*Journal of Dharma* 42, 3 (July-September 2017), 271-288

# THE *IS* AND MORAL *OUGHT* OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

**Napoleon M. Mabaquiao, Jr.**♦

***Abstract*:** The paper analyzes the possibility and moral normativity of *intersubjectivity* — here understood as referring to the kind of human interaction that respects the personhood of human beings. The analysis of the possibility of intersubjectivity inquires into the conditions of its occurrence; while the analysis of its moral normativity examines the basis of its status as a moral obligation. The paper advances two points. The first is the distinction between *theoretical intersubjectivity,* where persons are perceived or conceived as *subjects* and not as *objects*, and *practical intersubjectivity,* where persons are treated as *ends* and not merely as *means.* The second is the clarification that the imperativity of theoretical intersubjectivity (for involving perceptions and beliefs about persons) is epistemic while that of practical intersubjectivity (for involving intentions and actions towards persons) is moral. Given these points and the questionable status of the possibility of theoretical intersubjectivity (for requiring a nonconceptual knowledge of persons), confusing the latter with practical intersubjectivity would render the morality of intersubjectivity problematic.

***Keywords*:** Human Dialogue, Human Interaction, Interpersonal Relationship, Intersubjectivity.

## 1. Introduction

Given that human beings are *persons*, that is, individuals who are conscious, intelligent, and free, their interaction can occur in ways that either respect their personhood or not. For our purposes, let us refer to the kind of human interaction that

♦ **Dr Napoleon M. Mabaquiao, Jr.** is a full professor of philosophy and a former chair of the Department of Philosophy of De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines. He specializes in the areas of ethics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language.

respects the personhood of humans as *intersubjectivity*. In this essay, I analyze the possibility and moral normativity of intersubjectivity, or, what comes to the same, the "is" and "moral ought" of respect for persons. As regards the possibility of intersubjectivity, I examine the conditions of its occurrence. But as regards its moral normativity, I examine the basis of its status as a moral obligation.

There are two points that I deem necessary for this kind of analysis. The first is the distinction between *theoretical intersubjectivity,* where agents are seen as *subjects* and not as mere *objects*, and *practical intersubjectivity,* where agents are treated as *ends* and not merely as *means.* To illustrate the distinction I consider the relevant views of Buber, Levinas, Sartre, Husserl, Heidegger, and Kant. The second is the clarification that it is the imperative of practical intersubjectivity that is moral for that of practical intersubjectivity is epistemic. This is because the former involves actions and intentions towards persons, which are either good or bad; whereas the latter involves perceptions and beliefs about persons, which are either correct or incorrect representations of persons. In discussing the morality of intersubjectivity, I consider the views of the ethical theories of utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics.

Based on these two points, I argue that the morality of intersubjectivity can only be accounted for by practical intersubjectivity and that the failure to distinguish this level of intersubjectivity from the theoretical would consequently result in rendering the morality of intersubjectivity problematic. Not only is this due to the epistemic nature of the imperative of theoretical intersubjectivity but also to the questionability of the possibility of this kind of intersubjectivity, which requires the impossible task of seeing persons outside of one's conceptual apparatus. I divide the discussion into two parts: the first deals with possibility of intersubjectivity; the second with its moral normativity.

## 2. The *Is* of Intersubjectivity

In examining what makes intersubjectivity possible, we shall look into the nature of human personhood and the different

levels of intersubjectivity. In particular, we shall examine what accounts for the moral personhood attributed to humans and the difference between the theoretical and practical levels of intersubjectivity.

**2.1. *Human Personhood*:** As intersubjectivity involves human personhood, an analysis of the possibility of intersubjectivity must begin with a clarification of the concept of human personhood. Human personhood can either be legal or moral. If we understand "person" as a bearer of rights, then humans are legal persons in virtue of their possession of legal rights, and are moral persons in virtue of their possession of moral rights. The case of nonhuman persons is controversial. For instance, corporations, being mere creations of the law, are legal persons in virtue of their possession of legal rights (they can, for instance, own properties under their names and sue human individuals and fellow corporations). Whether they are also moral persons with moral obligations, however, is still debated.[1] Animals, on the other hand, are also said to be moral persons in that they possess moral rights;[2] but it is not clear whether they have legal rights or are legal persons as well. As our focus is on human personhood, we shall not deal with these controversies here.[3] Offhand, however, I think corporations do have moral obligations for moral agency, being a functional concept (a concept solely defined in terms of possession of certain functions or capabilities) and thus being ontologically neutral, can very

[1]Peter French, for instance, argues that corporations are also moral persons because of the rationality and irreducibility of corporate decisions. See Peter French, "The Corporation as a Moral Person" in *Business Ethics: A Philosophical Reader,"* ed. Thomas White, New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1993, 228-235.

[2]Utilitarianism, for instance, argues that animals have moral rights in virtue of their sentience. See Peter Singer, "The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues," in *Business Ethics: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Thomas White, New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1993, 849-54.

[3]Philip Petit, "Responsibility Incorporated," *Ethics* 117 (2), 2007, 171-201.

well be attributed to collectivities as well. In the case of animals, their moral rights should entitle them certain legal rights. At the minimum, they should have the legal right to be protected from being abused or unnecessarily harmed by humans.

To better understand the nature of human personhood we need to inquire into the difference between a human being and a human person. The arguments of Tooley[4] on the value of making this distinction to explain the immorality of killing would be helpful. Tooley explains that what makes killing a human being immoral is not the mere termination of the human being's life but the destruction of a human person that goes with this termination. Tooley understands a human being as having the biological functions natural for members of the human species, while a human person as having "the type of mental life that characterizes normal adult human beings."[5] Tooley claims that seriously damaging the upper brain of a human individual, though he/she remains alive with the help of a life-support system, is tantamount to killing a human person. Modern technology has made it possible for a human being to continue to survive even though he/she is no longer conscious. This is when the upper part of the brain (the part of the brain mainly responsible for consciousness) has been irreversibly damaged while the lower part of the brain (the part of the brain mainly responsible for the biological functions of humans) continues to function with the aid of a life-support system. Another argument claims that reprograming a person's mind (granting its possibility), that is, erasing all the thoughts (beliefs, memories, and others) and replacing them with new ones would be tantamount to killing the human person, though the human being remains alive.

The main point of the arguments is simply that the mental life of a human being is what accounts for the moral personhood. Two things need to be noted here. First, these arguments are not committed to the reductive materialist view that identifies the

[4]Michael Tooley, "Personhood" in *Companion to Bioethics*, eds., Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 129-139.

[5]Tooley, "Personhood," 129.

mind with the brain, for they can very well accommodate the dualist view that the brain is simply the biological vehicle through which the mind (or the soul) performs its mental operations *while* still united with a body. Second, there is no claim here that moral personhood and mental life are identical. For among the many features of our mental life, the following are the only ones generally regarded as morally relevant to moral personhood: sentience (the capacity to feel pleasure and pain, which we shall include under the concept of consciousness), rationality or intelligence (the capacity to think), and freedom (the capacity to act voluntarily).

Moral personhood comes in two forms, namely, *moral agency* and *moral patiency*.[6] A moral person, in this regard, is either a moral agent or a moral patient (or both). A moral agent is one who has moral duties or obligations, while a moral patient is the recipient of these moral duties and consequently has moral rights. Generally, all moral agents are moral patients as well; but not all moral patients are also moral agents. Moral agents are morally accountable for their actions, that is, they deserve moral blame or praise for their actions due to their rationality and freedom. In contrast, to be a moral patient, or to be a recipient of moral duties, it is sufficient that one is sentient. For instance, infants and animals are regarded as objects of moral concern, and in that regard have moral rights; but we do not expect them to have moral duties.

Moral persons thus consist of (a) moral agents who are also moral patients (such as normal human adults), (b) moral patients who are also moral agents (practically all moral agents); and (c) moral patients who are not (or not yet) moral agents (such as human infants and animals). Human persons, in this light, include both moral agents who are also moral patients (normal human adults) and moral patients who are not (or are not yet) moral agents (human infants and humans with mental

[6]See Vinit Haksar, "Moral Agents," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Version 1.0, ed. Edward Craig, New York: Routledge, 1998, 5632-5636.

disabilities). Consequently, as sentience is the morally relevant mental feature for moral patiency it serves as the minimum qualifying feature for moral personhood (as rationality and freedom are only necessary for moral agents). This, however, raises some difficult questions such as whether embryos and infants who have not yet developed the capacity for sentience are moral persons or not. One perspective has it that they are indeed not moral persons but because they are potential moral persons, they also deserve moral concern. The point is that having the natural (active) potentiality for moral personhood makes them morally significant such that "the destruction of such potentiality … is morally on a par with destroying a person."[7] The potential moral persons have the same moral status as actual moral persons; and thus harming and killing them (as in the case of abortion and some medical experiments) are as morally wrong as killing actual moral persons.

### 2.2. Two Kinds of Intersubjectivity

It can be gleaned from the discussions of Buber, Sartre, Levinas, Husserl, Heidegger, and Kant that intersubjectivity occurs on a *theoretical level* (the level of perceptions and beliefs) and on a *practical level* (the level of intentions and actions). We shall refer to intersubjectivity occurring on these levels, respectively, as *theoretical intersubjectivity* and *practical intersubjectivity.* Theoretical intersubjectivity looks into how a person knows (perceives or thinks about) another person in relation to his/her concepts or mental categories. This results in knowing a person either as an object, when a person is *known conceptually*, that is, known through the lens of the concepts of the knowing person; or as a *subject*, when a person is *known non-conceptually*, that is, when he/she is known otherwise. As a person should be seen as a subject, intersubjectivity thus is theoretically a subject-subject kind of human relationship. On the other hand, practical intersubjectivity considers how an agent treats another person through the agent's intentions and actions in relation to their interests. This results in the agent treating the other person either

[7]Tooley, "Personhood," 135.

as *means*, when the agent through his/her intentions and actions uses the other person to satisfy his/her own (the agent's own) interests, or as an *end*, when the agent does otherwise and instead promotes the other person's interests. As a person should be treated as an end, intersubjectivity thus is practically an end-end kind of human interaction. It shall be observed that the various explanations of Buber, Sartre, Levinas, and Husserl on the possibility of intersubjectivity pertain to theoretical intersubjectivity, while those of Heidegger and Kant pertain to practical intersubjectivity. Let us briefly examine their views.[8]

Buber calls a person treated as a subject a "You" or "Thou," while a person treated as an object an "It." Buber describes the relation to the Thou as follows: "The relation to the *Thou* is DIRECT. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou* … No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between *I* and *Thou*."[9] The "Thou" is, therefore, known non-conceptually while the "It" is known conceptually. Buber then distinguishes between two fundamental types of human relations or interactions: the *I-Thou* relation, corresponding to the subject-subject relation of theoretical intersubjectivity; and the *I-It* relation, corresponding to a subject-object relation of theoretical non-intersubjectivity.

Levinas speaks of our "totalization" of the other person when we limit the identity of the person to our concepts thereby making him/her like us. As the person is much more than our concepts of him/her, totalizing the person does "violence" to his/her personhood. This is nothing but the conceptual knowing of the other person whereby he/she is reduced to an object. What Levinas refers to as the immediate call of "Thou shalt not

[8]Our discussion of their views is limited to showing how their approaches to intersubjectivity illustrate the distinction between theoretical and practical intersubjectivity. We do not claim that they themselves make or subscribe to the said distinction. That their approaches illustrate the said distinction is a claim that this paper is making based on its analysis of their views.

[9]Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* tr., Ronald Gregor Smith, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, 11.

kill" of the other person is actually a plea of his/her subjectivity not to be limited it to a set of concepts, for to be so limited would mean its death. The way to experience the other person as a subject and hence as a person is a non-conceptual encounter with him/her, which, for Levinas, occurs when we feel the responsibility to respond to the needs of the other person prior to any form of conceptualization or act of reason. It is also when we feel this responsibility that we realize our own subjectivity.[10]

Sartre distinguishes between two fundamental kinds of beings: the *being-for-itself* and the *being-in-itself*.[11] Sartre describes the being-for-itself as conscious, free, and essentially incomplete; while the being-in-itself as unconscious, unfree, and essentially complete; and the being-in-itself as the exact opposite of the being-for-itself. While human persons are the ideal being-for-themselves, they, however, can be regarded as being-in-themselves. Accordingly, treating a person as a being-for-itself is tantamount to treating him/her as a person; whereas treating him as a being-in-itself is treating him/her as a non-person. Sartre talks about the inherently objectifying "look" of a person. We take the "look" as general knowledge that includes perception and understanding. And it is inherently objectifying because it is inescapably conceptual. In contrast, the looker is always a subject. So, for Sartre, intersubjectivity is theoretically impossible, for there will never be a subject-subject human relation, only either a subject-object or an object-subject kind of human relation.

Husserl provides a mechanism whereby we can get at the essences of things: what he calls "phenomenological reduction," "epoche," or the "bracketing of presuppositions." According to this method, by bracketing or suspending our judgments, assumptions, or presuppositions about things, we will get to

[10]See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* tr., Alphonso Lingis, Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979, 194-216.

[11]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* tr., Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Barnes Pocket Books, 1956, 119-158.

know their essences.[12] When applied to persons, Husserl speaks of transcendental egos, or pure consciousnesses, as the residue of this method.[13] Intersubjectivity would then mean an interaction between transcendental egos.

Turning now to practical intersubjectivity, it is interesting to note that both Heidegger and Kant, in their own unique ways, have rejected the possibility of a non-conceptual attitude towards the world. Heidegger does this by rejecting Husserl's transcendental ego and advancing the inescapable nature of *Dasein* or the human person as a being-in-the-world. There is, accordingly, no Husserlian disinterested spectator of the world, for *Dasein* is always involved in its world of concerns and is always a being in time (with a past, future, and present). Kant, on the other hand, does this by showing that our perceptions and conceptions of the world are always dependent on the *a priori* structures of the mind (the forms of sensibility and categories of the mind). Without the possibility of a non-conceptual knowledge, theoretical intersubjectivity would not be possible (for if our knowledge of persons would always be mediated by concepts or categories, then it would be impossible to perceive persons as a subjects). This is why these two philosophers resort to a kind of intersubjectivity that is practical.

Heidegger makes a distinction between two ways by which a human person can relate with entities in the world: either as *being-alongside* them or *being-with* them. Being-alongside them is characterized by *utility*; that is, a person treats these other entities as his/her equipment or utensils, as something that he/she can use to satisfy his/her own needs and interests. In contrast, being-with is characterized by *considerateness;* [14] that is, a person considers the interests of the other entities in dealing

[12]See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to A Pure Phenomenology,* tr., F. Kersten, London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983, 57-62.

[13]Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology,* 63-66.

[14]Marin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* tr., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962, 159.

with them. Ideally, a person is with his/her fellow persons (treats them with considerateness) but alongside mere objects (treats them as utensils); but this relation is usually reversed. Consequently, it is when a person treats another person as a utensil that he/she uses this other person as a means and as a mere object or a non-person; but treats this other person as an end and with considerateness.

In the case of Kant, practical intersubjectivity appears in the form of a moral principle, as a standard for judging the morality of an action. His *principle of respect for persons* states that "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end."[15] Interestingly, Kant makes a crucial qualification about practical inter-subjectivity. He claims that we should not treat the other as a means in some way. But while we do so it is still possible to treat him/her also as an end. Thus for Kant the dichotomy is not between treating persons as means only and treating them as ends only, but between treating them as means only and treating them as means and ends as the same time. To explain this possibility, Kant distinguishes between one's moral duty to oneself, referring to the duty of a person to work for his/her moral perfection; and one's moral duty to other persons, referring to one's moral duty to promote the happiness of other persons.[16] These two duties are at work simultaneously when one acts ethically towards another person. In relation to one's moral duty to oneself, one treats the other person as a means; but

[15]Immanuel Kant, "Ethics is Based on Reason," in *Ethics Contemporary Readings,* ed. Harry Gensler, et al., New York: Routledge, 2004, 153-157.

[16]Kant writes: "What are the Ends which are also Duties? They are: A. Our own PERFECTION, B. HAPPINESS OF OTHERS. We cannot invert these and make on one side our own happiness, and on the other the perfection of others, ends which should be in themselves duties for the same person." Immanuel Kat, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Great Books of the Western World,* ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Colorado: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, 369.

in relation to one's moral duty to other persons, one treats the other person as an end.[17] Kant's qualification explains well our complex relations with other people, that though we use them as means (for instance, when we pay them for their work) we also treat them as persons at the same time.

## 3. The Moral *Ought* of Intersubjectivity

As moral imperatives are commands to perform morally good actions, and morally good actions are actions we are morally obligated to perform, the question of what makes intersubjectivity morally obligatory comes down to the question of what makes it morally good. If we are morally obliged to respect the personhood of other persons it is because it is morally good to do so. In analyzing the moral goodness of intersubjectivity, we shall first deal with its general feature of respecting human personhood; after which, we shall deal with the moral evaluability of intersubjectivity in its two specific forms: theoretical and practical.

### 3.1. Respecting Human Personhood

To account for the moral goodness of respecting human personhood, let us use the perspectives of the three dominant ethical theories: *utilitarianism*, *deontology*, and *virtue ethics*. These theories are based on the following morally relevant features of human actions: that these actions lead to certain consequences (*utilitarianism*), (2) follow (or violate) certain rules (*deontology*), and (3) are performed by persons with certain character traits (*virtue ethics*). As these consequences, rules, and character can be good or bad, desirable or not, and so are the actions connected to them. The main point of contention among these theories concerns which feature has the primacy over the others.

[17] Nowadays treating another person only as a means is explained as acting towards another person in ways that this person would not give his/her informed and voluntary consent. A consent is informed when a person knows the relevant facts about what the consent is about; and it is voluntary when it is not forced or coerced.

Utilitarianism claims that an action is morally good if it maximizes the aggregate good, happiness, or welfare of all affected persons,[18] or promotes the so-called "greatest good of the greatest number of people." In this view, respect for personhood is morally good if and only if it maximizes the aggregate good, and morally bad if it does not. This makes respect for personhood morally good only in a conditional way; for it is relative to the kind of consequences that it will lead to. This relativity, however, varies in degree in *act utilitarianism* (where the moral appraisal of an act is based directly on its consequences) and *rule utilitarianism* (where the moral appraisal of an act is based on the consequences of accepting the rule prescribing the act).[19] It is relatively lower in rule utilitarianism for the consequences of accepting rules are more or less stable compared to those of performing acts. Nonetheless, respecting human personhood, for utilitarianism is not always morally obligatory. In fact, the moral calculation of utilitarianism (especially by the form promoted by Peter Singer[20]) extends to the non-human animals, which makes it possible to sometimes prefer animal welfare over human welfare.

Deontology, also regarded as a *duty-based* or *right-based* ethical theory, can be religious or rational in form, depending on whether moral laws are grounded in a divine mind or human reason. For our purposes, let us consider the rational deontology developed by Kant. Kant gives two major formulas, or moral principles, for determining the moral worth of an action.[21] One is

---

[18]See Richard Hare, "A Utilitarian Approach," in *A Companion to Bioethics*, eds. Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 85-90.

[19]For a discussion of the distinction between act and rule utilitarianism see Brad Hooker, "Consequentialism," in *Routledge Companion to Ethics,* ed. John Skorupski, New York: Routledge, 2010, 444-455.

[20]See Singer, "The Place of Nonhumans in Environmental Issues," 849-854.

[21]Kant actually has five formulas: (1) the formula of the universal law - "Act only on the maxim through which you can at the same time

the *principle of universalizability*, according to which an action is morally good only if its maxim (the subjective law that the doer creates for himself/herself) can be consistently made as a law for everyone. Another is the *principle of respect for persons*, according to which an action is morally good if it does not use persons merely as means but also as ends at the same time. These two formulas are two different ways of directing us towards identifying the same morally good or bad actions. As earlier noted, the second principle serves as the guiding principle for the morality of respecting human personhood; consequently, this makes the act of respecting human personhood inherently morally good and always as a moral duty.

According to virtue ethics, a morally good action is the action that a virtuous person (a person of good character assumed to be acting "in character") would do; and a morally bad action is the action that a virtuous person would not do.[22] Virtue, for Aristotle, is the excellence of what is proper for humans, namely the excellence of their reason and will, the achievement of which is what brings about human flourishing—deemed to be the

---

will that it should become a universal law;" (2) the formula of the law of nature - "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature;" (3) formula of respect for persons or of the end in itself - "So act as to use humanity, both in your own person and in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end, never as a means;" (4) formula of autonomy - "So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making a universal law through its maxim;" and (5) formula of the kingdom of ends - "So act as if you were always through your maxims a law-making member in a universal kingdom of ends." John Atwell groups them into: I. The formula of the universal law, under which the formulas of the law of nature and autonomy are subsumed; and II. The formula of respect for persons, under which the formula of kingdom of ends is subsumed. John Atwell, *Ends and Principles in Kant's Moral Thought*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986, 144. We follow Atwell in his classification of the formulas.

[22]See John Oakley, "A Virtue Ethics Approach," in *A Companion to Bioethics*, 91-104.

ultimate end of humans.[23] Respecting human personhood is surely something that a virtuous person would do and would always do, as it is tantamount to respecting what gives excellence to humans, namely his/her rationality and free will. Consequently, for virtue ethics, like Kantian deontology but unlike utilitarianism, respecting human personhood is always morally good and a moral obligation.

### 3.2. Moral and Epistemic Imperatives

Let us now examine the moral goodness of intersubjectivity in its two specific forms: the theoretical intersubjectivity and the practical subjectivity. For this purpose, we need to examine the moral evaluability of these two forms of intersubjectivity—whether they are both fitting subjects of moral evaluation. The moral evaluability of practical intersubjectivity, to begin with, is generally non-problematic as it is about intentions and actions towards humans.[24] What is problematic is the moral evaluability of theoretical intersubjectivity; for it merely involves perceptions and conceptions of humans. For instance, the act of helping a person in need is clearly morally evaluable (it is, in fact, morally good); but seeing someone as a kind person is not (that is, neither morally good nor bad). Theoretical intersubjectivity claims that intersubjectivity only occurs through a non-conceptual knowledge of a person—when our perceptions and conceptions of the other are outside the framework of concepts or mental categories. Saying that theoretical intersubjectivity is morally good is tantamount to saying that a non-conceptual knowledge of a person is morally good but a conceptual

[23]See Aristotle, "Nichomachean Ethics" (Excerpts), in *Ethics Contemporary Readings*, ed., Harry Gensler et al. London: Routledge, 240-249.

[24]We classify intentions under practical intersubjectivity as they are products of the will, which for Kant is practical in nature. Kant distinguishes between *pure reason* and *practical reason.* Pure reason includes sensations/perceptions and conceptions, whereas practical reason includes intentions, desires, or motives to perform actions.

knowledge of a person is morally bad. But what would be the basis, if any, of this view?

While some of our perceptions of people may lead us to perform unethical actions towards them, we also have perceptions of them that no doubt also lead us to perform ethical actions towards them. But conceptual knowledge, by itself, is neither morally good nor bad. Perceptions and beliefs are amoral. They have no moral worth; the worth that they have is *epistemic*—whether or not they truly represent what they claim to represent. Technically, perceptions are either veridical or non-veridical, and beliefs are either true or false. Their conditions of satisfaction have a mind-to-world direction of fit. Meaning, we match them with the events in the world to determine whether they are successful in representing these events. Thus, I may be epistemically wrong in perceiving or conceiving a person in a certain way (say I see someone as an extrovert or a Marxist), but surely I cannot be said to have done something morally wrong against this person. Thinking about a person is not the same as treating a person; and there is no necessary connection between them. I may think of a person as guilty but treat him/her as if he/she is not, or vice versa. This is something similar to loving one's enemies. I may think of a person as my enemy but I nonetheless treat him/her as if he/she is not when I show love to him/her instead.

The role of language and how we formulate our thoughts play a critical role here. We sometimes express our thoughts not in their standard form, like expressing a command in the form of a declarative sentence. Take the expression "Smoking is illegal." Grammatically, it is a declarative sentence, but what it really expresses is a command, which is standardly expressed in the imperative form such as "You ought not to smoke." The context of the utterance determines how we ought to take the meaning of an expression. Take, for instance, the expression "Smoking is injurious to health." It can be taken as an expression simply intended to state a medical fact (say uttered as a conclusion of a medical research). But it can also be taken as an indirect way of telling the person to whom it is addressed that he/she should

quit smoking. In the same way, we may express an intention in the form of a belief. For instance, the belief that a person deserves to be punished may just be a disguised intention to hurt the person. In this sense, the mental state is not really a belief but an intention. And so when we say that the said belief is morally wrong, we are not really attributing moral worth to a belief but to an intention.

As moral normativity concerns morally good intentions and actions, epistemic normativity concerns justified true beliefs. As respecting the personhood of the other person is a moral *ought*; holding justified true beliefs about the other person is an epistemic *ought*. Another way of saying this is that while we have the epistemic duty to form justified true beliefs about persons, we have the moral duty to perform or intend to perform actions towards them. This, however, needs some qualification. We can have justified true beliefs about a human person if these beliefs concern publicly verifiable features of the person, such as the historical facts about him/her (his/her date of birth, nationality, names of parents, and others) and his/her biological features (like his/her blood type, height, and weight). But what about if these beliefs concern the person's mental life? In describing the mental life of a person, for instance, his/her moods, beliefs, goals, values, and desires, we obviously cannot be accurate and objective, for being private they are not publicly verifiable. They are private in the sense that only the person who has them can have direct access to them. Other people can only rely on their interpretations of their behaviors and verbal expressions. Given the limits of what can be known about the mental life of a person, beliefs about the personhood of a person generally serve as convenient, practical, and provisionary guides for dealing with the other person.

In sum, theoretical intersubjectivity involves knowledge of persons consisting of perceptions and beliefs about them. Perceptions are either veridical or non-veridical, and beliefs are either true or false. Both, however, can neither be morally good nor bad. The normativity of theoretical subjectivity, in this regard, is epistemic. In contrast, theoretical intersubjectivity

involves intentions and actions towards persons, which can be either morally good or bad. Practical intersubjectivity is thus morally obligatory, either in a derivative way (as utilitarianism would have it) or in an inherent way (as rational deontology and virtue ethics would have it).

## 4. Conclusion

As philosophy critically examines the foundations of our frameworks for understanding and engaging with the world, a philosophical account of intersubjectivity must look into the grounding of its possibility and moral normativity—how it occurs and why it is morally necessary to occur. It is in this light that certain philosophers, such as the ones whose views we have critically examined, have offered their own accounts of the matter. This paper is an attempt to make a similar contribution with its distinction between the theoretical and practical levels of intersubjectivity along with its clarification of each level's kind of normativity.

Accordingly, theoretical level explains the possibility of intersubjectivity in terms of our perceptions and beliefs about the other person, where the person is seen as a subject and not as an object. Here, we generally relate to the other person as a person when we see him/her not in light of our concepts or mental categories. Buber describes this phenomenon as seeing the other person as a *Thou* and not as an *It.* Levinas locates the experience of this phenomenon in moments when we feel the responsibility to respond to the call of the other. Sartre describes it as seeing the other person as a *being-for-itself* and not as a *being-in-itself.* Husserl's method, called *phenomenological reduction*, is designed to enable us to encounter the other person as a transcendental ego or as consciousness stripped of all its contingent features. On the other hand, the possibility of intersubjectivity in terms of our intentions and actions towards the other person is where the person is treated as an end and not merely as a means. Heidegger describes this phenomenon as *being-with* others (in contrast to *being-alongside* them), while Kant

presents this as a formula of a moral principle—the formula of the *principle of respect for others.*

Based on the differences of these two levels of intersubjectivity, we identify two reasons why theoretical intersubjectivity will not explain the moral normativity of intersubjectivity. One is that its possibility, which requires knowing a person not in the light of our concepts and mental categories, is problematic. For Heidegger, this is so because one cannot isolate a person from his involvements in the world. For Kant, it is because we are bound to see the world through the innate structures of our mind. Another is the fact that the imperative of theoretical intersubjectivity is not moral but epistemic. This is so because theoretical intersubjectivity involves perceptions and beliefs, which are, properly speaking, either correct or incorrect representations of things or events in the world. And being so, they are neither morally good nor bad. In contrast, practical intersubjectivity involves intentions and actions towards persons, which can either be morally good or bad.

Consequently, it is only when the possibility of intersubjectivity is explained in terms of the practical level that we will be able to properly account for the possibility and moral normativity of intersubjectivity. This is the sense in which the said distinction is crucial in the philosophical attempt to ground intersubjectivity. For to confuse these two levels of intersubjectivity, as can be seen in the accounts of some philosophers, would render intersubjectivity problematic. And what this means is that we do not have a clear sense as to why we ought to respect human persons as a matter of moral obligation.