lack of some elements in *A*'s '*subjective motivational set*' (or agent's *S*) as the choice of the subject is essential for the performance of  $\emptyset$  by *A*? Reason here indicates the agent's internal interpretation of reason. Thus all practical reasons are treated as internal reasons. The truth of this kind of reason statement implies that the agent has some motive that will be fulfilled by his  $\emptyset$ -ing. This means that reasons for action are necessarily connected with the agent's aims and if this connection is missing, the reason statement will turn into a false statement. In that case no one can claim that the agent has an internal reason to  $\emptyset$ . The connection between the reason statement and the agent's *S* is the justificatory as well as the motivating reasons for the agent to perform an action. The desire which is being served or fulfilled by the performance of the action by the agent is considered to be a non-egoistic element of the agent's *S* as this *S* is arranged by following a rational deliberative route.

Now someone may question against Williams' motivation dependent justification as it may leave justification with a loose end. As reason is justified by the subjective motivational

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<sup>160</sup> Bernard Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35.

<sup>161</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. 102.

set then there is enough scope to accept false belief as reason. The agent may wrongly believe that his desire will be satisfied by doing a particular act. Or he may be ignorant about some facts and without having complete information he may form his motivation to perform an action to fulfill his desire. Williams himself is mentioning about the possibility of such cases. But to counter his opponents he reminds us that internal reason is an explanatory reason that is connected with the rationality of the agent. In structuring the internal interpretation of reason, Williams claims, some true internal reasons statements are required. An internal reason statement is falsified if some appropriate elements from *S* are absent. According to Williams, any element of *S* can constitute internal reason for action. But if the elements of *S* are based on false beliefs, then *S* cannot be considered as a justification for  $\emptyset$ -ing. It is not because of some imprudent or deviant elements in *S*, but because the elements of *S* which is accepted as true by the agent are not actually true. Internal reason statement thus may be falsified due to lack of full-proof knowledge about the situation. The question arises if a desire is based on a false belief, then does it provide an explanation for that action? Can it be rejected since it is based on false beliefs? Williams opines that “if something can be a reason for action, then it could be someone’s reason for acting on a particular occasion, and it would then figure in an explanation of that action.”<sup>162</sup> For instance, an agent wants to drink gin and tonic. He believes that the stuff which is in front of him is in fact gin. He wants to mix this with tonic and drink it. This sub-Humean model states that the agent has a reason to mix this stuff with tonic and drink it. Now, suppose that this stuff is actually petrol. Here agent’s desire to drink the stuff of the bottle with tonic is based on a false notion. He is not aware that his desire to drink gin is false as the stuff is petrol. Therefore, intuitively, it can be said that the agent does not have any internal reason to mix this stuff with tonic and drink it, though he thinks he has reason to do the same as he is unaware of it. Somehow it can provide the explanation for that action; but it cannot be granted

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<sup>162</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. 106.

as rational explanation. If there are reasons for action, then it must be the case that people sometimes act for those reasons, and if they do, their reasons must carry with it some correct explanations for their actions. Though it does not follow that they always have all the correct explanations for their actions. The difference between true and false beliefs cannot make any changes in the form of explanation from the agent's perspectives as the agent is unaware about the falsity of his beliefs. It might move us to ignore the intuition and guide us to authorize that from the agent's perspective, who wants to drink gin and tonic, has internal reason to drink that stuff which is actually petrol.

Internal reason statement can explain actions since this statement implies something about the agent's motivation. But the internal reason conception is not only concerned with the explanation, it must focus on the agent's rationality that initiates the deliberation to reach at a true conclusion. There is a crucial link between them as normative reasons of this kind have to be capable of being explanatory reasons. The agent's false belief is rectified by the spectators as the agent does not have complete knowledge about the situation. By some kind of ordering of elements in his  $S$ , the agent would be able to convert his false belief into true one. The internal reason then provides the correct rational explanation of the action from the agent's perspective. Therefore, what can be ascribed as an internal reason to him from a third-personnel perspective is also the same what he can ascribe to himself as a result of deliberation. The explanatory and the motivating reason would then become one and the same in case of internal reason and a true internal reason statement would be made. Apart from true explanation, it is also necessary to have the desire to fulfil  $x$  (the goal to achieve) or more significantly that  $\emptyset$ -ing can fulfil  $x$  must be based on true belief. A member of the agent's motivational set ( $S$ ), the desire to drink what is in the bottle ( $D$ ), will not give the agent ( $A$ ) a reason for  $\emptyset$ -ing if either the existence of the desire to drink gin ( $\check{D}$ ) is dependent on false belief, or the agent's ( $A$ 's) belief in the relevance of  $\emptyset$ -ing to the satisfaction of the desire to drink gin ( $\check{D}$ ) is false. It can

be reformulated as  $A$  has a reason to  $\emptyset$  iff  $A$  has some desire  $D$ , the satisfaction of which will be served by his  $\emptyset$ -ing, except where  $\check{D}$  depends on a false belief, or where  $A$ 's belief in the relevance of  $\emptyset$ -ing to the satisfaction of  $\check{D}$  is false. So first of all agent  $A$  must have a true desire and secondly he must possess a true knowledge that his  $\emptyset$ -ing will satisfy his desire  $D$ . If the agent's desire to drink what is in the bottle is not false, and that agent's belief in the relevance of performing the action to fulfil the satisfaction of the desire to drink gin is not at all false, then it can truly be said that there is an internal reason for the agent for rationally performing the action.

In formulating true internal reason statement, the agent must have all the epistemic information about the reason statement and also about his own desires. It can be possible that the agent is ignorant about some true reason statement about himself and commit mistakes about his desires.  $A$  may be ignorant of the fact that there is a reason for him to  $\emptyset$ . There are some immediate and fairly close connection between the elements of  $S$  and the action performed by  $A$ , and if he knows it, he must have an explanation of what he does. But here  $A$  is ignorant of the fact that there is a close connection between some elements in  $S$  and the action performed by the agent. He may have the justificatory reason why he does so and so, but due to ignorance of the fact, he cannot provide the true explanation. In the gin and tonic example, the agent is ignorant about the fact that the stuff which is in front of him is actually petrol and not gin. But as he ignorantly thinks that he should drink what is in front of him, it provides a justification for his doing that, but cannot provide a true explanation for his action. On the other hand,  $A$  may be ignorant of some elements in  $S$ . But it can be the case that an unknown element, called  $D$  provides reason for  $A$  to  $\emptyset$  only if  $\emptyset$ -ing is rationally related to that unknown element  $D$ . The idea of a discovery can be used here to interpret the notion of rational deliberation. In some cases, the deliberating agent simply discovers elements in his  $S$  that were unknown to

him before; he just did not notice them.<sup>163</sup> In this example, the agent may be ignorant about some elements of his *S* which can provide a true explanation for his not drinking that stuff which is in the bottle. He can discover this element in his *S* through some information from his peers and he also can gather some experience from prior incidents. Consequently, the internal reason statement can be discovered in deliberative reasoning. It means that internal reason cannot only be applied to the unique result of deliberation. ‘*A* has a reason to  $\emptyset$ ’ does not mean that it is the only reason for *A* to perform  $\emptyset$ , but it also includes that there are some stronger reasons for *A* not to deviate from performing  $\emptyset$ -ing.

In terms of providing an appropriate model of the internal reason, Williams advocates it in terms of the notion of the agent’s *subjective motivational set* (or agent’s *S*).<sup>164</sup> Now, what is in the agent’s *subjective motivational set*? One might answer that it is constituted of the agent’s current desires. But Williams certainly has a different kind of response. According to Williams, the content of this set is not consumed by the agent’s desires. Rather, the subjective motivational set “can contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent.”<sup>165</sup> In addition to this, Williams assumes that the contents of the *subjective motivational set* are not *statically given*, but are affected by the agent’s deliberations. Williams’ such explanation can be compared with McDowell’s proper upbringing. Just as McDowell thinks that a properly brought up person can identify the right thing easily, I think, in similar manner Williams may also claim that if a person has internal reasons to do a certain action on the basis of his desire, he has a rational explanation to do the same. He thinks imagination can create new desires and new possibilities and thus plays a role in deliberation.

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<sup>163</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. 103.

<sup>164</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 102

<sup>165</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. 105.

Its use can result in both addition of elements to the subjective motivational set and subtraction of elements from it.<sup>166</sup> It is a process of discovery where imagination adds elements to the *S*. Here a person, by trying things out, discovers facts about his own desires through an analogy. Suppose a person has never tasted spring roll or dumplings. He needs to try both these foods to know which one is better. The person who does not try any of these food items before, cannot have any preference in his subjective motivational set one way or the other. Experience of the person can make his subjective dispositions more clear to him. Suppose the person has disposition for dumplings which has now been discovered through his experience (by tasting). Likewise, the person can use his imagination to discover his subjective disposition. By using imagination, he may add members to the *S*, but these really are the manifestation of his subjective disposition that has been discovered. This interpretation of rational deliberation explains why Williams includes such things as dispositions of evaluation and patterns of emotional reaction in the *S*. Since imagination adds new elements to the *S*, the agent can expand his range of subjective dispositions and thus rational deliberation is necessarily connected to his *S*. When imagination adds elements to the set, it does so simply as a response to such disposition or pattern. Thus by adding members, it is responding to the discovery of facts about given members of the set *S*.<sup>167</sup>

According to Williams' interpretation of the internal interpretation of reason, all reasons are relative to the agent's subjective motivational set, i.e., the agent can have a reason to  $\emptyset$ , only if his  $\emptyset$ -ing is supported by some element in his subjective motivational set. In this model, it is supposed that  $\emptyset$ -ing has to be related to some elements of the agent's *S* as a causal means-end relationship. However, it is not always possible to identify prior to the deliberation, an

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<sup>166</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 104-105

<sup>167</sup> Logi Gunnarsson, *Making Moral Sense: Beyond Habermas and Gauthier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26.

element in the agent's *S* which supports  $\emptyset$ -ing. The relevant element of the *S* may be itself a result of the deliberative process. Thus, the agent does not have an internal reason for  $\emptyset$ -ing unless  $\emptyset$ -ing is appropriately related to an element of the agent's *S*. All deliberations do not consist of relating an element of *S* that is antecedently given element related to the action. Although all the deliberations start from the agent's subjective motivational set, the deliberative process is not always confined to figure out a suitable connection between the action and given elements of *S*. It may also add to or subtract from the set. This is an appropriate example of practical reasoning. "A clear example of practical reasoning is that one has reason to  $\emptyset$  because  $\emptyset$ -ing would be the most convenient, economical, pleasant etc. way of satisfying some element in *S*, and this of course is controlled by other elements in *S*, if not necessarily in a very clear or determinate way."<sup>168</sup> Williams assumes that there are much wider possibilities of deliberation in combining the elements in *S*. There can be some solution provided by this *time-ordering* where there are some irresolvable conflicts arise among the elements in *S* as a result of deliberation.

To draw the concluding remarks of this chapter, I am going to focus on the main philosophical issues that are encountered here. Bernard Williams' exposition of practical reason not only includes his account of internal reason; though it is the most significant discussion of this chapter. To make a complete picture of Williams' exegesis, I have started with his critique of the Kantian account of morality. Immanuel Kant establishes his moral thesis only on reason ignoring the subjective aspect of rational agents. Bernard Williams, on the contrary, provides supreme importance to the rational agents along with the significance of reason. Kantian notion of rational agency seems to be unacceptable to Williams as he thinks that besides being a rational agent, he is a particular person with flesh and blood who also possesses some

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<sup>168</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. 104.

subjective desires that need to be fulfilled. Otherwise, all human beings will be replaceable by another as rationality is the only criterion to be a moral person according to Kantian framework. Therefore, Williams, in his own thesis, develops the notion of internal interpretation of reason that accepts subjective perspective of a particular person through a rational deliberative route. Subjectivity neither encourages egoistic wants nor it supports relativism; rather it includes all those subjective desires for which he will be considered as a responsible moral agent. There is always a scope of evaluation of the agent's moral character that provides justification for his moral decisions.

The aim of Williams' moral exploration is to establish a normative, explanatory reason based objective moral theory that emphasizes on the notion of rational agency. To encounter normativity, Williams accepts his notion of the internal interpretation of reason. There is another kind of reason which is not accepted by him as a normative reason. This reason, known as the external reason, does not have explanatory as well as motivating capacity and so cannot be considered as a reason for a moral agent. So, Williams with arguments has tried to prove the insufficiency of the true external reason statement and gladly announces that all normative reasons are internal reasons. Although there are supporters of external interpretation of reasons who think that Williams has made a very strong claim about the internal interpretation of reason. Williams replies them with his own arguments and establishes his claim of internal reason. Internal reason, according to Williams' insight, can be considered as the one and the only kind of normative reason that includes the subjective aspects of the agent through a rational deliberative route. This reason can explain as well as motivate the agent to take the moral decision. Williams' thesis of practical reason is a kind of moral decision-making procedure that has a very flexible idea of rational agency on the one hand as well as it advocates the notion of objectivity on the other. Thus Williams' pragmatic approach of reasoning is a unique and remarkable theory in contemporary moral philosophy.

## **Chapter 5:**

# **Reasons Holism: A Holistic Approach towards Practical Reason**

## **Chapter 5**

### **Reasons Holism: A Holistic Approach towards Practical Reason**

In the previous chapters, we have noticed that practical reason, the significant component of moral decision-making procedure, has multifaceted dimensions. The Greek thinker Aristotle in spite of admitting a fixed list of virtues and a pre-dominance of reason over subjectivity, accepts the importance of practical wisdom of an agent to take right decision in a practical situation. Practical wisdom is the key to live a happy, conflict-free life by maintaining harmony between reason and emotion. His line of thought has transmuted exceedingly and contemporary philosophers have developed their insights reviving the Aristotelian approach. Going a step further they claim that life is not a mere disposition, but the main aim of human life is to achieve well-being and happiness not only for oneself but also for other prospective agents. In complete contrast to the Kantian notion of practical reason, contemporary moral thinkers Alan Gewirth and Bernard Williams have defined the nature of practical reason in a significantly different manner as both of them opine that practical reason should emerge from the platform of life experiences. Along with reason, contemporary era has a tendency of including the subject-specific abilities, agent-specific needs for good living as motivational force that insists the moral agent to decide his moral requirements. Williams draws a sharp distinction between normative and motivational reason in dealing with internal reason. Instead of understanding practical reason as objective, Williams incorporates the agent-related factors within its periphery to form a complete picture of man and his own morality. In his explanation practical reason as normative and motivational reasons for action includes both explanatory and justificatory aspects of reason. In this discussion I have noticed that philosophers of contemporary era are more concerned about moral psychology of the agent as practical reason that we use to decide how and why we should do something definitely involves our ability to reason, what we feel or think to do that thing. In their explanation empirical issues are equally

vital as normative, theoretical and empirical issues are inter-weaved to systematise the whole moral picture. Discussion on ‘ought’, the normative aspect is validated through the possibilities to be motivated accordingly.

Following the similar framework, another British philosopher Jonathan Dancy advocates his thesis of practical reason in terms of some considerations that are treated as reasons for someone to act in a particular way. Such considerations do not have any kind of reason-giving force of their own. They provide reason in terms of specific context. One consideration that provides a reason in one context may not be considered as a reason at all in another context or can provide opposite reasons for action in other contexts. Dancy, in his situation-specific explanation, is clearly making a distinction between theoretical and practical reason on the ground that ought is involved only in theoretical reason as it reflects the truth about the rationale of the judgment. But reason for action does not necessarily bear with it the notion of ought as our thoughtful decision appeals to our understanding to be motivated to do the action in practice. Thus practical reasons are not essentially driven by ought, but they are contributory in nature<sup>169</sup> as they lead to actions directly. Dancy compares reasons with rats because in some situations they may act together and their togetherness definitely strengthens the motivation; but in other situations, they may quarrel with each other and opens the possibility of clash between motivations. He is not ready to give overall reason a separate status; rather overall reason is the combination of reasons acting in harmony with each other. In this sense all reasons are contributory in nature that may act individually or in collaboration with other reasons, but no one can be rejected necessarily by presenting a contradictory to that. Dancy refuses the possibility of overall reasons in practical field. He explains that at the time

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<sup>169</sup> Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 15.

of action we use contributory reasons that are capable to motivate us either in its own power or jointly with other reasons.

Dancy's notion of reasons holism in contrast to reasons atomism is advocated as a thesis of practical reason. He points out that atomism provides the significance of moral principles since atomism accepts exception free generalization of reason, i.e., whatever is a reason in one context must always be a reason in every context. Objective reason is thus both subject-independent and context-neutral. For instance, Kantian explanation of practical reason is considered as an atomistic approach to reason. But Dancy tries to establish his contention of reason from a holistic perspective as denying the subjugation under the all-inclusive, categorical and universal principles he admits that we act according to the demands of a particular situation. Attacking the method of moral generalisation, he formulates moral particularism as a form of reasons holism. In this chapter, my aim is to discuss Jonathan Dancy's insight regarding the nature of practical reason. In this short span of discussion, it is not at all possible to discuss in detail his exclusive idea of moral reasons, yet in this chapter I would like to draw a comprehensive picture of his account of practical reason. To define his idea, I will start my discussion by making a distinction between principle *qua standard* and principle *qua guide*. This discussion seems significant for my exposition since here he tries to distinguish between theoretical and practical conditions to formulate a principled ethics. Jonathan Dancy's situation-sensitive approach though accepts the importance of principles, but rejects the traditional notion of moral principles that are formulated by pure reason and are considered as obligatory for all. To him principles must be context-specific and so conditional. I will enter in the discussion of reasons holism in the next section which reflects a unique dimension of Dancy's moral particularism. My aim is to concentrate on the trend of Dancy's account since his point of view has taken different shapes through time. In the last section of this chapter, my focus is on his distinction between normative and motivating reasons which

has acquired a special kind of significance in defining the nature of practical reason (reasons for action). It is also necessary to mention here that Dancy has mentioned about practical reasoning very often in his writings. He has defined practical reasoning as an inference that insists a person to decide how he ought to act and never the performance of action.<sup>170</sup> My focus would be only to concentrate on his account of defining practical reason as a guideline to moral decision-making procedure. In this discussion, practical reason would be the reason that motivates us to take the moral decisions and not be imposed on us to regulate us in a certain way to finalise how to act morally in a particular situation. My goal here is to understand the psychology of the agent for taking any specific moral decision.

## I

### **Principles *qua standard* and Principles *qua guide***

The notion of principled ethics is one of the significant concepts of moral atomism. It holds that a reason in one case must remain a reason always, i.e., it retains the same quality of being a reason. Ethical theory here is based on ethical principles and to define ethical principles, atomists need to mention different characteristics of moral principles. A valid moral principle must be without exception, it should single out the relevant and irrelevant properties and most importantly, they must be applicable in all situations. But Dancy, as an exponent of situation-specific ethics understands principle from a different dimension. However, he thinks that there are four specific conditions of principled ethics – (a) Coverage, (b) reason, (c) epistemology and (d) applicability.

- a) Coverage – Principle determines the status of an action. It decides whether the action is moral or not.

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<sup>170</sup> Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Shape: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

- b) Reasons - Moral principles must provide the reason in favour of an action. It qualifies an action as a moral action by giving answer to the question why it occupies that status.
- c) Epistemology – Principles must not be transcendental in nature. They should not be such that people fail to learn them. If people cannot learn them through experience or through social dialogue then it is not possible for them to apply the principles in practical situations.
- d) Applicability - The principles must have a capacity to act as a guide to help an agent to act rightly in a new scenario. A person, after learning these principles, must be able to follow them or to apply them to take the appropriate moral decision.

In my present exposition, I have included the discussion of two conditions – reason and applicability as these two define the theoretical and practical concerns of an ethical principle.<sup>171</sup> Here I am considering the reason condition and the applicability condition for understanding Dancy's principled ethics. In the later discussion, the other two conditions – coverage and epistemology are engrossed into the discussion. According to Dancy, a principle can certify an action as justified if it can provide sufficient reason to prove the action as good to perform. Moral principle is the truth-conditions of a moral judgement. But the truth here does not arise from the pure rational capacity of the agent, but emerges from some sufficient features or considerations of the agent in favour of the moral action.<sup>172</sup> These considerations are very much situation-sensitive and agent-specific and so cannot be applicable universally. It means that in absence of these considerations in favour of an action, the principle cannot justify the action. The considerations and features associated with the moral decision can justify why some agent has chosen to perform that action. The agent has this kind of choice since his moral psychology

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<sup>171</sup> Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, 116.

<sup>172</sup> Philipp Schwind, *A Critical Discussion of Jonathan Dancy's Moral Particularism* (Scotland: University of St. Andrews, 2006), 52.

is shaped through a particular training. The agent has developed choices by his own effort. Due to incorporating agent's choice and rejection of the notion of overall ought Dancy is emphasising on the sufficient considerations of the agent to justify a moral principle. These considerations cannot be the considerations of all situated differently, though can be accepted as considerations to those who are in the similar situation. So he never claims these considerations as universal. As Dancy does not accept the necessity of moral principles, a valid moral principle, for him, cannot necessarily explain why those features that are considered as reason for some play such a role to him. In Dancy's view not the principle, but the sufficient considerations of the agent in favour of action are the reasons for the action. These considerations chose the principle which one is accepted as valid in that particular situation. The important thing is that as the action is justified on the basis of a series of features that are not necessarily present in all cases, they cannot provide the final explanation in favour of an action's being morally right or wrong. For instance, consider the principle - it is morally wrong to beat a friend since it causes him pain. The agent's self-designed psychology considers that beating a friend is wrong. But it does not entail a final explanation of why that causing pain constitutes the wrong features for choosing that action. There can be a series of features that sufficiently can cause pain to my friend. We cannot determine with certainty which feature is the necessary cause for creating pain. This principle cannot justify why my action of beating my friend is morally wrong.

According to Dancy, this condition proves that philosophers who believe in objective application of moral principles are called atomists in the theory of reasons. In moral atomism the moral principle functions as truth-condition to mark the same moral feature as valid in all cases. Atomism is the thought that "a feature that is a reason in one case must remain a reason,

and retain the same polarity, in any other.”<sup>173</sup> This is principles *qua standards* and focuses on a theoretical concern. This condition has a certain issue with the applicability condition of moral principles. Moral principles can serve the role of a guide in adopting moral decisions, to find out the morally right action only when the agent is prepared to use it. Here principles might depend on the moral agent as well since it requires the proper training of the moral agent who is prepared to accept it as his guide. So, having a well-trained moral psychology of an agent is a pre-condition for application of practical reason. This well-trained agent in a way resembles with the Greek thinker Aristotle’s account of virtuous person. A person can acquire virtues neither by nature, nor by teaching, but by habituation. Virtues as fixed dispositions help the man to lead a happy life. From the previous discussions of other contemporary philosophers also, we know that the social responsibility of the moral agent always plays a significant role in moral decision-making in a particular situation and Dancy is not an exception in that. Hence, the principle *qua guide* focuses on practical situations and it might contain simplification of complicated rules that are necessary for its practical purposes. However, principle *qua standard*, as provides truth-conditions, is too complicated to serve as a guide in the moral deliberations of particular situations.

The question arises can these two conditions (reason condition and applicability condition) for principles be reconciled? McKeever and Ridge think that moral principles should guide actions as well as provide the truth-conditions for applying moral concepts. They try to reconcile these two conditions and insist that principles *qua standard* and principles *qua guide* can be considered as ‘action-guiding standards.’<sup>174</sup> Moral principle can be called ‘action-guiding standard’ if it provides both explanatory reasons that supplies the truth-conditions for

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<sup>173</sup> Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, 7.

<sup>174</sup> Michael Ridge and Sean D. McKeever, *Principled Ethics: Generalism as a Regulative Ideal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.

moral claims as well as guides the agent towards the actions also. It is truly difficult for the finite being to be guided by principles *qua standard* as he is unable to fetch moral guidance in a particular situation because of shortage of time to deliberate and for his limited capacity to grasp complex truth-conditions. A virtuous person is capable to step back from the guiding principles and can assess the situation following the principles *qua standard*. As due to his training, he does not need to deliberate rather chooses to act spontaneously. Both these kinds of principles depend on each other as principles *qua guides* cannot guarantee the rightness of the moral action, whereas principles *qua standards* cannot be applied to everyday scenario. But the reconciliation of both these principles ensures to take sound moral decisions. The question is ‘does Dancy admit any kind of reconciliation of moral principle in ethical theory?’ Dancy has not discussed about this issue clearly in his system. But from his notion of ‘principled ethics’<sup>175</sup>, it seems that he prefers to accept that different principles play different roles. This idea eliminates the possibility of a unified account of principles since a unified account of principles can only be fulfilled by the interaction of various kinds of principles. But in Dancy’s formulation, this idea of making a unified moral account of principles is not admitted as his moral system consists of moral principles having different roles to play. To him a principled ethics provides requirements for a complete moral system that might consist of various kinds of moral principles with different roles. Furthermore, it is also true that the idea of accepting universal moral principles is not at all consistent with his notion of moral particularism. Particularism suggests that the possibility of moral thought and judgement do not depend on the provision of the universal notion of moral principles. In his framework of moral particularism, there is no room for universal ethical principles. Dancy does not allow universalizability of moral principles since unified account of moral principles does not have any provision to consider the significance of particular context. Thus it cannot provide any

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<sup>175</sup> Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, 116.

exceptionless and complete formulation of morality. Dancy accepts various kinds of moral principles while formulating his conception of a principled ethics. Therefore, principles qua standards and principles qua guides, for Dancy, are not only logically independent, but under certain circumstances these are mutually excluding from each other.

## II

### **Holism in the Theory of Normative Reasons**

Discussion of reasons holism in morality raises questions about the possibility and prospects of substantial moral principles. In traditional sense moral principles, as I have discussed in the previous section, has a nature of being universal that play the same role on every appearance. Dancy advocates reasons holism as “a feature that is a reason in one case may be no reason at all, or an opposite reason, in another.”<sup>176</sup> A feature that is served as a reason in one particular case, ceases to be a reason for action at all, or even become a reason against. Reason holism gives importance to the practicality of the situation; the situation has a high degree of impact as the situational constraints affect the nature of consideration. The same consideration can be treated as a reason in favour of an action, but it becomes a reason against, or vice versa in another situation. Dancy gives a simple example of it: I borrow a book from one of my friends and then I discover that she has stolen it from the library. Normally, as I have borrowed the book from a friend – this fact serves a reason for me to return it to that friend. But the situation is not the same now as I have come to know that my friend has stolen it from the library. The consideration that acts as a reason previously, cannot be considered as a reason now. In this situation, the consideration has reversed its polarity and does not serve as a reason at all. I do

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<sup>176</sup> Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, 7.

not have any reason to return this book to my friend; rather I have some stronger reason to put it back to the library.<sup>177</sup>

Dancy holds that his account of reasons holism advocates that every consideration is capable of reversing its practical polarity by the changes appeared in the context. Such view represents the strongest form of context-sensitivity. But it is very hard to accept this extreme claim, because of its awkward fashion engrossed in its characterization. Perhaps, it is worthwhile to admit that all reasons are not context-sensitive; to admit few numbers of considerations as context-dependent is the weakest form of context-sensitivity. But Dancy advocates the extreme form of holism that accepts that all reasons are capable of being transformed or altered by changes in context. Since Dancy believes that there are no such reasons at all whose nature as reasons is necessarily immune to changes elsewhere. He defends his view of particularism as an attack against generalism on the basis of reasons holism. Alteration of reason does not suggest that due to alteration of the consideration the reason of the agent takes an opposite mode, but the nature of the consideration itself changes due to situational difference. In his reasons holism the main aim of Dancy is to define the functionality of moral reasons from the particularist point of view where generalism, as a general account of moral reasons, needs to be proved as false. To prove this, he is claiming that rational constraints on moral thoughts and action can have the consistency if it is viewed from the particular standpoint and it cannot be achieved through generalist assumptions. Generalism insists a person to accept an unjust decision because he has made a similar decision in a different situation. A reason in one situation cannot be treated as a reason necessarily wherever it occurs. So, particularists claim that generalism is the cause of many bad judgements, ill-arguments, bad moral decisions. So, generalism needs to be falsified and rejected.

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<sup>177</sup> Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 60.

Generalism assigns very crucial role to moral principles as moral thought and judgements can be justified depending on the moral principles. The main contention of particularism is that moral principles cannot act as a general principle as it is impossible for them to play the same role wherever they occur. But Dancy thinks the particularists must not be so strict about rejection of the role of moral principles. He thinks that it seems wise for particularists to assign some importance to moral principle in practice as moral principle provides the justification in favour of an action. But to form the principle it is necessarily important to give value to our practice (practical field) than to our knowledge about what we ought to do (theoretical field). It is the task of the philosophers to provide an account of our practice in particular situations rather than just commenting on the necessary epistemological account of ethical thought. Therefore, the particularists, being in their own constraints, need to provide some account that can form some general truths that are helpful in the course of reaching and justifying a moral judgement. Dancy opines that we are able to learn such moral principles from experience and imagination plays a crucial role in formulating those principles. A principle acts as a reminder reason (or motivating reason) that reminds us about the importance of some considerations in suitable circumstances. The particularists need to have a huge list of principles in dealing with particular situations. When a decision has to be taken in a particular case, there should not be any shortage of principles because that can eliminate the possibility of considering relevant property or feature as a reason in that particular situation. There must be a checklist of principles (which is not a complete list) since any property may create a difference at the time of dealing with the specific demands of the particular situation.<sup>178</sup> There is no limit to the number of properties that can be considered as reason in particular occasions. There is a sequence or ordering of properties that are considered to be moral principles in particular situations. Some properties may be central than others, some may be more

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<sup>178</sup> Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, 67.

important than others. This ordering must be made on the basis of the demands of the specific situation, since the circumstance plays the vital role to decide which feature should act as the reminder reason in that particular occasion. In the previous chapter, I have discussed about Bernard Williams' exposition where he has mentioned a similar kind of time-ordering in formulating the moral agent's subjective motivational set (*S*) on the account of internal interpretation of reason. The elements are designed according to their relevance in the context of agent's goal of life.<sup>179</sup> The pluralists' sense of moral principles prescribes a unique way to reach at the moral decisions in a particular situation. They do not try to provide the final explanation of practical reason, rather they try to mention the possibilities that are important and can be considered as a reason in a new situation. For instance, if it is asked why does one do it? The particularists' answer would not be that it is the only honest course of action according to an agent's choice, rather it is suggested that only honesty can be important and it is just like that here.<sup>180</sup>

The role of moral agent is also significant in reasons holism. As different features can act as different moral principle in a particular situation, the agent has a special kind of role to play here. Since the training of the agent has made him well-skilled, he himself can choose which specific feature is allowed to act as a reminder reason for him in that particular occasion. But as moral principles are context-specific, a principle that is accepted as a principle in one context cannot be treated necessary as a moral principle in other situations. It means the agent has the freedom to reject that particular moral principle as a reason proper in another situation. The training of the agent differentiates him from a beginner who is not so well-trained. For a beginner, it would not be easy to choose the correct feature which acts as an important factor and can be considered as a reminder reason for the agent to act morally. Susan Stark in his

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<sup>179</sup> Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*, 104.

<sup>180</sup> Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, 68.

article 'Virtue and Emotion' draws a clear distinction between a well-trained person and a beginner. We find here a simile with Aristotelian notion of virtuous and continent person. Aristotle has mentioned that the continent person (strong-willed person) does the right action just like the virtuous person, but unlike the virtuous person, the continent person experiences a psychic dissonance. He is tempted by conflicting desires and so he does not have the harmonious balance of reason and emotion which the virtuous person possesses. For instance, the continent person feels conflicting emotions of fear and confidence in the battlefield, whereas the courageous person feels only confidence, since his emotions are unified. Dancy explains this unity of the virtuous person that is not experienced by the continent person by introducing the notion of narrative.<sup>181</sup> He argues that the virtuous person's (or the well-trained person) narrative of a moral situation is not equivalent to a mere list of all its salient features. The virtuous person perceives all the salient features of the particular situation and then draws a mental picture where all the salient features have a proper place as per the demands of the situation. This notion of narrative formulated by the virtuous person explains the situation properly, what he sees and why does he act this way. His narrative is accurate since he perceives clearly and is able to assemble everything flawlessly. The continent person, on the contrary, may perceive all the salient features but cannot assemble them properly or misses out one or two significant features of that situation. So, his narrative lacks unity either because he fails to perceive all the salient features properly or perceives properly but cannot assemble them in proper manner that makes sense and so it is not sufficient to provide a complete picture to draw a right conclusion according to the demands of the situation. Therefore, the notion of narrative is a very significant concept for reasons holism. The holist maintains that for virtuous person, considerations not only get their reason-giving force from the particular context, but considerations function jointly, i.e., in relation to one another within the particular occasion.

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<sup>181</sup> Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, 112-113.

The virtuous person's narrative is considered as a reason for action before the emergence of any reason from the consideration itself.<sup>182</sup>

### III

#### **Reminder Reasons and Favourer Reasons**

Human beings generally act to achieve something. The agent does so as he identifies some reasons in favour of his action. When a person performs an action, there must be some considerations that are accepted as the reasons for which he has done that particular action. Intentional, deliberate and purposive actions are always done for a reason. Jonathan Dancy begins his enquiry of reasons for action (generally termed as practical reason) from the distinction between good reasons and reasons for which the agent decides to act. Thus he is making a distinction between two kinds of reasons – normative reason or reasons in favour of truth or theoretical reason and motivational reason or reason for action or practical reason. When the agent acts for the normative reason, he performs the action without knowing the moral status of it. There are reasons that somehow persuade the agent to do an action as he considers them as good. On the other hand the consideration that motivates the agent to perform an action is considered as the reason for doing what he does. This kind of reason is coined as motivating reasons, i.e., 'reasons for doing it'. In case of this kind of reason an agent might know the reasons for which the agent has acted, but without evaluating the moral worth of the reason he does the action. When we think that there are some reasons, we actually think of some features that are considered to be the reason in favour of the action. These reasons are normative reasons, and normative reason not only provides justification for an action, but also establishes the action as morally good. It approves both the nature and the products of reason.

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<sup>182</sup> Susan Stark, "Virtue and Emotion", *Noûs*, 35, no.3 (September 2011): 440-455, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2671895>

‘Nature of reason’ means that favours action and ‘product of reason’ means it makes actions morally right or wrong. These reasons are good reasons for action if it favours an action.<sup>183</sup>

Normative and motivating reasons are different in another sense. Motivating reasons for action can explain why the agent has done it. According to Dancy, it might not be considered as a good reason for action always as in every situation the agent may not justify the action as morally right on the basis of the same consideration. Here, the agent is issuing a reminder that the focus of all the attention must be on the motivation. It is considered as the reminder reason for Dancy. In normative reason, on the contrary, the agent is considering whether it is a good reason that is favouring acting in the proposed way. It is the favouring reason that can justify why the agent has done the action this way. If a person chooses to act a morally bad or silly action, then there would be reminder reasons for the agent to act that motivates him and can explain why does the agent has made that kind of choice. But there is no scope for favouring reason or good reason to perform a morally bad action. For there is no favouring reasons at all in that case, no reason can provide a justification for his choice. But in some cases things are better because reminder reason coincides with favouring reason. This is the best possible situation where this kind of reconciliation can occur. Sometimes, there can be cases where there are favouring reason or good reasons to perform a morally right action. But the agent is not at all motivated to act since either he is ignorant of them or he is aware of them, but due to his laziness, selfish attitude or incompetence miss the bus. In this kind of situation, though there are good reasons to decide the morally right action, but the performance of the action cannot be possible due to absence of motivating reason. The agent here is not at all motivated to do things this way, rather he does something else.

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<sup>183</sup> Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1-5.

The distinction between normative and motivating reason is very common in the theory of reason since we would like to answer two kinds of questions. One is why does someone act in a specific manner? Motivating reasons are enough to provide a satisfactory answer to this question. But it is not so easy to answer another question. When we are asked ‘Is there any good reasons to act in a certain way?’, we feel the need of considering normative reasons. In this respect, motivating reason has lost its importance and normative reason is considered to be the only reason for acting normatively. Dancy opines that the importance of normative and motivating reason in the theory of reason cannot be considered separately from each other. Both of these reasons have their own significant role to play. When a consideration becomes reason for taking the moral decision in a specific context, then it is irrelevant to enquire whether there are good reasons involved in it to motivate the agent. It is the responsibility of the agent to identify the normative reason and to prepare him to be inspired by the same. Practical reason is concerned here with the practice or the applicability of the moral principles that is formulated through experience and valid for only one particular occasion.

To conclude Dancy’s account of practical reason, I have mainly concentrated on its context-specific role. Dancy has started his exposition by a strong claim of particularism that there is no existence of any moral principles which are responsible to justify our moral thought or judgement without exception. But later he considers the notion of moral principles in a limited sense that is different from the traditionally accepted necessary conception of moral principles. Going against generalism, he provides a new version of particularism where moral principles are derived from the agent’s experience. Empirical derivation of moral principles proposes a huge list of relevant features that can act as reason in different situations. But no chance of chaos is accepted by Dancy, however, he admits a kind of checklist that gives a provision for each and every relevant feature to be considered as a reason in different occasions. From the previous discussion, I can comment that the need for normativity, exceptionless,

strongly stitched system of thought is going to be obsolete. New kind of insight and thinking has started to take shape during the contemporary era. These kinds of theses encourage the attitude of open-mindedness and enhance a new dimension in the development of moral philosophy.

## **Conclusion**

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The whole thesis focuses on the significant changes occur in the nature of practical reason. Philosophers from different epoch have viewed ethics through different lenses and as a result their explanations of practical reason have taken different shapes. Practical reason has strengthened its footsteps in the arena of ethics as from the ancient period most of the philosophers accept reason as the valid route to take decisions; reason is considered as the only instrument to define human actions. But it has multi-dimensional connotations in different timeframes. Philosophers of the ancient and the modern era are interested in accepting reason in its normative sense. However, in the contemporary period, philosophers are more interested in incorporating motivational reason to understand the role of reason behind our decisions. Motivational reason becomes necessary in analyzing the nature of reason in moral sphere. Normative reason is considered as the justificatory reason whereas the motivational reason is the explanatory reason in support of the agent's moral decision. I have started my discussion by analyzing the nature of practical reason as developed by Aristotle. He is the pioneer of defining practical reason in the moral sphere. Then following the chronological order, I reach at the modern period to discuss about the philosophy of Immanuel Kant that dominates Western ethics for a long time. In respect of taking moral decision Kant is confident about the power of rational faculty of the agent. Practical reason does not contain in it any spiritual hierarchy which is the main tenet of middle age. Going against the attitude of Christianity of the middle age, he denies the hegemony of divine power in moral sphere. Due to such belief he insists to follow rational law, the secular equivalent of the divine law. Kant has a completely different set of frameworks though he has started his discussion following the Aristotelian footsteps. Both of them have started their discussion of practical reason in contrast to theoretical reason. These two kinds of reasons have their own fields of application, yet they are not completely segregated from each other. The functionality of practical reason is always dependent on the

theoretical aspect of reason. Even though they belong to two different eras, both these philosophers have a tendency to establish the predominance of reason in the moral sphere.

Greek philosopher Aristotle opines that the task of ethics is to evaluate the character of a person. In his theory, justification behind the decision of action is based on the nature of the moral character. To define the character of the moral agent Aristotle takes into consideration the psychological aspects of the agent such as desire, choice, tendencies etc. In spite of prescribing a fixed list of moral virtues, he is presenting a context based moral theory where a moral decision is made on the basis of the demands of the particular situation and the good life of a particular being. In his view a person should cultivate virtues in his character as *eudaimonia* or happiness, the ultimate goal of life, can be ensured through manifestation of virtuous dispositions in habitual actions. In Greek philosophy happy life means to maintain a peaceful psyche and such kind of mental state can be achieved by a person if his emotion acts in accordance with his reason at the time of performing action. He considers a harmonious coexistence of reason and emotion as a prerogative of a happy life. Aristotelian thesis seems to me a very enlightened and adaptable thesis which has a direct relevance in the contemporary era. But identification of things that are conducive to happy life depends on practical wisdom. Practical wisdom of a person provides him the power to deliberate about what is important to live a good life. It is a capacity that helps to decide what are truly considered as good for the agent in a particular context. On the other hand, the virtuous traits prepare the background of agent's intentional choice that follows the wisdom without any doubt. So the aim to live a good life can be fulfilled under the guidance of practical wisdom that acts in collaboration with the virtuous character. We may say that in Aristotle's theory virtues of character and practical wisdom complement each other. A person with virtuous character possesses all those emotions as dispositions that do not contradict reason, rather motivate the person to choose spontaneously the previously deliberated actions without facing any mental conflict. Thus he

is the begetter of his action as he willfully fulfills his deliberate desires. Aristotle considers practical reason as virtue, because it is also a capacity to rationally decide what is good for humans. Practical wisdom does not give mere opinions that can be easily ignored; rather a practically wise person never deviated from his rationally adopted decisions as the virtuous decisions are inscribed in the mind of the wise person. Thus for smooth functioning of practical wisdom the agent's whole-hearted participation is essential.

Immanuel Kant, the eminent philosopher of modern period, has advocated a completely different kind of approach. He is also considering practical reason as an instrument to decide what is right to do. Starting from the discussion of pure reason, Kant has formulated an absolutely reason-based justification for moral decision-making. His duty-based ethics entirely emphasizes on the evaluation of the discrete actions and not the character of the agent. In his approach the deliberation never involves agent's subjective aspects as his practical reason is a pure practical reason that formulates formal laws for actions. Though like Aristotle his theory is not tied with the character of the agent, but will of the agent is a very pertinent issue here as freedom of will is considered as an important precondition to take moral decisions. In his interpretation freedom means to allow reason acting according to its own norm. Reason gets the scope to act properly only if the subjective aspects of the agent are resisted to create obstructions in the application of reason. Kant's diligent approach that aims to answer what a proper duty is removes all the agent-related conditions from the domain of ethics. In contrast to Aristotle's approach, Kant is providing a formal ethical view that opposes everything that can be diluted by personal experiences. To him in ethics we require pure practical reason that is not infected by any personal attitude. Pure reason is applied in the theoretical field for obtaining knowledge and when applied to the moral field, it becomes pure practical reason. In this connection, he has framed his idea of practical reason as an idealistic approach toward humanity. But for him, human beings are inherently rational and moral beings. They are

naturally guided by the universal moral law that is a construction of pure practical reason. Human beings cannot choose otherwise as they are intrinsically moved by this moral law. It seems that in Kantian framework, human beings are not considered as an embodied human being anymore. Agent's individuality is ignored and he is considered as an ideal person for whom 'ought' is granted as 'can'. In case of making an objective moral system, Kant has ignored the individual agent, his subjective aspects, and his psychological intentions. These are considered as the important factors of moral decision-making for several moral thinkers; but Kant considers them as the hindrances in the path of being a moral agent. Though in his theory he makes scope for the virtues and moral feelings like love, benevolence, beneficence etc., but all these discussions come under the hegemony of the universal moral law. Kant discusses about respecting others as end and not as mere means since all rational beings are members of a common kingdom where they are all bound by the same formal law. Kantian thesis of pure practical reason has made himself a clear opponent for the contemporary thinkers. Kant is also speaking of virtues, but that does not defy the necessity to follow the universal rational law. Due to presence of virtue a person turns to a holy person who performs duty with self-constraints. Here we find an autocracy of practical reason as the agent himself possesses the capacity to subordinate his inclinations under his rational understanding. Virtue as a disposition is the inner moral perfection that supplies the respect in agent's mind towards the categorical imperative. So in Kant's theory virtue does not indicate any aptitude that we develop through habit. But virtue is the duty sense of a person, provides power to his subjective principle to follow the command of practical reason.

The nature of practical reason has gone through a paradigm shift in the contemporary era. Many philosophers of contemporary period have included the psychological aspects of the moral agent along with reason to decide the rightness of actions. It also takes into consideration the agent's intentionality that works in the background of his moral decision. Consequently,

individuality of the moral agent becomes significant issue in this discussion. Human beings are rational as well as social beings. His moral sense evokes from his social responsibility. This social identity of a human being cannot be ignored as without encountering his social self, we cannot evaluate the moral character of an agent. For Kant, the evaluation of the agent is not very significant as he is concentrating on the evaluation of the discrete moral actions. In the contemporary period, I notice that philosophers are more concerned about the moral agent as his moral decision (why is he taking that moral decision?) is a reflection of his moral nature. They are not ignoring the social self of an agent. An agent is an embodied soul who also possesses some subjective wants (not egoistic ones) that are needed to be fulfilled. Human beings are made of flesh and blood and their psychological factors like desires, belief, emotion etc. participate in the moral decision-making procedure. Every person has a sense of social responsibility, mutual commitment and moral understanding that need to be exercised in the process of his constructing moral decisions. The freedom of the human being appeals to achieve his social responsibility towards others. Kant considers human beings as a member of a kingdom where everyone treats others as end, and not as means to achieve moral goal. The idea is that if I treat another person as means, then it would turn into a universal moral law that every person is allowed to treat others just like the same. But no one is interested to make himself a means for others. In the contemporary span also, every person is treating others as equal. Each and every one agrees in an unwritten treaty of noninterference where no one is trying to harm or suppress others' rights, wants or needs. The principle of universalizability assures equal treatment for all other prospective agents as they are in a similar situation. In Kant's theory we are directed to respect other people for the sake of moral law. But in contemporary era we are following the law of non-interference as we are willing to structure a just society where citizens are responsible to one another and believe in an identity of interest for furtherance their well-being.

Alan Gewirth belongs to the group of contemporary philosophers who, following Kantian notion of the supreme principle of morality, advocates the PGC as the supreme principle. In spite of that, he formulates this principle through necessary dialectic method of logical derivation. For Gewirth, individual being and his generic rights of freedom and well-being are the most significant features of a moral action. Not only the individual agent, other recipients are considered to be prospective agents who also possess generic rights and their rights must be preserved by a successful moral action. His attempt to give primacy to practice encourages him to build a monistic theory that is helpful to avoid conflict among moral judgments and rules. His aim to establish an egalitarian theory is based on social justice. Though like Kant he is also advocating the necessity to follow a supreme principle, but his principle is not asking to perform duty towards other people only. Principle of Generic Consistency ensures the right of the agent as well as the other people. His ethics does not treat the agent and other people asymmetrically, rather suggests giving equal importance to both. Thus in his oblique approach justification of an action lies in the practical requirement of a purposive action. He is not accepting the role of free choices in moral sphere, but in his view to safeguard rights and human goods our practical reason must follow the dialectically necessary method. The premises of the inference are the beliefs of the agent that he has absorbed from his cultural environment and intellectual atmosphere. Like Aristotle he is also accepting our well-being as the goal of action. But in Aristotle's theory achievement of well-being was mostly agent-centric. But in Gewirth's view agent has the equal responsibility for his own well-being as well as the well-being of others.

Another contemporary philosopher Bernard Williams considers Kantian morality as a strong opponent of his own thesis of practical reason. He is against the idea that moral considerations are so powerful that they can override subjective desires. Denying Kant's moral claim, he announces that unconditional imposition of moral law on everyone is impossible. His

theory that suggests end justifies the means declares that moral judgments must be ultimately supported by the disposition of the agent. Here we find an affinity of his view with Aristotle's idea and he himself also willing to return back to Greek thought where human flourishing was at the center of ethical discussion. By constructing Kantian critique, Williams engages him to prove that apart from reason individual's subjective aspects and his psychological intentions have a significant contribution in moral decision-making procedure. Individual's own imagination, his experience and creativity are engrossed in making his moral decisions so deeply that an individual is motivated to transform him internally. Williams is also emphasizing on the freedom of the agent and in his analysis the agent is not an unthinking free thinker as his set of desires is prepared following a rational route. Though he is proposing the important participation of reason, but in his theory the agent is not pushed to make rational choices following universal law. On the other hand, he believes that the agent's own perspective is intermingled in his decision as the agent can take a decision only if he internally agrees to do the same. It is a kind of becoming (an existentialist notion) for an individual whose creativity is engaged in the consideration that guides him to take the moral decisions. Creativity is a significant aspect of a person which represents the uniqueness of that person. But here we must remember that focus on the subjective aspects of the agent does not mean negligence to his social responsibility. As a social being he must possess some social values. Creativity brings uniqueness to the agent, whereas social responsibility makes the agent a social being because of which moral decisions of the agent do not contradict to other recipients as well. It is a revolt against reason-based view as he is challenging our age-old understanding of ethics that is developed on the idea of objectivity and universality. We find that Gewirth is also talking about the social values, but his theory also insists to follow universal principle for providing justification in favour of choice. But Williams has trust on the capacity of an individual who being a member of a society adopts some common moral considerations naturally. It is a

precondition of a society that most of its members bear a common set of ethical beliefs. As a result, their practical reasons provide justification on the basis of these beliefs. These beliefs are essentially linked with our identity and so justifications flow from our dispositions that are the basis of such socially sanctioned moral beliefs. Going a step forward he comments that self-understanding, reflection of practical reason can initiate a modification in agent's ethical beliefs.

Following Williams' analysis, Jonathan Dancy also advocates moral particularism where there are no moral principles that can evaluate the moral status of the action; rather it depends on the configuration of the morally relevant features of the action in a particular context. Consequently, going against the theory of reasons atomism this doctrine would emphasize the notion of reasons holism that evaluates action in relation to the context. Something can be treated as reason in one context, though can be ignored in another context. Reason is thus turned to be context-specific. Thus particular context and its relevance in moral decision making becomes the most significant feature of practical reason. To Dancy practical reason is always contributory in nature and not overall kind, because such reason is treated as the only relevant consideration to perform an action. As reason always involves deliberation, Dancy believes that contributory reason ought to motivate the agent to action. The agent acts for the reason as he does not jettison it. Dancy's approach again goes contrary to the theory that is dedicated to justify universal moral law as obligatory. We find that his particularism is mentioning that at the time of making ought judgments we use theoretical reason as ought judgments are treated as true. But practical reason is related to action and so it cannot be an overall ought. Theoretical reason suggests what we ought to do, but practical reason points out what is best for one to do. To understand what is best for one we have to focus on his desire and also his beliefs that give birth to his desires. In his holistic approach he thus urges for functionality of reason along with the functionality of belief and desire.

We find that morality is an idealistic approach in the ancient as well as in the theory of Kant. In the contemporary era, morality turns to a pragmatic approach. As a result we find a shift of focus from a rational moral being to a responsible social being. It is also a process of transformation from reason to reasoning as the social aspect of the agent comes into consideration. The agent's experience plays a pivotal role here as he is considered as a social being. We are deviating from the pure notion of reason advocated by Kant and emphasizing on the experience of the social being (the embodied soul). The character of the agent comes into consideration in Aristotle and Kantian exegesis also, though they are only concerned about achieving certain virtues and performing some dutiful actions consecutively. But in the contemporary era philosophers are more concerned about the social aspect and the social responsibility of a being. The psychological aspects of the agent guide him to formulate the moral claims. Subject's personal choice, his desires, beliefs, needs etc. are concerned as an objective benchmark that provides the justification for an action. Apart from accepting the moral principles as directives, they try to achieve a self-directive moral discipline that takes into consideration the particular context or situation. Reason alone cannot be imposed on us; rather in present view moral knowledge provides us the capacity to justify our decisions on the demands of rationality along with particular being's subjectivity in responding practical situations. Finally, I can comment that in both Aristotle and Kant's framework there is a water-tight distinction between reason and the agent's psychology, his subjective aspects; whereas in the contemporary era, this dichotomy is not preserved. Alan Gewirth, Bernard Williams and Jonathan Dancy have shown that the subjective aspects of the agent are not to be considered as contradictory to reason. As rational beings, their desires are also considered to be rational and not egoistic ones. Therefore, inclusion of the subjective aspects of the agent along with his rational aspect play significant role in moral-decision making process.

From the critical analysis of the nature of practical reason, now I can conclude that the contemporary philosophical insight seems to me as a revival of the Aristotelian approach in a way of maintaining the equilibrium between reason and the subjective aspects of the agent. To construct a just society, it is very much important to sustain the harmony between reason and emotion, then only it will be possible to live a good life for all human beings. Aristotle has included the idea of happiness; in the contemporary era, philosophers are concerned about the generic rights that consist of freedom and well-being of the agent as well as preserving other recipients' rights. Both these thoughts have resemblance in giving emphasis on self-directedness. On the other, Kantian thought is much of a duty-based approach where persons are required to be dutiful towards others and it is necessary to treat other as member of a kingdom. He does not entertain happiness as the ultimate aim of life; rather he considers that the main aim of a human being is to be moral in life. His notion of morality also highlights the responsibility of the agent towards other people as being rational all are the members of kingdom of ends. Though Bernard Williams has constructed a Kantian critique; but the significance of reason as the source of decision-making procedure (the Kantian insight) cannot be ignored. Along with this approach, the contemporary thinkers are trying to make an addition by including the subjective aspects as a component of practical reason without ignoring the impact of pure reason. So, I can now comment that these theses which I have discussed here cannot be considered as completely contradictory to each other. Rather the understanding of these theses is quite symmetrical and they try to provide a holistic picture of the nature of practical reason. A deep insight clarifies that actions does not happen merely. All the philosophical views admit that an agent's capacity is involved to make things happen. We intervene in actions because of some reasons and these reasons are the product of our making. Thus these reasons try to justify our beliefs and so reason that we use to take moral decisions cannot be agent-independent.

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