

# In Defense of Liberal-Pluralism



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by

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Chidella Upendra,  
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*Dedicated to my parents*

and

*To the great minds of history*



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## PREFACE

Interpersonal context constitutes several types of conflicts and disagreements over what is right and wrong. It denotes tensions between the moral principle point of view and the individual or the personal point of view. The central problem of moral philosophy is whether we can have a rational resolution of any conflict or disagreement. Liberal moral philosophers of the Kantian and Neo-Kantian moral traditions claim that all our conflicts and disagreements are rationally resolvable through preference to universal principles, agent-neutral values and proceduralism, driven by the ideal of moral consensus that all rational-reasonable agents ideally agree, after all things considered. These are mere simplistic assumptions that make moral reasoning mere convenient to suit the axiomatic moral first principles for the purpose moral explanation. Dealing issues of morality, whether simpler or hard cases, does not explain moral disagreement as justifiable in one way or the other. On the contrary, we claim that rational resolution does not pertain to all interpersonal conflicts. The main emphasis is that in a complex social framework, conflicts and disagreements are implicit due to a certain role of irreducible plural claims; yet a better state-of-affairs can be achieved with a renewed preference to moral pluralism. The thesis develops an argument for liberal-pluralism, which claims that reason and morality are not to be determined by unification; by the inevitability of difference. This frees morality from the clutches of necessary convergence that most liberal philosophers prefer to maintain as implicit in moral understanding. However, morality and rationality are to be treated as 'domain-specific' though some kinds of moral conflicts satisfy the resolvability criteria. Nevertheless, they possess different degrees of resolvability. We cannot resolve interpersonal moral conflicts by using unconditional and higher-order principles that have singular meanings. Liberal-pluralism is neither relativism nor anti-thetical to morality. The complex nature of conflicts compels us to gamble between the possibilities of overlapping agreement and incommensurable disagreements. Liberal-pluralism, conceptualized here, centers around five important components of moral deliberation and intersubjective communication: reciprocity, fairness, cooperation, reasonableness and tolerance. This is what we owe to each other in a just society. Public Justification and reasonable reason should be guided by the principle of



accommodation of values while considering the fact of pluralism. Counting on the merits of moral imagination, we claim that reasonable agreement is possible through moral deliberation and persuasion. Due to this, minimal objectivity prevails without recourse to higher-order abstraction of impartial values. This assumption makes the difference between reasonable pluralism of the justificatory liberalism from substantial pluralism. The latter maintains that the nature of moral rightness and wrongness are essentially plural due to the capability of diverse thinking of the autonomous agents. But, autonomy of this kind does not violate the common good as every individual possesses autonomy as well as social agency. Moral bargain needs to have a 'recognition rule' permitting both overlapping opinions and differing opinions on manifold issues of existence. Emergence of new conflicts may be taken as a persistent condition. We ought to recognize the fact that most of the moral questions are open-ended despite of having fixed points. Hence, unlike the foundational framework of liberal philosophy, we claim that liberal-pluralism treats conflicts as neither totally resolvable using rational methods nor absolutely irresolvable. This is the determining factor of human condition.

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C. Upendra

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The important aspects of collective life are rights, equality and justice and the interpersonal conflicts on the issues related to them. Some of the issues of conflict are goals and preferences, reasons for choices, means-ends relationship, values, individual and collective reasoning, moral right and moral wrong, right and good, and beliefs. These issues are central to liberal-moral and political philosophy. The two main concerns of moral and political philosophers are how reasonable are individuals in making their choices and preferences for their *life-projects* and how reasonable are individuals in making their respective *value-claims*. We state that interpersonal conflicts are principally disagreements of rationalized general principles of right and wrong. In such situations, many moral philosophers have opined that judgment and justification have to be carried out methodically to arrive at rational resolution of the conflicts among the agents. Here, we would like to state that conflict involves the issues of basic liberties and substantive freedoms.

In the current study, we have mentioned this distinction as very important. This is feasible because it makes an initial categorization of issues for the convenience of discussing the nature and issue of conflicts broadly. In the liberal philosophical framework, in general, life-project is considered to have goals, desires, interests and preferences. Interpersonal conflicts are explained with respect to the disagreements on several issues that fall in the above categories. In the current study, we have added *value-claim*, which would mean that different moral rational agents will hold different point of views regarding various issues. *Value-claim* is an appropriate concept here as individuals make choices and justify these choices as right ones. These choices bear a resemblance to individuals' valuing some in place of some other. These value-claims also form the basis for treating one preference as appropriate from the rational-moral point of view, than the other.

Before advancing further to discuss the core problems, we need to make it

clear that conflict is taken to be an essential condition. There are several reasons why *conflict* becomes unavoidable. When we talk about fulfillment of the life-projects, every individual is granted with autonomy to realize the goals to the maximum possible extent. Conflicts occur because in any context there is more than one person involved in the fulfillment of life-projects. The current study presupposes interpersonal context or the *multi-agent framework* that can be used interchangeably. The reason for an emphasis on the notion of *interpersonal* is that we can reflect on the limitations of generalization and universalization in our moral judgments. The multi-agent framework does not ground itself on the fact that what is right for one is a right principle for all in all the cases. This does not mean that the interpersonal as such is missing in the theories of liberal rights and morality. A reflection on the point would enable us to understand three important things: the manner in which life-projects are fulfilled, the nature of collective life, and the nature of conflicts and disagreements.

Treating conflict as essential at the fundamental level, liberal philosophers have argued that the goals, preferences and values are to be tied to the choices, i.e., choices that count from the *rational* point of view as morally and reasonably justifiable. These right choices are intended to be impartial from everyone's point of view. The liberal philosophers' idea is that an agent's preference and values should not only be the ultimate one but also need to be justified by ultimate moral principles. This is the central idea within Kantian and Neo-Kantian moral frameworks. For, both of these moral frameworks, *judgments* and *justification* are to the extent vital that these philosophers would say that all choices and claims that are not justified are unreasonable and irrational. These would be called as moral conflicts and are interpersonal in nature. These conflicts are different from the single-agent moral dilemmas. The question is whether one is fair in wronging others in terms of moral worth.

Judgmentalism and justification too do not escape from contradictions. Kantians would argue that the application of categorical imperative would enable both moral deliberation and moral consensus.<sup>1</sup> Moral understanding, moral imagination, and moral reasoning bring objectivity to rightness and

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Herman, "Morality and the Everyday Life," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 74.2(November 2000): 29-45. Also see her, "On the Value of Acting from the Matters of Duty," *The Philosophical Review*, 90.3(Jul 1981): 359-382. Paul Guyer, "The Value of Agency," *Ethics*, 106.2(January 1993): 404.423.

wrongness of actions and value-claims. Moral universalism would prefer to have a uniform sense of morality rather than a fragmented one. The underlying idea of Kantian morality is that all rational agents agree on the authority of moral principles. The problem in the Kantian framework is not of the conceptual grounding, but the bases of these grounding. Moral agents are to be backed by the unconditional and supreme moral principles. The apprehension is that consensus approach to moral understanding may not help us in recognizing the importance of moral differences. The problem is how to apply rational principles to specific situations that are encountered in our daily experiences. This is where moral imagination and moral judgment are at loggerheads.<sup>2</sup>

The significant point in this context is the idea of ‘moral principles that all moral agents agree’ too cannot escape from diverse circumstances of moral disagreement. It means that what is right and wrong constitute difference of opinion by the moral agents. By moral differences, we mean that agents have different opinion about a particular action or moral worth. At the same time, two different moral agents can have different yet morally justifiable positions of right and wrong. When the applicability of moral principles get extended to multi-agent frameworks, like discourse processes, then agreement on general moral principles is difficult and challenging to the individuals themselves. Answers to questions such as what is a good life, how should we live with each other, and how should morality guide our actions do not reside in mere absolute standards. The hard view of the Universalists is that the absolute moral standards have the potential to consider *a priori* the *fact of pluralism*. If absolute moral principles have such a potential, then plurality should be the central concern of moral philosophers. Question such as “what is moral and rational” is not answered by a single idea. The assumption we make here is that morality has to be understood with respect to *multiple* rationalities.

Here the question that may arise is: Are we making pluralism a necessary principle? We are not making pluralism as a necessary principle as universality in the case of moral foundationalism. We are only making it an essential condition of a complex interpersonal framework. Pluralism is a genuine interpersonal condition here. Our conception of pluralism tries to avoid conflict and disagreement for the sake of disagreeing with each other. In this way, one can have a possible relief from arbitrary

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Johnson, “Imagination in Moral Judgment,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 46.2 (December 1985): 265-280.

differences. The advantage of not making pluralism a necessary condition is that there is no escape from reasonable agreement whenever it is possible among the moral agents. The point is whether we can bring a substantial congruency between self-interest and morality.<sup>3</sup>

Moral judgment is not an easy affair if right and wrong are applicable overwhelmingly to all the issues of life. Interpersonal issues are of various kinds that offer various types of conflicts. In such cases, it is even more difficult to simplify the complex moral understanding. What moral universalists do is simplify the deeper conflicts for the explanatory convenience of the superiority of the rational account of morality. Critics of this position may point out that in any social framework, commensurable conflicts always outweighs the number of incommensurable *tragic*<sup>4</sup> conflicts. But, the issue is not of the numbers only. Moral conflicts also refer to differences over any issue of interpersonal concern. Multiple rationalities would convey is that there is no necessary condition that all should have one point of view on every issue of moral deliberation.

There is a serious problem in claiming that different moral agents can have different moral viewpoints over any issues of conflicts. The urge in this regard is to avoid the feared *loss* of morality and its *foundational* status. The main concern of all the moral philosophers is that all our claims and actions should have potential to be evaluative. The fear is that if pluralism is made a fundamental principle, then moral evaluation and judgmentalism are affected drastically. Hence, all our value-claims are to be kept within the range of evaluative possibility. This evaluative possibility places the primacy of the rational-moral principle over the subjective claims thus yielding moral objectivity. Moreover, pluralism is treated as offering *weak* subjectivity. Much of the universalists confuse pluralism to be relativism. We will come to this point later in the chapter.

Moral judgment is a more serious affair because in some way or the other

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<sup>3</sup> F. M. Kamm presents the effort made by Scheffler in having a hope of certain congruency between self-interest and morality. See his, "Rationality and Morality," *Nous*, 29.4(December 1995): 544-555 [Critical Study of *Human Morality* by Samuel Scheffler]

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Dworkin uses this word while arguing that Isaiah Berlin is wrong in assuming that there are more number of tragic conflicts in the society. See Avery Plaw, "Why Monist Critiques Feed Value Pluralism: Ronald Dworkin's critique of Isaiah Berlin," *Social Theory and Practice*, 30.1 (January 2004): 105.126.

certain reasons and claims of the agents could be arbitrarily resulting in a conflict. For the moral foundationalists, it happens by virtue of the adherence to the non-moral principles. For them, there are certain demands of morality that all rational-moral agents ought to fulfill, to realize reciprocity, fairness and cooperation. We acknowledge that there is a conflict between personal point of view and the principle point of view. At the moral level, foundationalists have no second thought of giving priority to the personal point of view. It is like arguing that after reflection through freedom and rational agency, categorical imperative prevails over the hypothetical imperative. At the interpersonal level, it can be seen as the conflict between the liberty principle and the democratic principle (between the personal point of view and the general point of view).<sup>5</sup>

If conflicts are to be resolved, then morality and rational resolvability should have a definite role. The question arises as to how should we treat morality as all-pervasive in the sense of overriding in nature or does morality has limits too?<sup>6</sup> Moral foundationalists would prefer the all-pervasive sense of morality whereas pluralists would emphasize on what we call *realms of morality*. The former emphasizes on the unity of morality while pluralists permit certain partial fragmented moral systems that constitute a moral theory. These two moral points of view are like arguing for living with harmony and living with differences. The current work emphasizes on the point that social frameworks will not be too harmonious and at the same time will not be infinitely fragmented.

It is true that the Kantian morality generates effective sense of moral deliberation. The question then would be what should be the basis of moral reasoning and moral judgment? Foundationalists or universalists would say that interpersonal morality needs what is general and acceptable to all. Autonomy functions in the way that individual and collective reasoning should overlap at some point of time. This point of convergence is indicative of the Archimedean point<sup>7</sup> for all the moral claims.

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<sup>5</sup> Peter De Maueffe, "Contractualism, Liberty and Democracy," *Ethics*, 104.4(July 1994):764-783.

<sup>6</sup> baselineskip10ptFor instance see Samuel Scheffler, "Morality's Demands and Their Limits," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 83.10 (Oct 1986):531-537.

<sup>7</sup> The original position is Rawls's Archimedean Point, the fulcrum he uses to obtain critical leverage. See John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 230-232. Kai Nielsen, while discussing about ethical subjectivism puts forth a question, "Is it the case that we should accept the most perspicuous formulation of ethical subjectivism as the best sustained claim about

Universalists maintain that the value of agency lies in the fact that a moral agent puts on several constraints on himself/herself that prevent her/him from indulging the immoral and non-rational considerations. In this sense, morality has thumb rules for individuals as well as for the society. The Kantian moral philosophers claim that what is rational for an individual is rational for a collective due to reason and universalization.

The fundamental assumption of the Kantian morality is that if there is no conflict at the basic level, then there will be none at the deeper-level. The scope of moral disagreement is either totally wiped out from the Kantian moral framework or total resolution of the conflicts is the belief of the foundationalist moral philosophers. The problem with such an understanding of morality is that it does not really capture the essence of diverse nature of life. We are placing diversity as one of the important determinants of moral understanding because different persons understand life processes differently. All these comprehensions are not the result of everyone's adherence to ultimate principles only. Similarly, we do not really pursue only ultimate goals, but goals that drive our everyday life as the basic values are not the only ultimate values. Human telos are to be understood in this sense totally *a priori*.

The most important aspect in moral understanding is why do agents have different opinions over the simple and profound questions such as- what is moral? What is objectively moral? Why should we have rational agreement? Understanding human life is a complex process and in that social life is far more complex in itself. It is complex because different persons' perception of right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, permissible and impermissible is different. In that persons have *irreducible* preferences and values towards various aspects of life. These preferences would not be *agent-neutral* preferences for the reason that agents are more concerned about the *right* choices as well as ultimate ends. Rather, our preferences and values towards life are more *agent-relative* or *agent-based* as we chose them to be our goals. We are critical of the notion that only impartial, ultimate, and higher-order interests have the potential to become moral judgments.

What are moral conflicts and moral disagreements? Moral conflicts are

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the formulation of morality such that we should believe that efforts such as Rawls's or Gert's to achieve an Archimedean point in morality are fundamentally misguided?" See his discussion paper, "Ethical Subjectivism Again," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 37.1 (September 1976): 123-124.



those situations where moral agents cannot reach objective agreement over right and wrong. Most of the value-conflicts and conflicts of judgments come under this category. These conflicts are indications of moral disagreements that are basic to many issues related to rights, equality and justice. These are to be seen different from single-agent moral dilemmas. In the case of dilemmas can be resolved in some way or the other through the prescriptive rational moral principles. A conflict, unlike a dilemma, can be due to incommensurability and incompatibility in our value preferences. But in the case of issues of interpersonal concern, disagreement has an equal possibility to that of agreement. It is in a way denial of overriding objectivity of morality.<sup>8</sup> All moral disagreements are part of these moral conflicts.

Moral conflict is more than a dilemma here because most of the times different people hold different point of views over a particular issue. We cannot even say that they have equal compelling force in the true sense as they are invoked from different (moral) perspectives. There is no standard point to measure all these moral perspectives. This is called as *moral incommensurability*. Moral disagreements are explained by making a reference to moral incommensurabilities of several kinds. Universalists persistently endeavor to ground morality in commensurable values as much as possible. Pluralists and relativists talk about disagreement with an emphasis on incommensurabilities. Another important question to be discussed here is that whether incommensurabilities are not reconcilable even after intense deliberation? The idea behind raising such a question is that moral pluralism is easily acceptable if one follows three important ideals: reciprocity, fairness and cooperation.

One of the advantages in the Kantian framework is that moral judgments are accounted from moral principles. Priority of principle is taken to be emphatically *a priori*. We do not deny that moral deliberation is possible in the Kantian morality. We are more concerned here with morality and its demands. Kantian morality with its demands turns out to be an *extreme* principle in itself. The question that remains as a puzzle in the universalistic framework is: does an absolute moral principle really serves various complexities that agents encounter in making moral decisions?

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<sup>8</sup> William Tolhurst, "The Argument from Moral Disagreement," *Ethics*, 97.3(April 1987):610-621. S. I. Benn, "Persons and Values: Reasons in Conflict and Moral Disagreement," *Ethics*, 95.1(October 1984):20-37. David O. Brink, "A Puzzle about the Rational Authority of Morality," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 6 (1992):1-26.

Kantian morality resides in the domain of true moral principles. When we take the interpersonal conflicts into account, we may not be able to relate to Kantian morality in a very direct sense. In saying that, we state that it may not be reasonable to place Kantian unconditional true moral principles in the non-ultimate domain for treating several kinds of conflicts. Moral disagreement refers to two more important concepts: *moral right* and *moral difference*. In the normal sense, one can say a moral right is one that gives a moral agent the right to have a different point of view from other moral agents. From this we can say that, moral conflicts are of two kinds. As already mentioned, one is between that the personal point of view and the principle point of view. And the other is amongst the moral agents themselves. Moral right does not mean that moral difference is brought for the sake of difference. Instead, moral difference is to be treated as a moral fact.

The notion of moral right may seem troublesome though it is implicit that an agent has a right to form an opinion on particular aspect of life.<sup>9</sup> Instead of stating moral right, we can call it moral difference that would mean that every agent can equally hold a different yet right reason, beliefs and actions - *equivocation*. The fundamental idea of moral equality is that *convergence* principle is not a necessary condition. It means that there are issues and contexts where moral unanimity is not possible even when negation of irrational moral claims takes place. Moral difference highlights heterogeneity as the main principle of a complex society. This point will be defended in the current study. We will argue that though *moral imagination*, *moral reasoning*, and *moral understanding* are more important, it does not take away one's right to differ with the other. The issue to be addressed is whether the differences are drastic or marginal in nature.

Besides, the common problem to both foundationalist liberals and the pluralist liberals is the differentiation between a reasonable and an unreasonable difference. For the sake of deliberative outcome amid conflicts, we admit that some mechanism of distinction should be internal to a moral framework. But is this distinction brought out by an Archimedean point that acts as a common standard to measure the differences? It does not except in the cases of basic values and basic interests. The *irreducibility* explained above not only explains that values

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<sup>9</sup> Richard B. Brandt, "The Concept of a Moral Right and its Function," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 80.1(January 1983):29-45.

are incommensurable but also to a certain extent incompatible. Both epistemic as well as foundational liberals make the distinction easier, i.e., an agent has valid moral claims when those claims are judged right or wrong from the sense of universal morality. The distinction is not so clear in the case of pluralism.

If universal morality has the potential to take care of the pluralities, then why we cannot represent moral theory as basically plural is an important question. There is a difficulty in such thinking. Morality is treated as an independent autonomous domain from which one sees what is right and what is wrong. The question that would arise is how we can see the social domain from an independent or a neutral perspective (sometimes like an ideal observer). For this, we have to understand the relationship between a moral system as a set of principles and individuals having various points of views. Liberal moral philosophy calls for a unitary system of autonomous morality applicable to all contexts of moral choice or moral decision.

In resolving moral conflicts, some liberal philosophers have emphasized on the fact that we are inevitably driven by the independent body of moral knowledge. For instance, Barbara Herman defends that the Kantian ethics is the standard model of an impartial ethical system.<sup>10</sup> What we would like to argue is that morality is to be made somewhat flexible to avoid the necessitated self-evident nature of foundationalism. This may help us in the deeper understanding of moral problems in the interpersonal context. The intention is that if one can capture the reasons for moral disagreement, one could see the possibilities of resolution and the manner of application of autonomous moral principles. The recognition needed is to the complex situations of moral choices. Our approach to pluralism here is not to claim, as Barbara Herman fears, that Kantian moral theory omits something that any other moral theory cannot afford to omit.<sup>11</sup> We are also not arguing for a partial account of ethics, but would emphasize on the aspect that rationality and reasonableness have *substantial* plural meanings.

Moral imagination and moral requirements expect agents to be reasonable and fair in their reasons, values and claims. It is right that the Neo-Kantian conception of *reasonableness* is not as formal as that of Kantian morality. What is the difference in the conceptions of liberalism's reasonable

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara Harman, "Agency, Attachment and Difference," *Ethics*, 101(July 1991): 775-797.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 775.

pluralism and our notion of *substantial pluralism*? The former is concerned about the justice as fairness defined by the political conception of justice and overlapping nature of the comprehensive doctrines. It is explained as a diversity of incompatible but reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Any kind of disagreement here is the disagreement among reasonable persons.<sup>12</sup> What it excludes is important for us in proceeding further. The exclusion is seen in the burdens of judgment where one is supposed to avoid non-overlapping values. The difference that substantial pluralism maintains is that the reasonable and cooperating nature of the persons need not lead to overlapping of the comprehensive doctrines. This is what could be said about the complex interpersonal framework. Extending the argument from moral pluralism, reasonableness should rather emphasize upon the recognition of differences so that one can create spaces for disagreeing agents too. We have to look into the aspect whether the burdens of judgment is more than unnecessary<sup>13</sup> or it is a method of avoiding conflicts thus making things too simpler, or is it epistemic abstinence?<sup>14</sup>

Life is so complex that we cannot once for all fix the role of rational principles and partial opinions. For instance, we say that a teacher should impart education amongst the children impartially. On the other hand, these same children are permitted to have a subjective understanding of life, nevertheless of some moral kind. This is just a simple, among manifold complex dilemmas. One has to reflect on the aspect that whether we can put forth a manual for the rational conduct of all rational moral agents.<sup>15</sup> We do not deny that impartiality is a preferred principle but not in every issue of life. What we would like to state is that when every individual is bestowed a moral right to form a life-project; we have to

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<sup>12</sup> Leif Wenar, "Political Liberalism: An Internal Critique," *Ethics*, 106.1(October 1995): 33-62 at 35. Also see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 55

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43. Leif also raises three significant questions in this regard: One, isn't it disappointing that human reason under free institutions divides people from each other by multiplying mutually exclusive comprehensive doctrines? Second, isn't it particularly wrenching since it becomes very likely that those on all sides of the dispute hold comprehensive doctrines that are substantially false? And third, Could one not reasonably see modern history as the diversification of error and illusion, or at least as the intensification of tragic conflicts or values? *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Raz, "Facing Diversity: The Case for Epistemic Abstinence," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 19.1(Winter 1990): 3-46.

<sup>15</sup> Nomy Arpaly, "On Acting Rationally Against One's Own Judgment," *Ethics*, 110.3(April 2000): 488-513.

permit *agent-relative* considerations accordingly.

What we would like to emphasize is that one need not confine moral understanding to have a clear cut answer for every moral question. Similarly, agents need not necessarily differ from each other in each and every case of deliberation. The diverse conditions of life involve several understandings of life-situations which can be called *worldviews*. These different worldviews indicate different beliefs that could be from a single moral theory. For this diverse understanding, autonomous reason is a better pre-requisite apart from different persons in different cultures. These formations of worldviews are guided by both common morality and common good.

Liberal moral philosophy ignores another dimension of interpersonal conflicts. Moral disagreement on the *prima facie* appears as if agents' differences are over profound issues of social life. It is not the case. Disagreement can appear over issues of daily concern which are also governed by moral principles. The question: How are these ultimate moral principles and issues of daily life are connected is not only applicable to moral universalists but also to the pluralists and the cultural relativists.

From this uncertainty, one has to address the question as to where rests the crucial problem of moral disagreement. A critical reflection would certainly show us two reasons: approaches to the resolution of conflicts and the very nature of understanding the interpersonal social framework. These two aspects apply to all the perspectives in moral and political philosophy. The reason is there are certain paradoxes and the current study takes into account these moral paradoxes. One, morality and rationality are certainly action-guiding, but all agents need not have the same value and belief system. Universalization is not an overriding principle. Judgments are not made keeping in view the all-pervasive sense of morality. Two, general and normative principles do possess the potential to resolve the conflicting situations. Yet, general point of view can be different from the personal point of view under the guise of public and private morality. Three, common morality is very much appealing, but the autonomous nature of persons make them differ in their understanding the facts of life due to diverse conditions. Fourth, moral conflicts are to be resolved. Yet rational resolvability is not applicable to most of the conflicts due to incommensurability of values.

Kantian morality also has another important critique. Communitarians

understand morality through the notions of common good and shared meanings of life. They are critical to the method of rational justification. Rather virtue makes us opt for shared meanings of life as human life is teleological, i.e., ends are prior to the self. The consequent argument of this is that not reasons but values are shared by the individuals. It is worth addressing that how *personhood* and *agency* of liberalism properly accounts for reciprocity, cooperation, fairness and reasonableness. The point of dispute between the communitarians and the liberals are the most prominent among them. What is more important to understand moral deliberation? Is it the moral development aspect of a person or the choice aspect of an already attributed rational agent? The difference between the liberals and the communitarians is not only of deontology and teleology but also on the nature of justification itself. For instance, communitarians would argue that we cannot explain everything through rational justification. The problem is to view morality as imperative.<sup>16</sup>

Critics of Kantian morality emphasize on the understanding of morality through character rather than through choice. There are two categories here: choice morality *versus* character morality and thin morality *versus* thick morality. Even virtue theories would emphasize on the importance of character morality. For instance, John Kekes argues that Kantian morality is problematic because it places choice as foundation for morality. Kekes's argument is that to make right choices one should have a moral character.<sup>17</sup> It is fine that moral character is important to make right choices. But there is no way possible that a moral-rational agent can free herself/himself from making choices. Social contract liberalism cannot be negated on the pretext of character-morality. When we talk about preferences, values, actions and claims, we need to bring choice into the moral framework. In that sense, all Kantian rational agents are self-evidently moral in nature. The critical point is that in the virtue framework of understanding the interpersonal, critics of Kantianism assume that moral character can absorb the very differences amongst individuals. But this is not the case. We cannot make it a necessary statement that shared or common good does not indulge in the convergence of value-claims.

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<sup>16</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "Imperatives, Reasons for Actions and Morals," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 62.19(Oct 1985):513-524. See also his "Moral Arguments and Social Contexts," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 80.10(October 1983):590-591. Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> John Kekes, "On 'Ought Implies Can': Two Kinds of Morality". *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 34, no. 137 (1984): 459-467.

The problem is not whether character morality prevails over choice morality and *vice versa*. The important aspect is how we should lay the ground for reciprocity, fairness, cooperation and reasonableness. Whatever communitarians claim to be important can be stated to have been central to the Kantian morality except the fuzziness about the context and community. Communitarians, in fact, do not address several serious dilemmas of interpersonal life. What we claim is that understanding social framework and interpersonal moral conflicts is not restricted to the *narrative* aspect of historical conditions. There are many conflicts for which we need to refer to the context but need not lay too much primacy on historicity.

In critiquing rational justification, critics a deeper understanding of interpersonal is different from the rational understanding. They would counter the above discussion by stating that such morality is empty and impoverished. Their argument would be that one should have a very deep understanding of the aspects of good and other virtues.<sup>18</sup> The underlying intention may be that a deeper understanding than rational understanding influences the human behavior. It is difficult to say which is better in this regard. On the other hand, thin morality attributed to moral foundationalism is more worried about the aspects of rightness and wrongness. For them, morality is the subject matter of evaluation and justification. Hence, choice is immanent to our beliefs, values, choices and preferences.<sup>19</sup> The current study also concentrates on the aspect of balancing rational understanding and deeper understanding, as reason and value are vital to the resolution of various kinds of moral conflicts.

Another point of dispute is the recognition of the interests of others. Both the theorists of good and society argue that individual is subsumed into the social. Rights, equality and justice are meaningful only in collective representation. For the collectivists, priority to autonomy is violating both the interests of others and that of society at large. The current study also focuses on the aspect that a moral theory can prioritize autonomy with respect to rights, equality and justice. It is even more important in the case of choice and decision. For instance, Kant was right in arguing that a rational-moral agent should make autonomous moral decision without

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<sup>18</sup> Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> This point refers to traditional Kantianism and contemporary defenders of Kant. It is considered that the modern moral ethical theories are schizophrenic to rightness and wrongness.

external coercion. The thing that is unreasonable in his idea is the universalization principle of rationality and reason. Nevertheless, autonomy does not violate the common good.

Autonomy is not to be taken in the libertarian sense or in the sense of mere self-interest. We have been emphasizing on the aspect of moral difference. For that very notion of moral difference, we need autonomy to take personal decisions without violation of the sense of morality. Autonomy has got four principal characters that make it important. They are constitutive agency, normative significance, source of values and source of obligations.<sup>20</sup> We propose to argue in the following chapters that a rational-moral agent is free enough to make moral choices, and choose a specific *agent-relative* life-project of her/his own and has the freedom to form a particular belief, value, or an opinion about something. This, we believe, is a very important aspect for understanding pluralism. Besides the choice of life-project, agent-relativity can also be attributed to valuing something that could be constituted in that particular life-project.

Autonomy has an equal importance in both the foundationalistic frameworks and the moral pluralistic frameworks. This is linked to our position on the cultural pluralism. We argue for pluralism from the individual point of view. In other words, moral difference has an ontological basis for the very reason that autonomous individuals are bestowed with autonomous thinking. These autonomous individuals retain the virtue of diverse thinking. These individuals can differ from each other due to this freedom of thinking. Pluralism is interested in this aspect of *internal pluralism*, where as *external pluralism* is more or less taken as an obvious given condition. By internal pluralism, we mean to define pluralism as multiplicity not just because of the factors like culture, society, religion etc., but because of the distinctness of persons. The idea of multiple rationalities explained earlier also is bound by this understanding. I do not differ with you just because you belong to different culture, group, or association. Multiple rationalities could be multiple meanings of what is moral and rational. The study raises a question: How can an autonomous individual violate the social agency? If s/he violates social agency, then he can also be morally wrong barring the rare instances where one individual has proven right from the rest of the society.

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<sup>20</sup> Henry S. Richardson, "Autonomy's Many Normative Presuppositions," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 38.3(July 2001): 287-304.



The shared meanings of life still leave several questions unanswered in terms of reciprocity, fairness, cooperation and reasonableness. With respect to moral universalism, we will argue that there is a lot of difficulty in admitting that rational resolution is possible in all cases through moral imaginative reasoning and also moral *persuasiveness*. Shared reasons do not mean that our reasons and values are one and the same. Such extreme overlap is out of question. Yet, priority of right over the good is very relevant.<sup>21</sup> It does not violate the good of every individual. Similarly, common good does not mean that an agent admits everything of that tradition. There are many liberal philosophers who argued that individual autonomy does not prove contrary to social good. In this sense, good may not be violated once a choice-morality and priority of right are accompanied by *agent-relative* life-projects. Reason can still be made to work in the context of project-dependent desires. Hence in the context of common good also, one may have to give reason and justification for why s/he differs from others. Sharedness may not contribute much in this regard. By stating that shared reasons and shared meanings are restrictive in their own sense, neither we are negating the relevance of objective reason nor are we undermining the value of interpersonal relationships. Both of them are wrong in taking for granted that their respective philosophical perspectives would resolve the conflicts completely.

*Deep individualism* is not the source of conflict, nor does it violate the interests of others, nor is it to be made synonymous with methodological individualism. By deep individualism we mean that a person has every right to recede unto herself/himself whenever s/he desires to do so.<sup>22</sup> If one differs from the other in reason or shared understanding, then where does the necessity arise for the need to recognize and reciprocate each other's value-claims? How do we assess whether individuals are reasonable and fair? For moral objectivists, to be moral is to be reasonable and fair.<sup>23</sup> The idea is that reason presupposes equality and justice as ideals to be pursued for their own sake. While arguing for moral equality, moral objectivists would argue, is not to validate or justify any value-claim in the name of equality and justice. It is rightly argued by them that every claim cannot be justified. On the other hand, there is no explanation for the unavoidable

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel Freeman, "Reason and Agreement in Social Contract Views," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 19.2(Spring 1990): 122-157.

<sup>22</sup> See Maeve Cooke, "A Space for One's Own Autonomy, Privacy, Liberty," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 26.1(1999): 23-53.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Railton, "Some Questions About the Justification of Morality," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 6(1992): 27-53.

*moral loss* and *deliberative loss* involved in the idea of moral judgments. By moral loss, we mean that confining morality to certain *self-evident* moral principles will result in the negation of certain moral claims. We will invoke a question upon ourselves: Does it mean that autonomous moral principles are less capable of whatever is moral in agents' claims? It is not easy to answer such a complex question.

We need to treat moral questions as mostly open-ended because morality is plural in nature. Three important questions would follow from such a claim: But why should open-endedness of moral questions affect the moral agreement at some fixed points of moral deliberation? How should we make moral decisions in the process of resolution of moral dilemmas? How do we fix the ethical requirements of human nature? These three questions are in themselves puzzling in the sense that they challenge the basic positions of pluralism. Philosophers have divided the issues of life as consistent and inconsistent to the act of judgments. It is argued that there are certain issues to which one cannot attribute truth values. In a sense, we have taken this into account for pluralism by introducing the values of issues into *domains of conflict*, *types of conflicts*, *realms of morality* and *degrees of resolvability*. All these notions take into account the puzzling and troubling questions of equality and justice. Questions that pertain to equality, justice and morality are not as easy as the liberal moral philosophers thought it to be.

By *domains of conflicts*, we mean that interpersonal context is divided into different domains of human activity. These different domains pose different *types of conflicts* that vary in the *degrees* of conflicts. This categorization is important because all conflicts are not to be treated on a similar domain. There is a simple disagreement that is easily resolvable and a conflict that may be very difficult to resolve or sometimes irresolvable. The varying nature of conflict resolution is because of the *irreducible* preferences and values of the rational moral agents. Arguing in domains is important to avoid the rigid unity of principle of Kantian and Neo-Kantian morality. In treating conflicts in several domains differently, we also make morality to be domain-specific. By domain specific sense of morality, we state that moral right or moral wrong are specific to domains of deliberation and are not *merely* guided by unconditional moral principles. Whereas realms of morality mean that the way we treat a moral principle in domain may not be similarly treated in other domains.

In this regard, we would like to make a clarification with respect to the use

of the concept of a *domain*. Neera Badhwar has used the notion of domain in her argument of *limited unity of virtue* granting that a person may be wise and virtuous in some domains without being virtuous in others. She invokes such an argument in response to the unity of practical wisdom that could be associated with Aristotle. As her thesis is about the limited unity of virtues, we are concerned with the limited or better minimal unity of morality. It too like the former would argue that morality is domain specific, that it is not to be understood as an all-pervasive principle. Neera Badhwar defines a domain as an area of practical concern about some aspect of human good.<sup>24</sup> This definition is near to our understanding of a domain. Several aspects of life create several domains of thought and action that may not be reasonable to overlap with each other. Badhwar is right in arguing that a slight separation of our normative concerns of practical wisdom is reasonable.

In arguing for pluralism, in the coming chapters, we follow that *minimal universality* is possible. In saying this we take into account the concerns of character-morality of the virtue tradition and the choice morality of the choice tradition. For instance, to lead a good life one should be a good person. To do *right* things, one needs to be moral. In both the cases one needs to have hold of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom needs the understanding of others' point of view. But the concern is whether moral persuasion as part of understanding others would yield the desired reasonable outcomes or not. Domains are important because we can morally wrong a person with respect to an issue or a domain, but not in the holistic sense.

If there is a possibility of resolution of the incommensurable moral conflicts, then we should have certain moral standards. But taken the relevant information or moral facts, one cannot reach objectivity in all issues of conflict. David Copp argues that it is important to take seriously the idea of morality as a system of standards and to eschew the idea of that moral codes and standards are to be justified in the guise of empirical theories.<sup>25</sup> The issue that matters is what amount of relative rightness one can take into account if one is considering social rationality from the collective point of view. How should a moral skeptic pose the question other than merely being skeptical to the relevance of every moral theory? Questions like these direct our attention to the understanding of a moral

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<sup>24</sup> Neera Badhwar, "The Limited Unity of Virtue," *Nous*, 30.3(1996): 306-329.

<sup>25</sup> David Copp, "Explanation and Justification in Ethics," *Ethics*, 100.2(January 1990): 237-258 at 258.

discourse. Moral Universalists may fear that the idea of moral impartiality is at stake if one argues that rational resolvability does not pertain to all issues of interpersonal concern. The fear is that morality loses its normative spirit.

Till now we have been discussing that moral objectivity is not to be treated as overarching principle or unconditionally applicable to judge our preferences, actions, beliefs and claims. It is being skeptical to the rational account of morality. Does arguing for moral pluralism take the debate to the other extreme, i.e., moral relativism that objects any kind of moral objectivity and rational resolvability? In this aspect, the current study claims and further substantiates that the extremes are difficult positions in themselves. On one extreme, reason and morality are taken to the level of unification in the name of higher-abstraction and on the other; reason and morality are made to be relative to every other thing. One talks about the convergence as the only alternative, and the other talks about difference and strict incommensurability frustrating every form of reconciliation between the conflicting parties. Moral pluralism, on the contrary, admits neither moral unification nor moral fragmentation *per se*.

The contemporary liberal philosophers like Nagel, Scanlon, Rawls and Habermas have advanced the arguments to a more refined level. Like most of the Kantians, they too have argued that the preferences, values and choices are to be determined by the recognition of higher-order and lower-order interests. One significant development in the contemporary Kantian philosophers is that they have recognized that *irreducible pluralism* or the *fact of pluralism* as an inevitable condition. Similar to moral judgmentalism, these philosophers have put forth the idea of *reasonable justification*, which means that reasonable agreement is the outcome of specific type of interpersonal deliberation that carries out the justification of reasons and value-claims in the deliberative framework. But the important aspects that are carried forward from the Kantian tradition are uniform morality and objective agreement. These contemporary liberal philosophers can be called Neo-Kantians or New-liberals. They have taken into account the importance of desires, preferences, beliefs and value. The central problem of the Neo-Kantians or the New-liberals is drawing the basis for reasonable justification. Justification is done through the public use of reason, thus becoming public justification.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For most of the contemporary Kantians like Rawls, Nagel, Scanlon, Habermas, Kenneth Baynes, Korsgaard etc., reason is public and is what we owe to each other to a maximum extent. The notion of public reason is derived from Kant's practical

Interpersonal or public justification method more or less stands on one principle observation: it assumes that most of our conflicts are the tensions between personal and impersonal preferences and values. If we go further and observe, it is also a conflict between the personal point of view and the rationalized point of view. Similar to that of the traditional Kantian methodology Neo-Kantians believe in moral impartial principles that are of a higher-order. These principles, for them, have the power to resolve the deeper conflicts also. Rational resolution of the conflicts is possible through impartial morality and interpersonal neutrality. In this framework, persons are reasonable if and only if they come to an objective agreement, in line with the unifying sense of morality. At the level of making preferences and values, one should make a preference that has interpersonal value. The contemporary Kantians would admit the point that *moral impartiality* would lead to objective reasonable agreement. Whenever there are moral conflicts, impartial and autonomous principles prevail over subjective motivational claims. The best way, for them, to avoid the serious deeper conflicts is to opt for *agent-neutral* preferences and values. This kind of a prescriptive sense of morality is seen in Nagel's *agent-neutrality*, Scanlon's *contractualism*, Rawls's *public reason* and Habermas's *intersubjective communication* and *universal pragmatic justification*. These philosophers' ideas can be paraphrased as "whenever there is a conflict, recourse to neutral, impartial and higher-order moral principles would resolve the conflict and yield reasonable agreement."<sup>27</sup>

In both the Kantian and the Neo-Kantian moral frameworks there is an immense emphasis on the role of a moral agent and what morality expects from each one of them. We recognize the importance of rational moral agency, but we are not comfortable with the nature of moral reasoning that ought to lead to objective agreement. There is a challenge to our apprehensions. These set of philosophers have highlighted the importance

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reason. John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 64.3(Summer 1997): 765-807. Onora O'Neill, "Political Liberalism and Public Reason: A Critical Notice of John Rawls, Political Liberalism," *The Philosophical Review*, 106.3(July 1997): 411-428.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Nagel, "Moral Conflicts and Political Legitimacy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 16.3(Summer 1987): 215-240. See also "Personal Rights and Public Space," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24.2(Spring 1995): 83-107. Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Robert Merrihew Adams, "Scanlon's Contractualism: Critical Notice of T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*," *The Philosophical Review*, 110.4(Oct 2001): 561-586.

of dialog and deliberation. Interpersonal or intersubjective level creates the necessity of *justification* to others. An agent has to convince other for why s/he has a different value, belief or reason over a particular conflicting issue. For instance, Rawls forms the basis for normative sense of cooperation by attributing sense of good and sense of justice to each and every individual.<sup>28</sup> In the writings of both Rawls and Habermas there is a strong sense of public realm as both of them agree to the metaphysical nature of certain issues. It links to the old problem of public and private morality that is more or less similar to the tension between the individual and the collective. The distinction of public and private is nevertheless more important even in the contemporary sense.

Objection to both the Kantian and the Neo-Kantian frameworks is not with respect to first-order moral principles or basic values. But we state that the acceptance of these basic values, i.e., common shared interests in basic values do not necessarily avoid conflicts. Both these moral frameworks treat interpersonal moral conflicts in a comparatively simpler manner. This may not really value *irreducibility*, even if one admits that the action-guiding nature of morality ought to improve the state of affairs. In the context of deliberation also there are certain issues where individuals desire to have personal points of view that may not be linked to the notion of commensurability. Besides, owing to the complex nature of social conflicts; morality is not to be tied to unification. Normative moral principles may necessitate the generalized point of view which is moral in nature. Moral impartiality here takes the help of moral persuasiveness through which any kind of conflict resolution can be achieved.

The idea of reasonable justification of the contemporary liberal philosophers is appreciable. The idea we owe to others in certain sense of reasonable reasons is well taken. But the kind of reciprocity implicit in reason and rationality have to be supplemented with the recognition that life is so complex that even a *cohesive*, collective or an interpersonal framework would yield certain disagreements. Agents would be unreasonable and unfair in not admitting this helpless situation. In a complex interpersonal framework, agents may be reluctant to arrive at have common shared principles over certain issues of everyday life. Conflict resolution may not necessarily mean complete resolution or

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<sup>28</sup> John Rawls, "Basic Liberties and Their Priorities," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. For intersubjective communication, refer Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990). Also see his *Inclusion of the Other* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).