

## CHAPTER VII

# KANT ON FREEDOM AND ITS CONTEMPORARY REVALUATION

*ANATOLIJ KARAS*

Kant distinctly formulated the theoretical problem of relations between the private/individual and the universal/social in terms of the value of freedom and the role and nature of mind. He was attempting to remain in the context of an ethical understanding of society in the Scottish intellectual tradition. At heart, his approach raises the problem of freedom and thence of equality. His work "What is Enlightenment" (1784) is an educational program for people's growth and significance therein of the role of reason in human life. In this the role of courage as the ability to live by their own wits and to seek help in their state of immaturity is central. This requires "only freedom, namely, the freedom to use their own minds." Kant emphasizes the proper use of understanding as public, and not just private, "can lead to an Enlightenment among the general public" and positively affect "the global civil society".

In another work "The Idea of Universal History in Terms of a World Civil Plan" (1781) Kant asserts that maximum freedom can be achieved only in the "unity of legal civil society" based on a civil equitable arrangement. This social condition can be achieved by the means of the personal mind, acting freely from instincts, with a "natural ability for viable development." This is associated with the use of reason, which is fully developed not in the individual, but in human kind. In so far as people are recognized as having equal capabilities, Kant believed that all people are equally autonomous and that moral responsibility and human dignity also are based on this ability. Thence he formulated the idea that individuals should enjoy equal respect due to their autonomy.

The idea of individual autonomy was not new. Its traces are lost in the ancient commitment to a free man capable of self-direction. In the modern times this idea had been argued by Rousseau and others on new Enlightenment grounds, but Kant went much further in theoretical terms. He described autonomy as the value of individual freedom and ability of man to free himself not only from external coercion, violence, slavery or manipulation, but also from internal motivations, passionate desires and prejudice. Freedom then is the absence of conditionality in nature operative as deterministic relationships or laws. The free human being is mediated by choice which is based in the mind with its universal

maxims. Thus, Kant draws special attention to mind or reason in all his works.

In articles, written in response to his main critics, Kant emphasizes that “the mind is created not for isolation, but for including itself in the community. It prevents all selfish principles of judgments, and thus the principles based at the most only in feeling”<sup>1</sup>

Behaviour, if it depends on the object of will or a deep longing, may not be truly free. Instead of the object of will, one needs to understand the law, which acts a priori to determine that very freedom. According to Kant, we cannot understand this law empirically. The condition of understanding “law,” which regulates human will and directs her/his choice of truth and justice, can only be a subject which precedes any experience. His main ability is the ability to combine into a single picture the various sensations and to keep them in mind. The entity with its own source provides the principle of unity, or transcendental apperception; without perception the world would be a stream of loose and changing empirical representations.

Freedom, therefore, is above all through reason, which could realize the dependence of man on sensual experience but agrees not to perceive oneself as an entirely empirical reality. To be free means to be independent from that causal impulse of behaviour that is stipulated by wishes and their objects. Freedom can exist only when persons can have their own intentions to act.

For Kant, a purely empirical basis for understanding that appears as caused only by outside influences eliminates the moral base of the individual and cannot serve as an explanation of human freedom. As sensual human experience is always limited and incomplete, the universality of laws constituted by scientific thinking can only have a mental nature. This approach introduced a revolutionary shift in the interpretation of the role of the human spirit and especially the productive imagination as constitutive of the conditions of social life. But the point is that the mind, for Kant, functions on the basis of concepts and categories that are universal and necessary and cannot depend on the will of the subject. In this aspect categories and concepts remain an instrument of progress for Physics and are the features of material interactions. Consequently, on the level of pure reason, freedom is not an accomplished phenomenon, but only in the sphere of practical reason; where there is the reality of human responsibility is there the reality of freedom. At the practical level of understanding, the notion of universal physical law turns into a concept of moral law. From these

---

<sup>1</sup> Quote from the Ukrainian translation (only one in the world) book, prepared with Kant’s handwritten notes made by Beno Erdman in 1884 and called “Reflection on critique of pure reason” (citation # 32).

Kantian thoughts we can trace the ideas of contemporary communicative philosophy and its ethical concern.

Freedom is not chaotic action and not an accident, which would carry devastating consequences. To be free means to be willing, as I ought, to be under moral universality. Only autonomy, which has a moral nature, can be the basis for actions of free people in a practical sense. Kant writes: "Autonomy of the will is that property by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition). The principle of autonomy then is: "Always so to choose that the same volition shall comprehend the maxims of our choice as a universal law" (Kant 1952: 277). Then I. Kant emphasizes that "The concept of freedom is the key that explains the autonomy of the will" (Kant 1952: 279).

The individual as an autonomous moral being becomes free because it is the legislator of its own behaviour in terms of its moral values. The human not only bears the burden of liberty—he or she becomes their sole objective. Freedom should promote the autonomy of each individual and not limit one. In this freedom is related to reason, as Kant notes: "reason would overstep all its bounds if it undertook to explain how pure reason can be practical, which would be exactly the same problem as to explain how freedom is possible (Kant 1952: 285).

Thus, Kant's interpretation of freedom brings a new level of understanding. The world of objects or our surroundings is not the main factor in free behaviour of individuals. That is, the notion of freedom goes beyond the physical context, which is composed by reference to the phenomena of nature (things) and needs approval or denial of a certain objective state of affairs.

Kant introduces a new basis for understanding the freedom he specified in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and experience as insufficient grounds for the activity of a person and society. Man, as an active being, for Kant, is guided by theoretical and practical reason, and the moral ideal connected with free will. This means an ability to overcome what is attributable empirically to facts and things. To be human is to be unaffected by mental imagination of moral ideals and personal goals. Freedom is not just a fact of natural free will, but rather a substance that appears in the context of a mind: it is "a property of the will of all rational beings." The idea of freedom entails intelligible value. To act as well as someone wants (some person or governor or ruler) is not yet a manifestation of the transcendental essence of freedom in a society filled with value marks. True freedom has moral value when a person is independent of others approving of his or her action. Actually this phenomenon of freedom testifies to individual autonomy of behaviour, and mutual recognition of autonomy is a prerequisite for the legal regulation of public relations. Therefore, the subject as an active force is

involved in creating a Human Umwelt in the two dimensions of empirically-physical and socio-cultural values. Freedom, for Kant, is man's faculty to initiate action or make changes in the social world.

We come to an important turn made by Kant in the interpretation of freedom from empirical to axiological value. Further, we need to recall the role of "creative imagination," which has special significance in Kant. Imagination is not a blind game of sensual images but has a productive dimension which allows it to integrate diversity and achieve a certain unity. This explains the ability of the imagination for the "unity of apperception"—one of the central concepts of Kant's philosophy. The bonds and unity of apperception cannot be derived empirically or from past experience. "The conjunction (*conjunctio*) of a manifold in intuition can never be given us by the senses;...for it is a spontaneous act of the faculty of representation. And, as to distinguish it from sensibility, we must entitle this faculty understanding; so all conjunction...is an act of the understanding." We mark it by the term: synthesis. "Of all mental notions, that of conjunction is the only one which cannot be given through objects, but can be originated only by the subject itself because it is an act of one's purely spontaneous activity" (Kant 1952: 49).

The nature of understanding Kant interprets as "the ability for knowledge." Knowledge relates to a certain representation between imagination and object. An object is that which occurs when concept combines a variety of contemplation. It is important to emphasize that Kant established the relation between the object and imagination, consciousness and the process of learning in a quite new way for Modern times. This outlined new aspects of the problem of object and objectivity. Its full coverage is possible if you move away from the paradoxes of Kant's Epistemology and apply the semiotic variant of interpretation. This, of course, will engage the views of Kant, but also will be meaningful as regards the potential opportunities of his theory and of the undervaluation of Kant's and hence of Enlightenment's philosophy.

Distinction of objects and physical things in the aspect of freedom as conflicting with Kant's theory, this problem was considered primarily on the epistemological plane. But if we put emphasis on relation as a spontaneous precondition of reunifying the imagination with its subject or thing, then the axiological nuance appears first because of the context of consciousness. For Kant, the objective value or object of anything is a result of a relation, in which an active subject expresses its interest. That is, outside of human relations a world of unknown things does exist; an interested (in any sense) relation indicates the ratio of, say, a physical thing by means of imagination and it is transformed into an object, giving to the later a certain value and meaning. The central role belongs to categories, which coordinate the person (subject) and is related to the

world. Hence Kant speaks about a transcendental unity of apperception, “by which all given in contemplative variety unites itself in the concept.” Phenomena are not themselves things, but only imaginations which cannot exist outside of our soul. Imagination stretches further than just the external (time-space) location of things and combines phenomenological objects so that signs may be included in the context of perception. In the language of contemporary semiotics, a physical thing (or the ideal image) is converted to an object (becomes meaning) if and only if the thing becomes marked by a human’s sign perception. Outside of that relation the object (and so-called objective world) does not exist, at least for humans.

Thus, for example, we can observe and examine the phenomena in any order, regardless of their relations. But we can think about and understand phenomena only in a certain order which is accepted as some kind of objectivity of reason and intelligence. Although imagination has a creative, productive capacity, it is not entirely free. It can be influential concepts of understanding the basic characteristics of which are determined by necessity and—what I want especially to emphasize—by relationships or interests associated with all human’s souls. The last feature added is emphasis on the axiological interpretation of freedom. Thus Kant does not actually do the same physical things with objects. He was very close to distinguishing them not only on the basis of a differentiation of reason and understanding, but on a basis of the interaction of images operated by a free creative imagination.

The subjective dimension of human personality acquires new value: it becomes richer in the free activity of a man or woman. Objective reality is not identical to the physical reality. The last is a set of “things in themselves”, while objectivity may arise only in relation to subjectivity. According to Kant, it is possible to think about the existence of a thing by itself without regard to perception and experience, but then we know nothing about it. By the logic of Kant’s interpretation of reality, objective reality becomes rather the value of the reality of objects that occurs exclusively through humans. Man as a subject has subjective ability to differentiate oneself from the world of things and from the reality created by others. Everyone aims at one’s own subjectivity, which constitutes especially one’s own autonomy and independence, and exercises one’s own subjectivity. It is in terms of this that we speak of human communication or shared, common or universal interest. The reality of objects, therefore, concerns not just experience, but what subjectively is acquired by practical reason. The reality of objects is equal to human actuality.

It is also worth noting that the philosophy of Kant became the basis for understanding human freedom in modern society and is significant for research in our time. Thus, the distinction between society

and government (separation of public areas) was interpreted on the basis of the *a priori* ability to reason and man's moral responsibility for man. Responsibility belongs in the public sphere of interpersonal relationships and applies among people in the context of discursive practices. Here the modern German philosopher Manfred Riedel believes that "responsibility" is a matter of communicative practice, where language and a real relationship of persons exist together. In other words, freedom in the public sphere has the value of responsibility proper to practical reason, which has both a personal and social basis.

Thus, the Kantian products of the Enlightenment return with the possibility of developing the ethical responsibility of the person and of humankind.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Kant Immanuel*. The Critic of Pure Reason. The Critic of Practical Reason and other ethical treatises. The Critic of Judgment—in Great books of The Western World. Robert Maynard Hutchins, editor in chief. # 42. Kant. William Benton. The University of Chicago Press, 1952.

*Department of Philosophy*  
*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv*  
*Lviv, Ukraine*