

Kantian Morality as Respect

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In an article written by Timothy Radcliffe entitled “Jurassic Park and the Last Supper” he describes the contemporary society as “characterized by the fierce struggle between competing individuals, each pursuing its own goal.”¹ This might be a negative outlook of society, but to some extent there is some truth in this observation. Consider for example how economics work. The greedy capitalists devour the market of the small merchants forcing the latter to close because of the threat of bankruptcy. In the field of politics, more often than not, he who has the gun, gold, and goons is the eventual winner of the political seat under contest. Even in daily life those looked up to are the strong and the powerful but only minimal attention is given to the poor and weak. To use the expression of Radcliffe, our society is like a “resurrected Darwinian jungle” where the mighty, rich and strong rules over the meek, weak and the poor. It is a politics of greedy competition wherein people do not mind at all whether in the process of realizing their selfish interests other’s right are sacrificed and neglected.²

This study will deal with the notion of human person and the appropriate moral behavior that this notion demands, as

¹ Timothy Radcliffe, OP, *Sing a New Song*, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1999, p. 15.

² Fr. Radcliffe, however, does not end in this pitiful description of contemporary society but moves further to take inspiration from the event of the Last Supper to reconstruct the values that the society must uphold.

advocated by Kant, which is adversely different from the one presented in the jungle-like society described above. For Kant, the human person has an incontrovertible value which is intelligible to all rational beings and the recognition of which accuses the self to perform his moral duty. The discussion will commence with the radical difference between persons and things as it will make evident the rational feature in humanity that makes him worthy of respect. From here it will proceed to discuss that the human individual has the capacity to rationally discern universal moral duties leading to the realization that one ought not to engage in some acts if one sees that such could not be practiced universally. Then, it will demonstrate that the performance of moral action stems from the duty of respect to oneself which demands external manifestation in the form of respecting the person in others before concluding with a discussion about a particular problem concerning the regaining of one's self-respect once its has been lost.

The notion of the human person

To set the stage for a better and more profound understanding of this study it is necessary to explore Kant's understanding of the value of person vis-à-vis the usefulness of things. Kant reveres the persons as ends-in-themselves for they have the capacity to recognize the existence of moral laws, and to enact and act on the genuinely universal laws of conduct for oneself and for others. Persons have intellectual faculty capable of apprehending the moral laws, and, cognizant of the value of these moral laws, they prescribe their will to execute the action, which the law requires. It is this capacity for morality that confers *dignity* to man giving him absolute value thus making him irreplaceable as a being.

On the other hand, as regards things, he argues that if they have value, then it must be extrinsic, conditional and subjective only. This means that the value of things is derived in relation with other things "in so far as someone happens to desire them and regard them as valuable."³ The value of things depends on

³ Roger J. Sullivan, *Kant's Moral Theory*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 195.

the people that accords them price. The price is determined by the people who consider them as means that can be manipulated to the advantage of the one using them. Under this scheme it is necessary the replacement of things when they no longer advance the attainment of the end which they were ordained to seek.

In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Morals*, Kant writes that "humanity, in so far as it is capable of morality, alone has dignity."⁴ However, the succeeding text reads: "We do nevertheless ascribe a certain sublimity and dignity to the person who fulfills his duty."⁵ It thus leaves one to wonder what is it that really accords the rational being dignity. Is it the capacity for morality or the actual practice of moral duty? How to reconcile the seeming discrepancy of the two texts cited? For Kant human dignity can be imputed to all persons because of that intrinsic worth each one possesses, a potential for moral excellence that resonates with the rhythm of reason; but such capability takes its full realization in the actual production of moral action, that is, man being actually moral. The seed of moral worth, which lies in our potential to legislate unto our will universally recognized rules of action, takes its perfected form in the rendition of that potency into actual practice. Persons should endeavor to translate into action what is discovered by their rational faculty as good, whether he has natural inclination to do it or not, because it is ought to be done.

The dignity of the human person is not grounded in the actual performance of a good moral action, but it is rooted in the natural capacity of man to know and do what is good. It goes without saying that the fundamental respect we owe to every human being is not based on success in one's endeavor, but on having the capacity of making decisions and setting his goal under the conduct of reason. That being said, there is no reason in Kant's mind that gives anyone, even those people in authority, license to dismiss the life of a person even if he has committed the most

⁴ Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysical Foundations of Morals" in *The Philosophy of Kant*, (ed.) C.J. Friedrich. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977, p. 435. Hereafter will be referred to as MFM.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, (trans.) T.K. Abbott. London: Lowe and Brydone (Printers) Limited, 1963, p. 435.

heinous crime. The Kantian moral system allows one to hope for that time when the criminal will finally realize the beauty and necessity of the moral prescription of the practical law. Thus one formulation of the categorical imperative directs to respect everyone as ends not excluding those who fail to act on account of the moral duty.

However, Kant is well aware that there are societies which consider some human beings *as having price* only and not as beings *having dignity*. This is because sometimes human beings are considered as merely having conditional value, that is, when merely seen as phenomenal beings relative to the achievement of the goal for which they are employed. This conception is most prominent in the community where utilitarianism is the supreme principle, holding everyone as a commodity with specific worth depending on the quality of service that each renders. It is possible in this community to shelve off a person in favor of another, or even in preference of a machine, especially when the person has become useless by reason of old age, disability, or incompetence. It is a pity that, in this type of environment, often the old and disabled are not given the respect due them simply because they cannot render any service to contribute to the advancement of the goal of the community or of the individual person that controls them.

What is highlighted in man considered as a phenomenal being is his animality, a passive being governed by instinct and is subjected to the forces of nature. Animality, however, does not properly constitute the essence of a human person for a human person is capable of self-governance which is realized in making the rule of reason guide one's life. Kant summarizes this thought in this passage:

"as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in himself, that is, he possesses a *dignity* (an absolute inner worth) by which exacts *respect* for himself from all other rational beings in the world."⁶

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Introduction, translation and notes by Mary Gregor, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 435. Hereafter it will be referred to as *MM*. The number corresponds to the number of the paragraph(s) cited as provided by the translator in the margin.

No one can meddle in the exercise of independence of every individual person as when others manipulate him as instrument to be utilized for the fulfillment of others' needs, or even of himself as when he allows his own selfish desire to dominate his rational faculty. Man, belonging to both worlds – world of sense and world of intelligence – must regard himself and be regarded by others in reference to his essential and proper characteristic, that is, an intelligent being with rational will.⁷

Moral Duty and Good Will

The essential quality that gives and makes the human person worthy of respect is his ability to make unaffected choices, ordaining him to act on a certain way on the basis of duty. Duty, as understood by Kant, is not equivalent to the unthinking obedience of the slaves or the blind obedience to orders practiced by soldiers. They are actions that have moral value because they are specifically carried out for a moral motive, that is, they proceed from the conscious recognition of the rules of reason which demands obligation from the will. In the first section of the *Metaphysical Foundation of Morals*, Kant inquires about the real constitution of a good act in order to reveal the quality of the will that a moral person must actually have. And he argues that the good things we conceive in the world are such because the will that makes use of them is good, otherwise, they can be extremely bad. The necessary condition of every good act then is a good will whose maxim always conforms to the precept of the practical law.

The performance of an action done out of duty presupposes the existence of a good will that acts in accord with the rules of morality. This will must have absolute value sufficient for effectively obliging the subject to act even if it is contrary to the inclinations of the subject. It behooves that the human will should possess intrinsic goodness without reference to any specific objective. Kant tries to demonstrate the precise nature of this will by specifying only those actions that directly flow from the precept of duty while excluding other actions that do not formally belong to this category. For Kant, not all actions that conform to

⁷ MM, 418.

duty can be considered virtuous. What one does might be lawful, but for it to have moral value, one's action must be done for the sake of the moral law. In view of this Kant distinguishes between legal actions that conform to the law without considering their ethical value, and the moral actions framed from the maxim adopted under the light of universal law. Hence, he excludes legal actions from duty. These are actions that, although consistent with the notion of duty, are executed not for the sake of it, but because the agents have other ulterior motives for doing it. In this scenario the agent is not inclined to act but, nonetheless, he performs the action because of some other personal interest.

Hence, it is not enough that actions must conform to duty. It must also be done out of concern for what is the right thing to do. To further illustrate this point, Kant employs the, example of a merchant who wills not to cheat a buyer who is a minor, because if he would do so, his other buyers might learn of it and consequently despise him for taking advantage of the innocence of the child. Thus the merchant is inclined not to deceive the minor because he would not like to lose his buyers to his competitors for that would mean diminishing his financial gain. The action described cannot be considered a genus of duty because of the presence of conflict between the maxim of the merchant (not to cheat the minor to keep his regular buyers) with the objective practical law (I ought not to cheat the minor). Duty requires that the subjective motive of the agent must qualify as an objective law for moral action. This is the insight of the third formula of the categorical imperative, to "always act in such a way that the maxim behind your action can be willed as universal law."

Another important quality for the determination of a good will is freedom. There is a reciprocal relationship between freedom and practical law. Kant assumes freedom to be a necessary quality of the will of all rational beings for without such there could be no moral worth in all actions. Accordingly, only the will that enjoys autonomy is capable of acting unconditionally on the rule prescribed by the practical law. It is impossible for the heteronomous will to be necessitated by the categorical imperative because it admits external influences. Such will acts on something not because reason tells him to do so, but because through the performance of such action he will be led to something else. The

imperative of the heteronomous will is only hypothetical. It tells the person to set out for something because it is good as a means to achieve his end.

There are two conditions that are required for inner freedom, namely, “being one’s own *master* in a given case (*animus sui compos*) subduing one’s affects, and *ruling oneself* (*imperium in semetipsum*), that is, governing one’s passion.”⁸ With regards to the first requirement Kant simply teaches that the authority to legislate a law that binds the will to act cannot come from an outside source. Morality is something that is self-imposed. Accordingly we do not need others to educate us regarding permissible good actions that we ought to do and the immoral actions that we should avoid to take for they are already present in human nature. Thinking beings have the innate potentiality to discover what reason ordains as universal law that is valid for all. In his essay *What is enlightenment?*, Kant urges everyone to abandon what he calls “self-imposed immaturity,” which consists in the laziness of man to utilize his intelligence, relying only on the authority of other people and books to tell him what course of action to take.⁹

The second requisite refers to the ability of the person to effectively control his passions and natural inclinations. Inclinations are not bad *per se* only that sometimes they rebel against the rule prescribed by reason and thus need be regulated. It goes to say that following the rule of reason does not imply eradicating all inclinations but simply subordinating them over the rule of reason especially when they tempt us to do actions that repulse our reason. We can take note here a dualism between inclinations and duty as sources of motivation of the will. Between the actions that are done out of duty and actions motivated by the impulse of sensuous inclination, only to the former that Kant attaches moral worth.¹⁰ Kant perfectly understands that every human is an imperfect being with inalienable needs to attend to, who is prone to do anything even those that are not in harmony with reason

⁸ *MM*, 407.

⁹ Immanuel Kant, “What is enlightenment?” in *The Philosophy of Kant*, (ed.) C.J. Friedrich. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977, p. 289.

¹⁰ *MFM*, p. 162.

in order to satisfy his needs. The aspect of empirical content such as the wants that proceed from natural inclinations will not give moral value to a particular act for such maxim is impossible to have the universal character of a practical law since it originates from material pleasures which are diversified in every individual. Moral worth could be only ascribed to actions that are performed from the notion of duty without the interference of inclination.

Among the doctrines of Kant, this has become the locus of attack from among his many critics. Schiller, for example, a contemporary of Kant, ridiculed him, saying:

Gladly I serve my friends, but alas I do it with pleasure. Hence I am plagued with doubt that I am not virtuous person.¹¹

The objection implicitly claims that moral state is a pitiful situation where person is only obligated to act but is condemned not to enjoy or take pleasure in what he is doing. Accordingly, this is because practical law restricts all inclinations thereby producing impression of displeasure because our wants are being frustrated by the prohibition of the practical law. But, this is a very naive interpretation of Kant. Never in his writings, nor in his lectures, did Kant avow that it is impossible for a moral man to be happy. What is definite is that he firmly upholds that moral worth consists in obeying duty rather than happiness. However, it is not entirely true that he excludes the plausibility for the moral man to take pleasure in what he is doing, and so be happy in his state. In fact, he has postulated in the *Critique of Pure Practical Reason* the harmony of morality and happiness.¹² He is consistent in maintaining that happiness must not be the end by which one takes his motivation for acting but he is also optimistic that reason will eventually reveal that it is the person who opted to obey the prescription of the moral law who is more worthy to be happy because that is what he ought to do.

¹¹ Quoted in Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, Canada: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 336.

¹² Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Pure Practical Reason" in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, (trans.) T.K. Abbott. London: Lowe and Brydone (Printers) Limited, 1963, p. 226. Hereafter will be referred to as *CPPR*.

Kant never teaches that duty and inclination cannot go together. What he contends is that it is impossible for an inclination to be an adequate principle for moral action because of its fickleness. The reason is being enumerated by Guyer in his book:

- “(1) First, no inclination can be a reliable rule for what duty requires, because any inclination may sometimes tell us to do what is lawful and at other times to do what is not lawful;
- (2) Second, no inclination can be a reliable motive for us to do what is right, even if we know what is right, for inclinations sometimes may be there but sometimes will not.”¹³

We can mention two kinds of inclinations. The first is the inclination to do what is right and second the inclination to do what is wrong. Whereas inclination that entices us to carry out bad actions must be tamed and subordinated to reason, inclination that induces the performance of good actions must be affirmed. In the latter case the desired object of inclination agrees with moral duty, but this obvious agreement could not be the reason behind the performance of the action for mere inclination cannot impel the will to act. While it is true that we cannot conceive of a decision that is unaffected by causal factors both internal and external, it is not however conclusive to say that decisions are determined by them because there is in man an initiative to resist these factors and to act solely on what reason tells as right.

There is a need, for example, to clarify “one’s maxim to help the poor” from “one’s inclination to help the poor.” That which should necessitate one to act should be the former. However, the latter may affect the implementation of the object of one’s maxim so that it may be done with dedication and love. In other words, natural inclinations that direct us to do actions bring in the element of emotion and feeling in the process of fulfilling our end. The performance of such action must be imposed no more than on the account that the maxim has universal legislative character, that is, it is valid and morally acceptable for all rational beings. Hence, the presence of the element of inclination or emotion in the performance of moral action is not contrary to the original teaching

¹³ Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p. 338.

of Kant that moral value is distinctively attributed to actions done out of duty. For as Kant explains in *The Critique of Judgment*:

"The agreeable, which as such represents the object solely in relation to sense, must in first instance be brought under the principles of reason through the concept of an end, to be called good, as an object of the will."¹⁴

Freedom is not a license to do anything we want to, but it is the power to do what our reason prescribes as right. It is in this context that Kant says that freedom is a limiting capacity. It constrains us to act in a certain manner but at the same time the act that results from it is free because the constraint is self-imposed and does not originate from the coercion of outside forces. Freedom is confined in the following of the maxim that is conformable to the practical law. Properly speaking then, "to attribute property of the autonomy of the will is to attribute it the capacity to be moved to action by a rule of action (practical principle) that makes no reference to an agent's needs or interest as a sensuous being."¹⁵ The urges of our inclination are not to be adhered to but to be conditioned by the rules of reason. Reason is the only rule for the will, and nothing else. That we respond to act to the activity suggested by inclination is because of its suitability to become a universal law. The object of inclination must not be the cause of the will but rather the will must be the cause of the object. This is the peculiar characteristic of man that elevates him from the status of brutes. It is this capacity to determine himself to act rationally in accordance with the laws of morality, by virtue of which he can be brought under obligation, that gives man his dignity.

The concept of respect

The categorical imperative prescribes an attitude of respect to the dignity of person in oneself and in others. The concept of

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, "The Critique of Judgment" in *The Philosophy of Kant*, (ed.) C.J. Friedrich. New York: Random House, Inc., 1977, p. 289.

¹⁵ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, New York; Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 98.

respect, as employed by Kant in his writings, differs from its current popular usage. In common speech, respect is associated with honor and the repute given to people who hold position of authority in the society and those who have accomplished remarkable achievements in life. However, in Kantian understanding, respect is not identifiable with honor because if they were the same then only selected people would have to be respected because not all can be elected into a position or have the talent to successfully achieve laudable feats in life. This would limit the principle which maintains that respect is entitled to all human beings irrespective of their status.

There are three different notions of the word “achtung” (translated in English as respect) as used by Kant in his works. First, Kant sometimes describes respect as a feeling of a special kind that provides for a motive of feeling out of fear. This feeling of fear arises because of conscience, the inner judge in man that threatens him whenever he thinks of escaping the obligation of the moral law. Accordingly, conscience is “the power which watches over the law within”¹⁶ man. It condemns man for committing wicked actions, but also keeps him in awe for every good moral action that he does. Conscience is something that is not acquired through constant practice but is originally within moral beings. For this reason Kant describes it like a shadow which follows man everywhere he goes. No one can excuse himself from being accountable for his misdeeds for he has at his disposal an incumbent power that tells him whether his behavior conforms to or deviates from what reason ordains.

Conscience judges a deed involuntarily and unavoidably. It is in its disposition to spontaneously express a judgment about the morality of an action without it being told or compelled to do so. “[It] has the right to judge *valide*, and to give legal effect to his judgment. Thus his judgment has force of the law and is sentence.”¹⁷ Not only that it pronounces judgment about the righteousness and unrighteousness of a certain act, but more so,

¹⁶ CPPR, p. 259.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Lecture in Ethics*, (trans.) Louis Infield. Indianapolis: Hackhet Publishing Company, 1963, p. 127.

it passes judgment to the person himself thus prompting him to act in accord with this judgment. Kant metaphorically describes the activity of conscience like the judge in legal courts, an authoritative person other than the self, who issues a judgment that impels one to behave corresponding to the prescription of his verdict. The subject out of fear of being condemned by his conscience tries to avoid perpetrating wicked acts, and thus intends to act in accordance to the judgment of conscience. But the said act cannot be considered in itself as a duty since it involves inclination of fear as the cause for acting.

The second notion of respect is understood as *reverentia*. Just like the first one, *reverentia* is a special kind of feeling, but what makes it peculiarly different from the former is that it is instigated by the mind's recognition of the purity of the moral law. Kant has sometimes referred to this as humility in face of the moral law. He writes:

“In the light of the law of morality, which is holy and perfect, our defects stand out with glaring distinctness and on comparing ourselves with this standard of perfection we have sufficient cause to feel humble.”¹⁸

Perceiving the uprightness of the moral law, Kant says, we experience humiliation because of the natural propensities that we have whose tendency to do bad actions is made known like dirt that is made visible in the presence of a very bright light. This humiliation that is effected by the conscious awareness of the moral law is not a downward movement of the whole person. That which is humiliated in man is only the inherent sensible inclinations, but the rational aspect of man is being elevated allowing it to exercise its full function. It consists in the curbing of desires, of the wants of our sensible inclinations, and the exaltation of our rational faculty as superior that must dictate our behavior towards certain actions. The sight of the moral law makes man conscious of his sublime dignity, and subjectively produces respect for the higher nature in him. This awareness irresistibly induces the feeling of reverence and animates the

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 126.

moral man to adopt the recognized law as his subjective maxim for acting. Purity of the law attracts the moral person to own and make it his principle for acting. Hence, by reason of reverence, the once objective moral law becomes at the same time subjective through the process of internalization of that same law by the agent who respects it. In this regard the will is not only subject to the law but it becomes the subject that makes the law. The reason why a person is obliged by the law is because it is a moral law of his own making.

Reverentia is a right motive for action. However, this assertion needs to be reconciled with what is said above that moral actions are ensued solely and immediately by the moral law, without the intervention of any forms of feeling. While it is true that *reverentia* is a form feeling, it is a feeling that proceeds from the apprehension of the moral law.¹⁹ There can be no reverence without the detection of the moral law by the rational will, for reverence to the law is an inseparable aspect in that act of recognition. Hence, acting out of reverence to the law is the same as acting for the sake of that law which the will reveres. In this sense *reverentia* is a moral feeling produced by the activity of the rational faculty and is derived from reason's attentiveness to the moral law. It is therefore not included among those feelings induced by human inclinations which are excluded by Kant from the precept of reason and are not valid principles of moral duty.

Thirdly, Kant takes respect to mean as *duty*. It is expressed as the requirement that persons should be treated as ends not merely as means. It is understood as "the maxim of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person."²⁰ This duty is demanded by the person's ability to reason and his capacity for autonomous self-directed living. The proper object of duty is rationality. Again we restate the question raised earlier in this study: Are we to respect the whole person even if he commits actions that are despicable or is our duty of respect directed only to the rationality of the person? While we respect rationality in

¹⁹ See chapter V of H.J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1948.

²⁰ MM, 449.

human beings, we apparently have no direct obligation to respect their feelings, that is, their feelings that run in conflict with the principle of reason. For example, we do not respect, but rather should despise the selfish interest of someone who cheats others in order to gain wealth. In actual practice, however, we do not dichotomize between rationality and sensible inclination in the human person when we show them respect. More specifically, Kant would answer this dilemma by indicating that there are two distinct attitudes towards the person. Whereas, respect understood as *reverentia* is the proper attitude for the virtuous person, that is, the actually moral person, *respect as duty* is appropriate for the persons who have the capacity for self-directed living, and yet allow external influences to affect his actions and fundamental decisions in life.

Self-respect and respect of others

At first glance, and this observation is known also to Kant, the duty of self-respect involves an apparent contradiction,²¹ for how can the self constrain the same self to act? The self who imposes obligation to the same self can always release the obliged self from that constraint especially when the performance of its duty introduces great difficulty. A chain smoker who resolves to quit smoking but finds it hard to carry out his resolution can always relieve himself from fulfilling his pledge. Here we again find Kant returns to the dual attributes of man – as sensible and intelligible being – to address this apparent difficulty. Obligation cannot be ascribed to man considered as sensible being who has no power for self-directed action because his passions and inclinations play master over himself. However, the same man viewed as intelligible being endowed with inner freedom, that is, possesses the ability to understand the moral law and the power to order the will to follow the mandate of reason, is bound by moral obligation. What is precisely the moral obligation of man to himself? According to Kant, the duty to oneself, "...requires him to remove the obstacle within (an evil will actually present in

²¹ MM, 417-418.

him) and then to develop the original disposition to a good will within him, which can never be lost.”²²

The duty of self-respect entails acting in one’s own status as a moral person that is adopting the maxim of “treating oneself in accord with his true worth.”²³ It is a cathartic activity that summons man to purify himself from evil inclinations that deviates the attention of the will away from the purity of the moral law. This purification of the self takes place not by violently eliminating inclinations but by bringing them under the control of reason. This means “forbidding him to let be governed by his feelings and actions,”²⁴ and considering reason the absolute source of one’s motivation to act. This duty is geared towards the development of the moral character of the person. It is an act of cultivating one’s moral disposition that enables one to acquire a rational will whose moral significance is sovereign, it being more susceptible and more inclined to the promptings of reason rather than the outburst of feeling or emotion.

Moreover, Kant would make a direct connection between respect to oneself and respect to others. He is emphatic about it in this remark:

“I am under obligation to others only insofar as I at the same time put myself under obligation, since the law by virtue of which I regard myself as being under obligation proceeds in every case from my own practical reason; and in being constrained by my own reason, I am also the one constraining myself.”²⁵

The moral disposition of oneself is outwardly manifested in the direction of good action towards our neighbors. The duty to respect the self instructs to bind ourselves under duty to treat everyone as moral beings. Self-respect is expressed in the actual

²² MM, 441.

²³ Stephen Massey, “Kant on Self-Respect” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 21/January, 1983/no. 1, p. 64.

²⁴ MM, 408.

²⁵ MM, 418.

performance of good moral action to others. The categorical imperative of self-respect enjoining the duty to respect others suggests an order of priority. Self-respect takes precedence over the respect we give to others for it is impossible to respect others without first experiencing this respect within. The Christian saying, "You cannot give what you do not have," beautifully expresses this contention. Unless we possess that ability to respect which we acquire in the practice of respecting oneself, can we fulfill such duty to others. However, this order of priority is not of time in which case the moral subject first nurture the moral sense of the self without reference to others and only after the successful realization of one's moral worth that he starts acting morally relative to other people, for self-respect is a way of acting that is directed to both the self and other people. The proper understanding of the priority of self-respect over respecting others is in the context of self-respect understood as the foundation or principle from which respecting others is based. Respecting other persons would mean acting on the precept of reason that is consistent with the duties to oneself. This is precisely what is meant of the moral directive to "act so as to treat man, in your person as well as in that of anyone else as an end, never merely as a means."²⁶ There are no immoral acts destructive of other person that originate from the premise of reason, for reason only dictates that which promotes the perfection of the person in the self and in others. Actions that fail to regard others in their sublime dignity results from the domination of inclination over and above one's reason, which is a manifestation of lack of self-respect.

The case of the differential wife

What attitude one has to have in order to gain respect in oneself? For example, how can those persons who have a very low regard of their self recover the sense of self-worth that is lost? Since the fundamental moral duty to oneself effects and affects one's behavior with regards to one's dealing with others, the condition of a person who has lost self-worth poses a problem. The

²⁶ MFM, p. 195.

person with low self-esteem may show two attitudes towards others. First, he may cultivate a strong dependent sense of self. Excessively dependent upon another, this person surrenders his moral capacity to another and let others use him as a means to satisfy their wants. He will see others as superior competent to tell him what course of action to take thereby becoming dependent to what the latter thinks right and proper. Second, a person with low self-esteem may consider others existence as trivial as he regards himself and may become skeptical to the potential of others, as he to himself, to accomplish noble things. How shall we reply to this problem?

Let us take the classical example of “The Deferential Wife”²⁷ proposed by Thomas Hill. She is described as a devoted wife serving her husband – purchasing his favorite clothes, entertaining the guests of his husband in the house, making love with him every time he asks for it, etc. She freely gives herself in the service of her husband, sacrificing her interest and likes counting them as less important than that of her husband, and finds happiness in doing it. She just believes that the proper role of a woman is to serve her family. This is beside the fact that women right activists have been convincing her to secure even a little to herself. It is easy to point out what is objectionable in this given case. Although, the wife is not coerced and is happy of what she is doing, it is obviously clear that she fails to understand and appreciate her moral rights for her all out support to her husband’s activities at the expense of ignoring her basic values in life as a woman.

The article²⁸ written by Palmquist on self-esteem may help answer the problem. He distinguishes three kinds of self-esteem. First, there is a *dependent self-esteem* that is engendered by other people. The person in this case depends upon the external approval of other persons which results the upliftment of the spirit of the former by winning back his self-confidence. This is true in the

²⁷ Thomas Hill, “The Ethics of Duty: Immanuel Kant” in <http://ethics.acusd.edu/e2/chapterSix.html>.

²⁸ Stephen Palmquist, “The Freedom and the Boundary of Morals” in <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/top/topl8>

classroom when a teacher encourages a student to keep on studying for possible honors at the end of the semester. The second kind, the *independent self-esteem* is self-generated. The person himself judges his performance as worth-praising independent of other person's opinion. The first two kinds are unacceptable for Kant as both fail the requirement of self-respect as a moral duty of the person to himself not because other persons have approved of it (dependent) or because he has to be honored as superior compared with others whom he considers having trivial existence and whose actions would not equal his achievements (independent). The third kind of self-esteem suits the Kantian imperative of self-respect, which is termed as *interdependent self-esteem*. Accordingly, a person who has reached the level of interdependent self-esteem considers the worth of his being "not contingent on being better than other people (dependent self-esteem) nor is it contingent on performing well relative to himself (independent self-esteem)."²⁹ He is secure of his worth as a human person and performs his job well not for the sake of being praised by others or to be known as better than others but merely because he knows very well that that is what he is supposed to do.

Let us now return to the problem of the lost self-worth of the deferential wife. It would seem that the wife has closed her mind to her own pre-conditioned understanding of the role of a wife. The stimulus to change her defective mindset would hardly come from within her since she has been comfortable doing the chores in the house as she thinks proper. She would never take initiative to change her view and consequently her way of life unless another confronts her present principles and can provide a new better-reasoned viewpoint. Cultural environment plays a significant role as a venue for enhancing or stifling one's moral growth. The environment may hinder the moral development of the deferential wife if the community where she belongs to advocates wrong values like in the extreme patriarchal society that considers women as inferior. On the other hand, it may facilitate the enhancement of her moral worth when it promotes the rights

²⁹ Ibid.

of women which is a fact given in the narrative, thus, in some way, she is being educated about the equality of rights among human beings. Common events that provide alternative outlook, different from what she presently practices, about the role of women in the society and the family, as when she witnesses the harmonious relationship of couples in their neighborhood who dearly respect one another – the man not asserting her power over the lady but respect her rights and values as a wife and the woman subjects herself to the husband not in a servile manner but in the spirit of mutual trust – can inspire critical reflection.

The most effective way to effect radical change in the person is through intellectual conversion from one's traditional standpoint to a new one. Kant used the same approach in his effort to advocate drastic transformation in the lives of the people of his time in his essay, *What is enlightenment?* Thus, to change the attitude of the deferential wife towards herself, she has to be confronted with information other than what she presently holds to encourage her to do analytical re-evaluation of her stance in the family and thus be eventually transformed into a new person of self-worth. However, the wife should not depend much on the details her cultural environment gives otherwise she would fall into the pit of dependent self-esteem which we are trying to avoid. She should respect herself not because others tell her to do so, but rather she should critically evaluate other's propositions and be categorically convinced of its rational ground in order to own it as an end to pursue. Still, the wife alone having considered the information and thoughtfully reflect on it, can make recovering her self-worth her end. Not the pressure of women right activists or the encouragement of her friends but only her own rational judgment can make her will to change her way of life. Unless she perceives her dignity as a human person and be motivated by the moral uprightness of the duty to respect herself, only then that she will be able to appreciate the importance of her rights and values.

Conclusion

Kantian morality stresses the development of man's interior disposition for doing moral actions. It starts from the effort of man to control his errant passions and not permitting them to affect

or even to control reason in steering one's life. It is simply the right ordering of the essential components in man, allowing reason to supersede the lower passions and drawing them to add fervor to the undertakings of reason. The duty to cultivate the moral sense in the self is externalized in the performance of good moral actions towards one's neighbor. Self-respect is articulated in the imperative to respect humanity in all persons. The universality of the categorical imperative of Kant instructs to treat everyone, rich and poor, young and old, the saintly and the obnoxious, fairly with the same respect. The basis for this is the capacity of every person to become a morally good individual. It is founded on the optimism that even the most demonic person can have the chance to change only if he will be given the proper environment that would entice him to rationally discern what is the right thing to do. This is the vision of Kant of perfect society where person live in mutual respect to one another each pursuing their moral goal without stepping over the rights of others. □