

PHENOMENOLOGICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF DECISION, VALUE AND PERSONAL-IDENTITY

The present paper aims at phenomenological analysis of decision and its roots in personal-identity. Since man is not to be explained in terms of a fixed theory, he is to be characterised in terms of decisions, choices and actions. There is nothing like 'I am' or my intrinsic 'being' over and above what I do in the course of my existence-striving. In this existential striving, there is a fusion of person, decision and value. Though these three terms are distinct (conceptually), yet are inseparable in the phenomenon they designate. The paper attempts to show the interdependence of value and decision. Decision involves value both prospectively and retrospectively i.e., as a ground for taking decision and evaluating it. The function of value in decision-making is constitutive, regulative and directive. Value is not a theoretical construction, it is manifested and realised through decisions. The act of taking any decision has got to be unique, discrete, monadic and historical but its justifying grounds have to be universally convincing. This interdependence of value and decision bridges the gulf between the universal and the specific conditions of human individuation.

In order to illustrate the above points, the nature of decision must be clarified. Decision is an interplay of subjective and objective factors i.e., inner projections and external situations. It is based on the fittingness of the following elements :

1. Needs : Human needs have their origin in the physiology and biochemistry of human organism and are considered to be

causal conditions of the individual. But they are not merely physical constraints like tropism and homeostasis. They are not mere instinctual drives or blind forces but undergo considerable modification through acculturation. There is a shift from mere biosphere to socio-cultural sphere. Needs are differentiated and classified through language. They are continuously being re-fashioned in the crucible of culture and are related to self-individuation which is distinctive of historic element of an agent i.e., self-articulation of organism to its own nexus in nature and with others in solidarity of human-kind.

2. Situations : Objects and other agents constitute my world.

3. Technical Knowledge : A strategy of manipulating the situations. It includes knowledge of means-ends relationships, knowledge of the relation of intended action and their consequences. What is the best way of achieving the end-in-view in the reckonable given circumstances, which are by definition assumed to be tractable.

4. Assurance that the action when undertaken and satisfactorily performed exclusively embodies the intrinsic values. Any other action in the given circumstances would not embody the values in the same degree i.e., the given action is the optimal realisation of the value in question.

It is to be noted that decision is not a logical consequence of the above mentioned elements. It appears that given the needs, situations and technical knowledge, decision can be demonstrated. However, what we need to specifically note here is that what follows is not the conclusion of a syllogism but in this deliberation we arrive at *an imperative*. The end-product of decision is not a deduction from the given conditions or statements of premises. The given conditions are not self-enforcing, they in themselves are vague, uncertain, indeterminate; the deci-

sion of the individual articulates these conditions in fact, and is not wholly a discursive imaging. The relationship between the constitutive elements and the end-product is not conceptual but involves existential commitment. Decision is not a mere discursive knowledge of the circumstances or an entailed conclusion from the set of premises. One is bothered about the desirability rather than content of the necessary notions involved in the description of the situation. Given the knowledge of the regularities of the situation, decision appears to be predictable. I project myself into the future action to be done. This future temporal dimension is to be distinguished from that of prediction. The ground of decision can neither be deduced by way of a causal regularity nor can it even be logically analysable. Further, I can express certainty about my intention and decision but I cannot express certainty about the outcome. The external contingencies may affect the total performance. There can be a gap between my attempt and the success. Unlike a proposition, decision cannot be true or false. What are good reasons of my choice? The good reasons are not merely based on rational knowledge of the circumstances but are the results of one's commitment to values. Decision is characterised in terms of my lived uniqueness and the specificity of my world. In the seemingly identical circumstances, different individuals are known to take different decision. The reason being that the meaning of the situation is constituted by the agent and not fixed and can be interpreted or decoded in alternative ways by the very same individual in different moments. Situation is not a simple aggregate of things and persons but is also mediated by a sequence of involuted interactions. In the process of interaction both the person and his situation get transformed.

Phenomenological perspective rejects the naive realistic approach towards 'the situation'. The world is structured manifestation of the 'positis'. The term world as used in phenomenology needs

to be understood in the sense in which it stands in their noetic elaboration of the entities of severally 'intended world'. Our familiar commonsense view is only a naive unreflective dogmatism. The world and consciousness cannot be separated. Phenomenological analysis is neither pure scientific analysis in terms of objectivity nor is idealistic analysis in terms of metaphysical essences. Meaning is generated in the interaction between consciousness and the world. The fact-world is turned into the world of meaning by the experimental acts of consciousness. This point is emphasised by Husserl who holds, "...this world is not there for me as a mere *world of facts and affairs*, but with the same immediacy, as a *world of values*, a *world of goods*, a *practical world*. Without further effort on my part I find the things before me furnished not only with the qualities that befit their positive nature, but with value-characters such a beautiful or ugly, agreeable or disagreeable, pleasant or unpleasant, and so forth."¹ The individual does not passively receive things from outside but he interprets them and gives a new meaning to their reality. In the act of experience, the individual constitutes the reality. Thus there is a shift from naive attitude to reflective attitude, reality is constituted through an intended perspective i.e., world is not to be taken as simply there (bare existent) but is to be viewed as intentional objectivity of consciousness. World is constituted by a subject's intentional orientation rather than by spatial location. It is constituted by radical awareness of lived experience.

The situation is transfigured and seen in a new light. The individual's decision is not a stereotyped standard response to the situation. Every new step is a unique step, it is a new embodiment of one's own self awareness. Self is not a passive outcome of happenings but is constituted through active striving. It cannot be viewed either as a thing or a substance but to be understood in terms of intentional acts. The non-empirical and non-meta-

physical approach relates temporal historicity and normative transcendence. The self-projective resolute being is called by Heidegger as *Dasein*. *Dasein* is inseparably linked with the world constituting of things and other persons. To live as *Dasein* is to posit oneself as a person, to place oneself in conscious relationship to the world. There is a difference between the modalities of presence of things in the world and that of *Dasein*.² The table cannot relate itself to itself and to other thing. It is not a possibility but an actuality. On the other hand, *Dasein* is a possible being and is always 'ahead-of-itself'.³ Unlike a manufactured tool, the person is not fixed once for all. He decides every moment about his being, he is to be characterised in terms of 'mineness'.⁴ To quote Heidegger, "... when we designate this entity with the term 'Dasein', we are expressing not its "what" (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its Being... Dasein is never to be taken ontologically as an instance or special case of some genus of entities as things are present-at-hand... in each case Dasein is mine to be in one way or another. Dasein has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine (je meines) ... In each case Dasein is its possibility, and it 'has' this possibility, but not just a property (eigenschaftlich), as something present-at-hand would ... it can, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so."⁵ Self-reflective noetic acts constitute the individuality of *Dasein*. Thus man's attitude towards the situation is not adaptive and mechanical but is critical and reflective. The individual disentangles himself from a passive involvement in the 'here and now'. The transcendence of man is in his ability to project beyond 'here and now' and to separate himself from a purely physical involvement by anticipating the things that will be. There is a shift from the exterior to the interior, from episodicity to dispositionality. A decision is neither determined by one's own nature (it is not a matter of personal

taste) nor by external factors. It is free from determination by the complex of factors present in the primitive situation exclusively; it depends upon the attitude and the mode of internalisation one could adopt while being fully conscious of the possible alternatives. The subjective response cannot be accounted in terms of causality. The scientific analysis of decision reducing its occurrence to factors and causality is not an account of the origination of decision but of event in which the decision took shape. Decision as an event must be distinguished from decision as a value. The individual may take into account all the factors and still can decide against them or what they might recommend. As the individual is characterised in terms of positing attitudes, the situation is not simply there but is the result of the decisions of the subject.

No doubt the individual is rooted in the situation yet he is not completely submerged in the totality of nature and the surrounding world. This point is also highlighted by Jaspers who maintains that situation is an object of the intentionality of consciousness. He analyses the meaning of situation as follows : " What we call a situation is not just a reality governed by natural laws. It is a *sense-related reality*—neither psychological nor physical, but both in one. It is the concrete reality which means advantage or detriment, opportunity or obstacle, to my existence... Situations exist by *changing*. There comes a moment when they no longer exist. I have to put up with them as given, not as definitely given; there remains a chance of transforming them even in the sense that I can calculate and bring about situations in which I am going to act as given henceforth... my *consciousness* of them is a *new factor* that goes into the making of the situation. " ⁶ There is a transition from factuality to a perspective. Consciousness is directed towards objects, it is also directed towards itself which constitutes its self-identity. Like

Heidegger, Jaspers characterises the nature of self as transcendence without mystifying it into a substance or soul. It is not to go beyond the world to the realm of supersensible realities, transcendence acquires significance in and through temporality. It is only by living in the world that one can go beyond it. Temporality is not to be understood, in the naive way; it is not a mere absorption in the present, it is 'ekstatis' and contra-factual in nature. The individual reflects over his past and visualises future projects. 'Now' is the fusion of past and future. The individual is not to be explained merely by what he is but also by what he is 'no more' as well he is 'yet-to-be'. This is implied by saying that he is a potential being. To quote Jaspers, "An existential choice does not result from a struggle of motives, which would be an objective occurrence. It is not a decision in which I merely seem to decide after performing a calculation, so to speak, that has yielded the correct result—this would be cogent, and I could do nothing but admit its evidence and act accordingly. Nor is it obedience to an objectively phrased imperative... In this choice I *resolve* to be myself in existence .. Resolution is what comes to my will, as the gift that in willing I can really be— it is what I can will *out of*, without being able to will it .. what manifests my resolution is my concrete choice ... Resolution and self-being are one." 7

Decision is to be arrived through intention, deliberation and resolution. Intention is not to be confused with naturalistic explanation of things. It implies the attempt on the part of the individual. Desires and wishes occur, they are not chosen *per se*. I take a decision when I make an attempt to change them. It is through rational faculty one regulates one's chaotic impulses and passions. Process of deliberation involves the consideration ...7

of reasons for and against different courses of action with a view to decide what is best and most desirable. When deliberations end up in an imperative, it is called a decision. Decision is implemented through resolution. Jaspers maintains, "In regard to time, the import of resolution is that once I have made a choice I will unconditionally *stick to it*... My resolution starts the *movement* that can give my life a self-based continuity in the diffusion of existence .. What the word "choice" expresses is that in my free decision I am not only conscious of acting in the world but of creating my own being in historic continuity. I know that I not only exist, that I not only am the way I am and therefore act in that way, but that as I act and decide I originate both my actions and the way I am. My resolution makes me feel the freedom in which I no longer merely decide about things but about myself, the freedom in which I can no longer separate the choice and me because *I am this free choice*." ⁸ Thus Jaspers argues that the individual is constituted in and through his choices, decisions and actions.

From the foregoing discussion it emerges that needs, situations and technical knowledge are necessary conditions but are not sufficient to produce values. Value is neither a mechanical configuration of these elements nor can it be deduced from needs or situations or to be realised through technical methods. Can blind striving for survival be called a value? What is the difference between 'I am a body' and 'I have a body'? Can the being of person be reduced to one dimensional impulse of bodily needs and desires? Is man merely the product of the given circumstances? Is value possible without creativity? Values are generated out of the critical reflection on one's needs and situations. Man not only lives but seeks meaning and fulfilment in his life. Mere technical knowledge produces standard results and leads to scientific objectivity. It is through values

that scientific objectivity is turned into phenomenological exploration into the nature of being. The individual is not a victim of needs and circumstances but is capable of seeing them in the totality of the nexus of self and regulate his own person in terms of his own ideas.

Needs are basic conditions for the realisation of any kind of ideal but in terms of evaluation, they are not very high. They are prerequisites of intrinsic values in the sense that they must be satisfied in order one strives to attain intrinsic values. Thus intrinsic values are parasitical on the basic values. Survival (which includes food, clothing, shelter, etc.), rationality (objectivity, identity, consistency, plausibility), freedom (used in the negative sense as absence of constraint and determination by the pre-existing structure) are foundational values and are preconditions of all other axiological endeavours. The perpetuation of life is a necessary condition for the realisation of any pursuit. Unless one is rational, consistent and free, one cannot be open to constitute intrinsic value. Elimination of the foundational values means impossibility of taking any decision and that would mean absence of any effort to realise any value. The non-fulfilment of basic needs is of greater disvalue than non-realisation of intrinsic values. This point is well understood by the social philosophers like Gandhi, Marx, Lenin and Maotsetung. They made it as the cardinal point for various social and political reforms in their historical writings. They held that there cannot be a possibility of any axiological effort unless there is a liberation from poverty, insecurity, unreason, determinism, injustice and inequality.

There is an asymmetry of values and disvalues in respect of their realisation and non-realisation. The absence of basic values makes more difference than their presence. It is a real axiological puzzle that non-realisation of the most universal but

trivial values has greater compulsive force of disvalue than the failure of embodiment of any intrinsic value. But in terms of realisation of values, the relation is reversed. Realisation of basic values is not much of an achievement. Altruism, self-sacrifice, charity, creativity, high intelligence are supremely valued. The fulfilment of these values makes the individual stronger than the realisation of basic values. In fact for the sake of these, one is willing to sacrifice even foundational universal values like money, recognition and comforts etc. A martyr forsakes his life for what he is convinced are higher pursuits. In this traumatic experience, others see in his creativity much higher axiological value than obligation to ensure mundane survival. One is convinced of the legitimisation of martyr's decision to be of highest value. This is extraordinary reconstruction of a new value experience—a condition of profound creativity setting a new paradigm. The worthfulness of a martyr's self-sacrifice is appreciated and recognised by others too. The martyr's action is paradigmatic which is to be distinguished from idiosyncratic arbitrariness. This shows that value is potentially universalisable and communicable. Though value originates in the consciousness of the person, yet it is not tied to him, it becomes meaningful to others too.

The martyr chooses intrinsic value over and above the foundational value. His action is supererogatory; in the self-sacrifice he realises the highest good. The crucial problem arises when there is a conflict between two intrinsic values. As all the values cannot be simultaneously realised, one has to face the intense axiological dilemmas; collaterally these are innermost discords. For instance there can be a conflict between the values of charity and justice. Is it possible to have a standard hierarchy of intrinsic values? Can there be a scale of preference? It should be noted that there is no conflict in the intrinsic values *per se* but the conflict is contextual i. e., it arises in the finite situations

in which a man has to exist (not accidentally but essentially). An agent is always faced with a unique and complex situation, he must make a finite decision relevant to it. In the given circumstances, he himself has to make the 'decision' whether he should be just or charitable. As the situations and experiences of the different individuals are different, there can be no unchanging coincident hierarchy of values or unfailing rules of decision-making. It reveals the plurality, atomicity and autonomy of persons and non-monotonic character of axiological or practical deliberations. The solution therefore cannot be logical, if one looks simple deductive, predictable model of decision-making alone as logical.

It has been shown in the paper that the existential striving is an interlinkage of person, decision and value. These three terms are distinct but are inseparable (to what they apply). A decision is monadic and historic but its ground is universal. A person is the synthesis of historicity and transcendence. His being cannot be exhausted in terms of positing attitudes. A value is dispositional and it is to be concretised by the person in his choices, decisions and actions. The medium of individuation of a person, a value or a decision is non-material, it is not either an object or a configuration of objects or a property of such configuration of individual objects. No straightforward body of objects or their classes could lead to specification of any of the three. They are representations (forms) of transcendental consciousness. But they are distinct in their modalities. Each decision is constituted singularly. A person is not identical with any one decision, he has a whole sequence of decisions in his life. Similarly a value is not confined to one self or a self is not confined to any one value. All decisions do not involve values. There are technical, coerced decisions which are born of ecology, bodily needs etc. as well. In other words, the whole of value is not decision and

the whole of decision is not value. Value can be used both prospectively and retrospectively, whereas the process of taking decision is prospective, it posits value as an ideal to be achieved. Value is not a part of nature, it is projected by consciousness. While values are transcendental paradigms which our decisions conform to and would not be intelligible before one could have the assurance that we are capable of living upto norms; but norms themselves are not decisions. However, neither norms nor decisions could have any meaning except for the foundational human consciousness which can come only through the reflective being of man. The reflective being is not be identified with value but it entertains timeless paradigms which are manifested through concrete enactments. Thus the bridge between the monadic historic decisions and value paradigms which are a-historical universal patterns are synchronised in the reflection of the agent who constitutes the duality of historical immanence and transcendental projection.

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NOTES

1. E. Husserl : *Ideas : General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by W. R. B. Gibson. London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1931, p. 103.
2. M. Heidegger : *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1973, p. 67.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
6. K. Jaspers : *Philosophy* Vol. II, trans. by E. B. Ashton. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 177-178.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.