

**SELF AND OTHERS IN MORAL DISCOURSE :
Kant, Existentialists, Liberals and Communitarians**

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I. The Kantian and Early Liberal Views

1.1 A basic question of all morality or the moral point of view is whether morality is mainly interested in regulating interpersonal behaviour in society by defining and emphasizing our duties towards other; or whether we also have duty towards our own selves. A second related question would be whether the person of moral agent is totally constituted by the society, its institutions, norms and conceptual framework, or whether the moral agent is a person in her own right; that is a person is at least partially what she is because she is a rational being, or because she is a human being who shares with other human beings not only certain biopsychological needs, but also ways of thinking and responding to various existential situations and dilemmas. Ancient and medieval societies everywhere were structured on a hierarchy of social classes-feudal lords, peasants and slaves in Europe; brahmins; ksatriyas (upper castes), middle castes and sudras in India. Duties were strictly defined in terms of this hierarchical social structure in which the uppermost class hardly had any duties. The common bond of humanity among persons of different classes or communities was explicitly or implicitly rejected.

Both the humanism of Renaissance (which did not even try to question social inequalities) and the emphasis on the rights of the individual as against the Church in the Reformation (which soon got undermined by the dogmatism of the reformers) made a substantial beginning towards the assertion of the identity of the individual as a person.

It was during the period of Enlightenment that the twin ideas of the individual as a person, and the natural affinity and equality of all human beings based on their shared rational nature found definite expression. John Locke is the foremost

among early Enlightenment thinkers who asserted the 'natural' dignity and equality of all human beings, and their 'natural' right to life, liberty and equality, as well as to property.¹

According to the Enlightenment thinkers, the equality, liberty, dignity and inviolability of the individual was not merely a normative principle, but a factual assertion. That is, not only all humans ought to enjoy optimum liberty and other rights, they are born free and the restraints on their liberty are the result of unjust social institutions (Rousseau).

1.2 In Kant, the ideas of dignity and inviolability of a human person (which is expressed in the second formulation of the categorical imperative concerning the need to treat human persons as ends-in-themselves, and never as means); the absolute equality of all persons (expressed through the third formulation of the categorical imperative concerning the kingdom of ends) find their strongest expression as absolute normative principles. Both ideas of the dignity of human person and their equality are based in Kantian philosophy on the axiomatic belief regarding the moral agent being essentially a rational person; while reason, in turn, is conceived as universal.²

Another axiomatic belief of Kant is that the moral law alone has absolute worth or value for the sake of which all other things may become valuable. This worth or dignity of the moral law passes over to rational persons who are capable of being determined by the moral law. As W. Windelband says:-

*reverence for the worth of man is for Kant the material principle of moral science. Man should do his duty not for the sake of advantage, but out of reverence for himself and in his intercourse with his fellow-man he should...honour in him the worth of personality.*³

Kant asserted the freedom or autonomy of the individual will, but this autonomy follows from the universal rational nature shared by all. Though the human person is an end-in-herself in Kant, she is also a member of the kingdom of ends, and the latter concept saves the former idea from being reduced to a mere assertion of individualism.

1.3 Nineteenth century liberalism carried forward these ideas. There was a continued emphasis on equality, liberty and individual dignity of all human beings *qua* humans. The individual's right to think, choose, and act for herself without any interference from others is its pivotal idea, and revolt against tradition and

authority is its natural corollary. It is expressed beautifully in J.S. Mill's much quoted passage:

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.....

We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavouring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still⁴

The ideas of equality and liberty go back to the social-contract theory of Hobbes and Locke which conceives the society as a product of social contract or agreement among free individuals, in and through which they are supposed to have sacrificed some of their freedom in order to ensure a well-ordered society. It is the individual who has supreme value in this theory; and society is reduced to a mere instrumental value. The social order created by the social contract has nothing sacrosanct about it but is merely meant to facilitate the realization of the goals of free individuals. It is also assumed that the dignity and inviolability of the human person, as well as her right to freedom and equality, are 'natural' or innate to the human person, and are prior to the formation of the society. Even the moral agent's personality, conscience and moral code are understood as derived either from reason, or known through intuition, and thus not having their source in the society.

At least in early liberals, the conception of society as an integrated whole is undermined, so that the assertion of individual's equality, freedom and dignity becomes an expression of an extreme individualism. On the plus side, the doctrine of liberalism (individualism) rightly emphasizes the equality, dignity and inviolability, of the individual; saves her from being expressed either by the state, or society, encourages attempts at social welfare, and affirms the values of plurality and tolerance. Freedom of conscience and expression presumes the plurality of opinions and ways of life, and the insistence on them means emphasis on tolerance in every field of life.

Liberalism thus encourages not only individualism and the idea of freedom but also the values of pluralism and tolerance which have been generally associated with relativism. But it can have no truck with any kind of relativism as the latter is based on a more or less communitarian conception of the human person, while liberalism's hallmark is its individualism.

1.4 While liberalism dominated nineteenth century thought, and came to be closely associated with positivist philosophy and socio-political reform movements, its influence was greater in the English speaking world than in the Continent. First half of nineteenth century saw the development of idealist philosophy in Germany, e.g. J.G. Fichte and G.W. Hegel. State is placed very high in Hegelian hierarchy and is perceived as a living expression of universal Reason, Mind, Spirit or divine Idea. It is only as a citizen of the State that the individual becomes wholly free and possesses rationally defensible rights. State is conceived as an organic unit in Hegel whose citizens have no separate or independent identity other than that of being the citizen of a particular state. The role of the State in Hegel's thought is quite extensive.

Inasmuch as the State is the source of both laws and moral standards or norms, the morality of any particular society as determined by the state would be naturally different from that of other societies. Of course, Hegel had no relativistic intentions but his moral philosophy comes very close to the later communitarian point of view.

Though the emphasis on the State as the integrated whole, having greater worth than its parts or individuals was more prominent in German philosophy than in the English speaking world, F.H. Bradley's conception of the whole as being richer and larger than its parts comes very near the German idea of the State. The emphasis on the greater worth and reality of the society and secondary importance of the individual in Bradley, as in Hegel, anticipates later communitarians.

II. The Existentialist View

Though existentialists' main concern is with the individual subject of experience, they have strongly recognized that individual's person is constituted by her relationships with other. Martin Heidegger develops his philosophy in conscious contradiction to the Cartesian idea of the subject's certainty of herself (I think, therefore I am) as the only truth in one's experience. He opposes the concept of the subject as some one standing over against, or confronting, an alien and unknowable objective world, including other selves.

In contrast, he develops the concept of *Dasein* or being-in-the world. Knowing and acting no longer have to be conceived in terms of the subject-object relationship. They are modes of *Dasein* or being-in-the-world. That is, the human person is an existence-in-the-world, and is conditioned in every mode of her

thought and action both by the external world or her material situation, and by other people in the world. Being related to other selves is an essential aspect, or even constitutive, of the being and existence of each self.⁵ The being of a person is 'being with' others. An individual could not have been what she is without her relationship with others. Her knowledge, private concerns and standpoints exist only against the background of ways of thinking and responding which are shared by members of a social group. Part of our self-awareness is derived from our awareness of the world. Our relationship with others, or our 'being for-other' is a part of our being ourselves. The entire idea of *Dasein* or our being-in-the-world, or our being-with-other seems to suggest an integral relationship between different selves. But it is not the case.

Though the various existentialist writers differ widely among themselves, they all emphasize the essential solitude of the human person as she faces anxiety, guilt and above all death alone. Even Heidegger who emphasizes the self's relationship with others more than other existentialists comes close to Nietzsche in his arrogant affirmation of solitary existence of the human person.

J. P. Sartre emphasizes this solitariness of human person in his concept of the authentic existence which consists in "treating ourselves as isolated, unique and free." Authentic life is one in which we are prepared to take full responsibility for our lives.⁶ Our reason for doing an act must not be that society demands it, or that others expect us to do certain things, or play a certain role in society, but that we have chosen to do that act, or live in a particular way through an authentic act of decision.

Sartre talks of Bad Faith which is understanding oneself as others understand us, and living in a way which is expected of us from others. authentic existence consists in a total rejection of bad faith, that is refusal to be what others want us to be. Authentic existence is being and living on the basis of our free decisions.⁷

Sartre even says that each person must devise her own system of values or morality, and make her own absolutely unaided choices. Choosing something for oneself is to set a value to something. The individual, thus, becomes the source of all values.

While both Heidegger and Sartre acknowledge the importance of influence of others in shaping up of one's personality and life, their conceptions of human

solitariness and authentic the importance of others. Sartre goes further and declares that the self is irremediably opposed to the 'other', and there is no area in which the self can address the other as a 'thou'. For him, the very being of 'other' challenges or even poses a threat to my existence. As against Heidegger, Sartre is closer to the Cartesian position. My self is the only sure thing, others' 'being' is either a matter of doubt, or a threat. Freedom is the watch-word, a freedom which mainly consists in putting aside societal bonds and asserting that 'I' am the source of whatever happens to me.⁸

Strangely enough, Heidegger as he grew older became very close to Nazi ideology; and Sartre became communist in his later years. While in the case of Heidegger, Nazism was an extension (though a distorted one) of his conception of being-in-the-world of *Dasein*, especially as he started identifying *Dasein* with the nation; in the case of Sartre, communism, being a strictly communitarian ideology, just does not fit in his conceptions of human solitariness and authentic existence.

Existentialism is an interesting study in our context, as it brings into focus—first, that the self's existence, or individual's personality presupposes the existence of and interaction with, other selves; and second, that at the existential level, self's interests or goals and above all authenticity imply a natural conflict with those of others. I do not agree with the second proposition at all. Obviously, the two assertions are at variance. The emphasis on authenticity which can be achieved only by rejecting the place of others and their demands in our lives is at variance with both, their first assertions of the subject's existence as a being-in-the-world, and the moral point of view.

Does existentialism suggest that morality's main object or referent is the subject alone? It seems so, but then at least for Heidegger this cannot be the case, as his conception of *Dasein* implies the primordial importance of other selves, responsibilities towards whom cannot be brushed aside.

What their discussion brings out seems to be that morality cannot be conceived or practised without the presence of others, that is, without the context of interrelationships. Whether we consider other selves as integrally related to the moral agent, or a threat to her, a major part of morality would still consist in specifying our duties towards others; or in defining rules and norms to regulate interpersonal behaviour in the society.

One important contribution of existentialism is highlighting that human

person owes duty to herself. It may mean living an authentic existence (existentialists); living according to the moral law, or living as a rational person (Kant); or simply realizing one's potentialities, or living in a way which would bring happiness to one's self, and so on.

III. The Liberal View

III.1 This brings us to liberalism, because for liberals, as for existentialists, the individual person, her goals, desires, and rights are of central importance. We have discussed nineteenth century liberalism in our section I.3. Liberty of thought and practice; the free expression of individual personality; and the implicit or explicit rejection of tradition are the pivotal ideas of liberalism.⁹

Though Rawls is separated from nineteenth century liberalism by several decades, his views have been acknowledged by all as the paradigm of liberal ideology, and I would concentrate on this thought in this section. Typically, Rawls puts great emphasis on the liberty of individual subjects and agents:

*Each person is to have an equal right in the most extensive total system of equal, basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.*¹⁰

The central idea in Rawls is that of a positive conception of liberty for achieving one's goals, and inasmuch as this liberty is to be extended to all persons, the assertion of equality of all human beings becomes crucial. But liberty and equality are not always compatible, as given the inborn inequalities of human beings, the exercise of liberty by individuals with different capabilities and goals always tends to increase and strengthen economic and other inequalities in the society. Rawls, therefore, takes extra care to ensure minimum equality among different groups or classes of persons. This can be realized only when the principle of liberty is complemented by the principles of equality and justice and justice demands that,

*Each member of society is thought to have an inviolability founded on justice or, as some say, on natural right, which even the welfare of every one else cannot override.*¹¹

This, of course, is again a liberal ideal, different from the usual utilitarian point of view proclaiming the greatest happiness principle. Rawls takes further care to ensure that the exercise of the right to liberty does not result in an excessive increase in social inequalities, or disadvantage to the lesser privileged sections of

the society. Hence he puts forward his famous principle of 'justice as fairness':

*Social and economic equalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.*¹²

The emphasis on liberty in the entire liberal thought expresses a strong individualism. In Rawls, the saving grace is his equally strong emphasis on 'justice as fairness' principle, the latter being understood as taking care of the least advantaged sections of society.

This care, however, is entrusted to the State. Liberal ideology is mostly developed in the context of the relationship between the state and the individual. Therefore even though justice as fairness is a high moral principle, it does not offer much scope for the individual moral agent. That is, she has no additional duties to realize "the greatest benefit of the least advantaged;" apart from the usual one to act justly. To some extent, like all liberals, the emphasis in Rawls is on the rights of individuals rather than on their duties; and this suggests that the central referent of morality is the individual moral agent, and not the 'others.'

III.2 Rawls' conception of the person has been severely criticized by the communitarians. First, they contend that when Rawls emphasizes the separateness of persons, he-

*misunderstands the relation between the individual and her society or community, and more specifically ignores the extent to which it is the societies in which people live that shape who they are and the values that they have.*¹³

Communitarians interpret Rawls' philosophy as purely individualistic which fails to understand the intimate relationships between members of a society. According to them, people necessarily derive all their beliefs, values, norms of conduct and attitudes, as well as their self- understanding, from their relationships with others, or simply from their community. In other words, the society or community is the source of whatever we are.

Secondly, it is argued, that the entire liberal, particularly Rawlsian, conception of the society and the relationship between the individual and the society is faulty. According to the communitarians, the liberals conceive:

*society as nothing more than a cooperative venture for the pursuit of individual advantage, as an essentially private association formed by the individuals whose essential interests are defined independently of, and in a sense prior to, the community of which they are members.*¹⁴

I agree with both these criticisms that the conception of the individuals as if they are separate and semi-independent subjects and agents; and the conception of society as if it is a product of some hypothetical social contract between persons who are chiefly interested in securing their interests, are false and misleading.

To come back to Rawls, he is not as much individualistic in his *A Theory of Justice* as some of his critics suggest. Though his rational persons are individuals—may be separate individuals—they are interested in forming a social order based on the principle of justice as fairness. And most of the work is devoted to the problem of how to achieve such a social order. Moreover, in his later work—*Political Liberalism*—Rawls acknowledges the important role of the society as a political community in shaping up the entire personality of the individual. Even in his *A Theory of Justice* he has clearly acknowledged the role of “a social setting as well as a system of belief and thought that is the outcome of the collective efforts of a long tradition.”¹⁵

And,

*in the well-ordered society of justice as fairness citizens share a common aim, and one that has high priority, namely the aim of political justice, that is the aim of ensuring that political and social institutions are just and of giving justice to persons generally, as what citizens need for themselves and want for one another. It is not true, then, that on a liberal view citizens have no fundamental common aims.*¹⁶

That is, justice itself becomes the common aim which is given priority over the interests of individuals. The vision of society that emerges is “a society in which each citizen acknowledges the freedom and equality of all other citizens and is committed to maintaining the institutions and practices that preserve it...”¹⁷ Of course, a just social order is expected to be inductive to the individuals’ welfare; however, justice is not conceived as an instrument of ensuring the individuals’ welfare but as a moral or normative principle which is good-in-itself. The point of view of justice is that of impartiality. As Neera K. Badhwar contends,

The impartial standpoint commits the liberal agent to treat all persons as

*equally real, as equally bearers of rights to their own (compossible) values and pursuits, by virtue of their common humanity.*¹⁸

As conceived by Rawls, justice or impartiality has a special connotation. It is not merely and passively treating all human beings as equal; it is arranging or modifying social institutions so that the least advantaged sections are taken care of and a fair amount of actual equality of opportunity, liberty etc. is actually realized in real life. Justice conceived as such is definitely a social ideal to which individual interests are to be subordinated.

Thirdly, Rawls talks of democratic institutions which alone, according to him, can ensure the flourishing of the pluralist values and ways of life within a society. Communitarians again disagree with him. They contend that Rawls is always taking for granted a liberal conception of persons, and a democratic conception of State. Does Rawls intend, they ask, that his conceptions and the institutions they envisage are right or true for every social set-up; are they true for only modern Western societies? They support the latter alternative, whereas Rawls implies that the ideas of human beings as free and rational persons with natural claims to liberty and equality; of justice as fairness, and of democracy as a political system which best ensures these values, have universal validity.

I am here not interested in Rawls' political theory as developed in his later work *Political Liberalism*. It is self-avowedly one of the several political theories; and though it appeals to me and most people nurtured in the liberal tradition, it is nevertheless a political theory which can make no claim to universal truth.

A fourth criticism of liberalism by communitarians consists in pointing out that liberals, particularly Rawls, are suggesting that there is some universal essence of human beings; for Rawls it is the rational nature-which is common to, and overrides, the particularities of various cultures. Liberals, it is argued,

*characterize people in a way that detaches them from what is that makes actual people different from each other.....Rawls.....neglect[s] the variety, and the moral importance, of different cultures in which people live and in whose terms they conceive themselves and the meaning of their lives.*¹⁹

I agree again. Human beings may well share something, such as their bio-emotional needs and even some of their ways of thinking, but they are also very different from each other, and most of these differences may well be traced to their different cultures and communal set-ups.

On the other hand, those relativists and communitarians, who exclusively emphasize and base their entire understanding of human person, society and even of morality on empirical differences between various cultures, fail to do justice either to human nature or to morality. It is very true to say that our values and norms of both thought and praxis, as well as our patterns of behaviour, differ in different cultures. It is also true that generally we respond to apparently similar cases differently according to our different inherent biases and moral conceptions, all of which might have been learnt from our society, but have now become an integral part of our mental make-up.

But can we go beyond that, and say that two persons, belonging to very distant cultures, meet for the time, they would fail to recognize each other as human person; or they would not have any natural affinity which can pave the way for mutual communication of dialogue? Differences are not only there as an empirical fact, they may also constitute a major part of our personality. But let these cultural differences not make us blind first, to differences of capacities, inclinations and values among individuals belonging to the same society, and second, to the affinity between, or common traits and needs shared by, all or most human beings.

I do not see how the emphasis on the rationality of human persons—affirmed by both Kant and Rawls—need negate the differences between various cultures. While emphasizing rationality, or just humanity, of all human beings they are not necessarily rejecting their differences. Differences and common points are complementary aspects of humanity. That there are differences in the beliefs and ways of various peoples is undeniable. But it is also true that the internal differences within any larger culture are as pronounced and significant as those between any two cultures. Then there are differences due to individuals' own unique personalities. The recognition of these differences, however, need not imply the rejection of either, the rationality of human beings, or the fact that they share common ways of thinking and responding to life's situations. In other words, there is a common bond of humanity which does not contradict the various level differences between human beings.

Here communitarians have not been able to take due cognizance of internal differences within each society which are almost as important as those between any two societies. On the other hand, liberals are truer to reality in that they firmly assert the value of pluralism (within a society also). Let me quote from Rawls'

Political Liberalism:

Justice as fairness does indeed abandon the ideal of political community if by that ideal is meant a political society united on one (partially or fully) comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine. That conception of social unity is excluded by the fact of reasonable pluralism.

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IV. The Communitarian View

IV.1 Having criticized the liberal conceptions of the society, the individual and their interrelationships, the communitarians go on to present their own alternative and assumedly preferable version thereof. According to their view, the community is the chief or perhaps the only source of the individuals' beliefs, norms and values, and is even constitutive of her entire personhood. To quote Alisdair MacIntyre:

it is not just that different individuals live in different social circumstances, it is also that we all approach our social circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity... belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles.... These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my moral life its own particularity. ²¹

While revolt against authority and traditions was the starting point for the early liberals, the importance of both in the individual's life is emphasized by the communitarians. Traditions of our community are determinative of our personality and are therefore to be valued as such. To quote MacIntyre again:

What I am therefore is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history... one of the bearers of a tradition. ²²

Even at the critical level we are bound by our tradition because "all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode." ²³

Communitarians are generally vague about the nature and extension of the 'community' which supposedly determines the entire psyche of the individual, whose good is the good of the individual, and which is the sole, at least most important, object of duties and loyalty of its members.

Generally they regard state of political community as the referent of the term 'community'. And, the good life for human beings is contended to be one that is "devoted to participation in political life so that the content of individual well-being is inherently communal-and communal at the level of political society."²⁴

It is further contended that since a political community shares common meanings, latter shape all our understandings and moral commitments. And since we exist as moral beings only by virtue of our political community, the norms and standards of this community are also authoritative for us, as against any universal morality. Of course, communitarians do not totally reject the possibility of certain universal basic moral principles, but assert that nevertheless all substantive moral rules and standards of judgment come from our political community.

According to MacIntyre, even such apparently universal virtues as truthfulness, justice and courage cannot be realized or practised without the context of social relationships. Even if we acknowledge a few basic moral principles or virtues, this would not be incompatible with "the acknowledgement that different societies have and have had different codes of truthfulness, justice and courage."²⁵ He argues that morality can be understood only in the context of social institutions or traditions, and these differ from society to society.

Thus, morality is for them first and last a matter of social practice, my moral identity being totally determined by my society's norms and standards, as also by my role in the society. It is not only that we live in different social circumstances, it is also that, "we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity."²⁶ Our community determines what is right or wrong, what is worthwhile to pursue, and so on. Moral understanding and motivation can be sustained only in the context of one's community, here political community. The latter provides all our standards of judgment and norms of praxis. Hence preserving one's way of life and one's identity through loyalty to one's (political) community and its norms is the moral way of life. MacIntyre acknowledges both the plurality of goods and the continuously changing nature of traditions. But the emphasis throughout is on social identities, roles and their accompanying obligations.

IV.2 Now, I have some problems regarding the communitarian understanding of the community, the individual and their mutual interrelationships.

First, the communitarian writers, such as Michael Sandel and MacIntyre have mostly used the three terms-community, society and political community-

almost as interchangeable. There is a general lack of clear idea of the nature and extension of the term 'community'. Leaving aside very small nation-states, every modern society consists of several ethnic, regional, linguistic and religious groups. No one belongs to any one community exclusively but to several ones simultaneously. While some societies are more pluralistic, and that too at several levels, such as India's, no society can claim to be homogeneous, or monolithic. Ethnic, regional, linguistic and religious factors provide strong bases for community feeling. There are other factors which provide equal bases for fellow feelings or community feeling, such as economic status, educational level or profession, as well as rural or urban backgrounds. It may be that these differences are more marked and determinative in the third world countries and less so in more developed societies. These differences not only exist, they also determine a person's identity, her interests, views and social circle or community.

It would be naive to think that any individual can ever belong to one community alone. Each of us belongs to so many communities at once, and our various identities—regional, linguistic, religious, economic (and caste) - necessarily overlap. If so, which of these innumerable communities can justifiably claim to be the determiner of the individual's identity and her moral values and standards? That is, which of the various communities to which an individual belongs is primary or primordial, so that it should command overriding loyalty from its members?

It follows that none of these smaller communities or groups forming the nation-society is primary or most basic in providing us our moral identity. And definitely they cannot claim to provide conditions for the realization of individual goals, and even less for the realization of such common goals, as justice.

Secondly, it is perhaps for this reason that communitarians have chosen the political community as the primary community. Communitarian writers, however, mostly choose to understand the political community as a homogeneous whole, which is a historical society with a common language and culture, and shared sensibilities.

I wonder which political community these writers have in mind. I also feel that in the name of giving expression to the uniqueness and plurality of different communities, the understanding of political community as some sort of monolithic whole in communitarian writings, negates the natural plurality and diversity of attitudes and ways of life of different groups or communities within a nation-state.

In contrast, the liberals are interested in preserving the plurality of various traditions and identities within the nation-state.²⁷ Somehow, communitarians, the great supporters of the values of diversity and plurality, seem to end up in underplaying the same.

As we have seen, MacIntyre and others emphasize the role of social customs and traditions not only in day-to-day life but also in constituting our moral personhood. The role of social customs, practices, and traditions cannot be belittled. Perhaps the liberals, being preoccupied with the individual and her dignity and liberty, have not properly recognized the contribution of cultural traditions in making us what we are. On the other hand, communitarians not only overemphasize tradition as constitutive of our moral identity, they also speak of it in singular. In real life we never come across members of a society who are all determined by one tradition. Such a uniformity of beliefs, attitudes and moral standards is both inconceivable and undesirable being against the value of plurality which the communitarians are supposed to advocate above all.

Thirdly, the communitarian's seem to conceive the state as a totalitarian one. The power of the state and absolute loyalty to it are emphasized. More significantly, the concept of the society and state are identified. There is no denying the fact that these two concepts overlap. Nor is there any denying the fact that the individual's day-to-day life and the realization of her goals are possible only because of the rule of law by the state; and therefore the individual has certain very definite duties towards the state. But when the two concepts of society and state are identified, the idea of power or superior authority enters the concept of community or society. This idea of power and authority of the state has played a very important role in communitarian thought.

MacIntyre and others have frankly acknowledged that the state is the primary or most important community, demanding unconditional loyalty. The latter, in turn, may mean that nation-state is accepted as beyond all rational scrutiny, and its interests, or the so-called common good is to be pursued by citizens even when they are against the best interests of humanity. Walzer even asserts that acts of aggression against, or oppression of other societies by some one society are just as long as such are instrumental to its common good.

If the above interpretation of the communitarian point of view-as the theory of political community being the source of all our norms etc, as well as of our very

moral identity, and therefore deserving citizens' unconditional loyalty, and being itself beyond all moral criticism - is right, then it is just not acceptable to us, or for that matter to any one who enters the discourse from a moral point of view.

The idea of nation-state as beyond all moral criticism and the idea of 'common good' of the state entitling it to override the rights and interests of the entire humanity takes us to the rule of the jungle which could never be accepted.

Further the idea, that all our moral norms and standards and even our moral identity are determined by the state and hence it deserves unconditional loyalty of its citizens, is equally unacceptable from the moral point of view. Suppose a person belongs by birth to a totalitarian state, such as Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia, F.Castro's Cuba, or modern communist China. Does it mean that the citizens of Nazi Germany should have endorsed the genocide of the Jewish community, or a citizen of China should have condoned and perhaps practised the brutal suppression and massacre of students in the Tiananman Square?

I am not arguing against the sovereign identity of separate nation-states. I fully agree that citizens have several moral duties towards their state. But no moral thinker can endorse that citizens of every state should committedly support and even contribute towards the realization of all the aims pursued by the state (including acts of aggression). Decisions for such acts are made by power hungry politicians, and the hunger for power on the part of the rulers has been the one cause of innumerable wars and untold misery to the humankind throughout its history. And citizens have generally endorsed such acts of their rulers in actual life in the name of patriotism.

The conception that an individual's moral identity is constituted by the norms and standards of her political community is wrong from another point of view also. Does it mean that if an individual refuses to accept the norms and standards of her political community, she would lose "all genuine standards of moral judgment", or even her identity as a moral agent? Does it mean that the only moral way of life is one that consists of blind and exclusive loyalty to one's community? When MacIntyre and others are criticizing the liberal emphasis on individual liberty, do they mean to suggest that their ideal state would be one in which individuals are less free, and generally enjoy less rights than in a liberal state? That is, do they approve of a state of affairs in which individual moral agents would not be able to take their own moral decisions on the basis of thier

reason and valuational preference but would act as directed (or coerced) by the authority of the state?

I might not have understood rightly; but if the communitarians mean what I have understood them to mean, then they are definitely not talking of morality. An act would definitely not be moral unless it has been freely chosen, or unless the moral principle under which it comes has been freely chosen. The authority and overriding nature of the moral law comes from the fact of its being autonomously chosen and not being forced upon the subject by an external authority. Freedom to choose what acts one wants to do, what goals or values one wants to pursue, and how one wants to live is an integral aspect of one's identity as a moral agent.

However, I do not agree fully even with the conception of autonomy or freedom of will, as conceived by Kant and Hare. I find certain circularity in Kantian thesis, as the good will is one that acts out of respect for law, and the moral law or imperative is one that is freely chosen by the good will. And yet the conception of moral law as freely chosen by the moral agent provides us with a reliable standard to identify what is moral and distinguish it from what is not. A person who is fully conditioned or determined by the norms and standards of her society, and constrained by the duty of loyalty to her state as the supreme duty cannot act freely, and hence cannot be a genuine moral agent. That is to say, the communitarian conceptions of the moral code and the moral identity of citizens miss a very fundamental truth about morality, that it cannot be forced upon some one from outside but must be chosen freely.

Further, the communitarian conception of political community as the supreme object of one's loyalty cannot claim to be a normative or moral contention because it arbitrarily chooses one aspect of human life - political - as of supreme importance. If asked for a justification for this standpoint, communitarians contend that the political community is the source or determining factor in the development of our moral ideas and identity. But this is a totally indefensible moral position. MacIntyre and others are right when they emphasize the role of traditions in constituting our views, attitudes and standards of judgment. But these traditions - plural - have very different sources - history, customs, religion, literature, moral code and political structure. The political institutions are not the determining factor but are themselves influenced by the ethos or predominant values of that particular culture. State laws have only limited applicability, and have nothing to

do with the morals proper.

To conclude, the greatest contribution of Enlightenment thought, as best expressed in the Kantian philosophy, consists in its twin assertions of the dignity, rationality and inviolability of the person or the moral agent; and the essential affinity between rational persons. These together make universal moral law possible. No philosophy subsequent to Kant could reject these two ideas.

Almost the same conceptions are found in Existentialism. While the conception of *Dasein* is almost a unique contribution of the Existentialists, it can also be compared to Kant's kingdom of ends. Their conception of, and emphasis on, the authenticity reminds us of the Kantian idea of rational person being as an end-in-itself; and the liberal emphasis on individualism. At the same time, there is a definite tension between these two existentialist theses, which tension does not exist either in Kant or in liberal thinkers.

Of course, there is no end to the debate between the liberals and communitarians. It seems to me, however, that they can be quite complementary if their respective emphases on the individual and the political community are moderated a little bit. Liberals are right when they concentrate on the moral agent to whom the moral imperative applies. Communitarians are right when they point out the essentially social or other-regarding nature of all morality. Liberals' excessive emphasis on liberty and individual's rights fails to do justice to the other-regarding nature of morality. And communitarians' emphasis on political community fails to recognize that there can be no morality unless a particular course of action is chosen by a free subject. If the two groups could mutually recognize the strong points of the other, the conception of morality that would emerge would be much more balanced, comprehensive and definitely universal.

NOTES

- 1 "Reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty and possession... And being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature, there cannot, be supposed only such subordination among us that may authorize us to destroy one another..." Quoted in Madubuchi Dukor, "The Concept of Justice in Liberalism", in *J.I.C.P.R.* Vol.XIV, No. 3. May-August,

- 1997, p.21.
- 2 "rational nature exists as an end in itself" *Fundamental Principles of th Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Thomas K. Abbott, The Library of Liberal Arts, Indianapolis, 1984, p.46; also see pp.44 ff.
 - 3 *History of Philosophy*, tr. James H. Tufts, 1957, p. 553.
 - 4 *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. Stefan Collini, 1989,p.21.
 - 5 " In clarifying being-in-the-world we have shown that a bare subject without a world never. is..given. And so..An isolated "I" without others is just as far from being proximally given." Heidegger, quoted in Jurgen Habermas, "The Undermining of Western Rationalism -Through the Critique of Metaphysics : Martin Heidegger", in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, tr. Frederick G. Lawrence, 1995, p.149.
 - 6 "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself....existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him."
"...a man is condemned to be free.....once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does." Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in W.T. Jones, Frederick Sontag, Morton O. Beckner, Robert J. Fogelin, eds., *Approaches to Ethics*, 1962, pp. 521-23
 - 7 "Bad Faith and Falsehood", from *Being and Nothingness*, in *Ibid.*, pp.526 ff.
 - 8 "Man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders, he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being...Then whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for itself must wholly assume....the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it."
"Freedom and Responsibility", *Ibid.*,
 - 9 See "Liberalism," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, Vol. 9, p.276.
 - 10 *A Theory of Justice*, A 1973, p.302, cf. *Ibid.*;pp.14-15
 - 11 *Ibid.*; p.28.
 - 12 *Ibid.*; p.302.
 - 13 Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 1996, p.13.
 - 14 "Individuals are thus in both accounts primary and society secondary, and the

identification of individual interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of the social bonds between them." Alsdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1984, p.250

- 15 *Op Cit.*, p.522.
- 16 *Political Liberalism*, 1993, p. 146, footnote 13; cf. *Ibid.*; pp. 202-203
- 17 *Liberals and Communitarians*, p.203; see also Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp.202-203.
- 18 "Moral Agency, Commitment, and Impartiality," in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Vol. 13, No.1, Winter 1996, p. 3.
- 19 *Liberals and Communitarians*, p. 19; *After Virtue*, pp.195 ff., 250 ff.
- 20 *Political Liberalism*, p.201.
- 21 *After Virtue*, p.220
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.221.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.222.
- 24 *Liberals and Communitarians*, p.16.
- 25 *After Virtue*, p.192.
- 26 See ref. no. 21 supra.
- 27 See ref. no. 20 supra.