

# PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS IN DEFENCE OF A CULTURE OF LIFE

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## 1. Introduction

Whatever be the traditional understanding about philosophy, to my mind, it stands for the perspective that a person, individually or collectively, accepts, cherishes, and upholds in the web of human relationships and human actions with a view to enhance life in its multifarious dimensions. Technically, especially within the academic circles, however, ethics or practical philosophy has been identified as that discipline which provides us with a tool to distinguish between right and wrong arguments, with a hope to lead human agents to maximise good actions<sup>1</sup> and minimise bad actions. Hence, it is expected of a philosophical deliberation upon life to distinguish between right and wrong perspectives and arguments that are said to be at the back of many a human action with which we come across especially in the context of bioethics and related issues. Although better clarity can be legitimately expected of such an exercise, I do not intend, and I do not dare to hope, to handing down a set of perfectly acceptable moral conclusions; instead, what I propose to do here is only to highlight a couple of philosophical positions, which might enable us – who face the muddled waters of life and death issues in the modern world of advanced technological interventions – to arrive at sound arguments and life enhancing perspectives. For, the aim of humanity as a whole must be to evolve a culture of life, a situation where all would subscribe to a positive view of life and shape a creative way of life, culminating in the enhancement of both life and culture.

It should come as no surprise that bioethics has suddenly taken central stage, with many vital issues of life such as birth and death being

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<sup>1</sup>Aristotle claims thus: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim." *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925, reprinted in R. McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, New York: Random House, 1941, 935.

affected by the technological developments in the field of medicine and healthcare. The conflicts arising from a bifurcation of professional approach in these fields and the ethical considerations concerns all of us; for, they all address the questions of how we treat human beings, in the specific contexts of the facts and frailties of human life. Unfortunately, as we could see from most of the deliberations we have either in the academic or political circles, passion runs high and the likelihood of resolutions runs quite low.

In a world of constant flux, especially in the context of scientific advances, it is, indeed, necessary that we continue to discuss moral issues related to life, ranging from the issues related to pre-birth to post-death. Although technical expertise in various fields related to bioethics is certainly a must to arrive at more reasonable and humane conclusions, it does not mean that only experts (for example, scientists involved in assisted reproductive technologies, stem cell research, or genetic engineering and the moral theorists) can have an opinion and finally take conclusions. We should see them as problems faced by the entire humanity in the situations in which scientific intervention or medical care is essential. Indeed, as Paul Ramsey puts it, "birth and death, illness and injury are not simply events the doctor attends. They are moments in every human life."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. An Endangered Human Life

It is true that human beings have been involved both in the acts of destroying and enhancing life in various forms. However, despite the destructive activities initiated by many a member of the human species, nature, by its own ways, and in and through a dynamic, conscious, affirmative, and cooperative involvement of the majority of human beings, has been maintaining various cultures of life all through the human history. In fact, while some consciously tried to disrupt the culture of life that existed and flourished, there were equally – or, say, more effective – powerful attempts on the part of others to defend, safeguard, protect, preserve, and enhance life, especially human life, itself being the foundation of the values we cherish. The primacy enjoyed by human life among all forms of life has not yet been debased, which I consider to be

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<sup>2</sup>Paul Ramsey, *The Patient as Person*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970, xi.

the most optimistic result of a continued human quest for development, permanence, and excellence.

However, in the wake of an emerging exclusive thrust on values such as quality, economy, efficiency, etc., which finally turn out to be counterproductive to a large extent, and the manipulative strategies of the vested interests, including the *almighty* media of the twenty-first century and the remotely controlled, corrupt governments whose legislations and governance increasingly have nothing to do with the moral foundations of humanity, our age witnesses a growing tendency to enthrone a culture of death in place of life. Although its votaries are comparatively smaller in numbers, the reign of a culture of death tends to be catching up more with the so-called elite and the economically and socially well-paced groups, most of them belonging to the upper strata of the society, to whose standards of behaviour the majority look up and try to emulate. The emphasis on quality of life in every sphere, and the projections of a possible glossy and picturesque quality enhancement thrust (against the more demanding, ever-dragging and -increasing quantity considerations) in private as well as social life create a false aura of goodness and rightness among the naïve and the innocent.

In this context we should distinguish between two groups: the first, endorsing a culture of death as aggressively as possible, of whom at least a minority making economic and career advantage (mostly at the cost of human lives), and the second, adopting a lethargic insensitivity to the life of others. Although the first seems to be dangerous, as this group is more outspoken, the second is debasing the foundations of value of life in an indirect but very subtle way. The utter lack of concern for the lives of many a person in the society – especially those who are ill treated either by neglect in the family or as a result of social ostracism – is absolutely outrageous. There is an unheard cry for attention and openness towards many unbecoming practices meted out to human beings themselves in the neighbourhood of almost all of us. How many of us dare to respond, to take up the challenges, and face the uncertainties? The resulting personal initiatives would definitely make a difference, hopefully resulting in launching a positive transformation both in outlook and action patterns in the life of the society at large.

### 3. Assault on Life from Medical Field

Life is the central focus of medical science. The very purpose for which medical science exists is to promote, support, and enhance life in all forms, and at all levels of existence. The service rendered by millions of healthcare personnel all over the world is, indeed, a great service rendered to the humanity as a whole. However, proponents of a culture of death do not hesitate to drag medical science as well as healthcare personnel into life-denying compromises and controversies around issues of human life. It is alarming to note the opinion of a medical historian, himself a surgeon, Shurwin B. Nuland: "The patient is every day less a human being and more a complicated challenge in intensive care, testing the genius of some of the most brilliantly aggressive of the hospital's clinical warriors."<sup>3</sup> In fact, the very foundation upon which medical science is built, and is thriving on, is life itself; the very purpose of medicine itself – traditionally identified as "cure and care" – is to promote, support, and enhance human life in its multifarious forms. The recent thrust on quality healthcare, though praiseworthy as far as the effectiveness and efficiency are concerned, has caused the sidetracking of at least one important dimension of healthcare, i.e., the caring dimension (due to an over-emphasis on the curative procedures, which bring about tangible and immediate results).

Further, the major interests of a large group of physicians belonging to the modern globalised era lie in lifestyle and livelihood; unfortunately, the radical changes in healthcare delivery system promote the role of the physician as a clinical and economic manager rather than a professionally committed healthcare animator who has to awaken everyone involved to take life-enhancing decisions and to put them into practice, even if it were to personally inconvenience him or her, and thus to be an advocate of life in any patient.<sup>4</sup> The economic and career advantages scrupulously enjoyed

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<sup>3</sup>Shurwin B. Nuland, *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994, 149. However, I am proud to admit that my personal association with medical professionals has always been very enriching and life-affirming. Their unflinching commitment in catering to human life – even when some of them were at the brink of death or 'inhuman' existence, according to the standards accepted by the culture of death proponents – is praiseworthy and promising.

<sup>4</sup>The Hippocratic Oath (5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) – both in its classical and many modern versions, taken by the medical professional as they begin their medical practice – obviously expresses the positive affirmation of human life. A pertinent passage in the Oath reads: "I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked

by such tend to jeopardise the prospects of even those who are willing to spend their lives for the sake of promoting human life. Further, this tends to dictate a poor response on the part of many physicians in availing themselves for life enhancement programmes and procedures in healthcare.

#### 4. Modern Democracies and Culture of Death

Along with and apart from the healthcare sector, more serious danger lurks in the legislative authorities and judiciary. Although many nations apparently and outwardly subscribe to democratic form of governance, the actual legislative procedures – and to a great extent, even the functioning of the judiciary – are being manoeuvred by a powerful minority that has access to the inner sanctuaries and strongholds of political clout.

The natural and proclaimed aim of any state being the protection and enhancement of the public welfare or the common good, all members of the legislature and the judiciary have a responsibility to make sure that every adopted step ensures the realization of the same end. Human life is the basic substratum of this common good; in fact, in the absence of human life, there does not arise any consideration for common good at all. Then, naturally, the members of the legislature and judiciary have a bounden responsibility to ensure that life is respected, protected, and augmented through the enactment of laws and judicial activities. Any government and legal system that are accepted by the people should validate itself in terms of sound moral foundations; moreover, exercise of their powers could qualify to be moral only when it ultimately counters life negation in every form, and positively results in life affirmation and total life enhancement of the society. For example, legalisation of abortion, euthanasia, etc. – which has made out to be morally *valid* and legally *acceptable* in many democracies, through the concerted effort of legislative, executive, and judiciary bodies in any given state, with the powerful backup of the vested interests – clearly goes against the demands

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for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly, I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy." Ludwig Edelstein, trans., *The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, and Interpretation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943. However, in the context of the present day practices upheld by many of these professionals, some tend to sarcastically rename the Oath as "Hypocritical Oath." I am of the opinion that the collapse of Hippocratic tradition in the field of medicine and healthcare signals a catastrophe in the contemporary human history, as respect and reverence to human life run alarmingly too low.

of a life affirming moral system. Certainly, the moral foundations of the authority of such a state are challengeable. The moral foundations of the society are eroding due to a lack of commitment on the part of the state, the acclaimed custodian and protector of the age-old value systems and foundations of human life. The net result of all these is that the future of humanity appears to be so bleak from the perspective of the enhancement of value of life.

Through the powerful backing of the media – enjoying a wider reach in terms of the globalised coverage – a minority is capable of manipulating the majority opinion to such an extent that what is finally legislated by the ruling government is apparently acclaimed to be the choice of the majority! The subtle manner adopted in this game is being sustained by the intelligence and finances lavishly supplied by multinational companies, whose stakes all over the world continue to determine and change the course of events in human history and cultures.

The strategic manoeuvring employed by the so-called developed world in manipulating a large majority of the human race results in an almost total neglect and denial of life of those humans who are categorised to be of sub-human or even of animal status (for example, consider the treatment meted out to the prisoners of war in the recent Afghan and Iraq conflicts).<sup>5</sup> This distressing situation calls for a positive involvement on the part of those who, finally, turn out to be the losers of life. While the 'divide and rule' policy will be continuously employed by these forces to get their selfish designs fulfilled by hook or crook, others have to see to it that they do not become self-annihilating preys in the hands of the proponents of a culture of death. The self-alienating and destructive strategies of individuals as well as nations should be replaced by a strong collective will that is capable of binding and holding together the fragile lives of many a human being, which, in turn, would become the strongest force on the face of the earth, if groomed properly.

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<sup>5</sup>If we objectively analyse what had been happening before and after 9/11 all over the world, the number of people who have been killed has gone up without any due proportion, the respect and reverence accorded to human life have suffered enormously, especially in dealing with the lives of Afro-Asians, and, finally, the world is gradually becoming the worst place to live in as human life is endangered and uncertainties are building up from all corners.

### 5. Challenges to Life from Consequentialism

There is an alarming tendency, especially among a group of intellectuals – whose presence, penetration, and activity are all pervasive among the national and international media and bureaucracies – who tend to value only those human lives which are qualitatively better placed. In fact, they subscribe to and practice a preferential option for the *best*, based on qualitative utility concerns. Even in 1888, Nietzsche, the proponent of *will to power*, wrote as follows:

The invalid is a parasite on society. In a certain state it is indecent to go on living. To vegetate on in cowardly dependence on physicians and medicaments after the meaning of life, [or] the *right* to life, has been lost; [It] ought to entail the profound contempt of society. Physicians, in their turn, ought to be the communicators of this contempt – not prescriptions, but every day a fresh dose of *disgust* with their patients... To create a new responsibility, that of the physician, in all cases in which the highest interest of life, of *ascending* life, demands the most ruthless suppression and sequestration of degenerating life – for example, in determining the right to reproduce, the right to be born, the right to live..., to die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Death of one's own free choice, death at the proper time, with a clear head and with joyfulness, consummated in the midst of children and witnesses: so that an actual leave-taking is possible while he who is leaving *is still there*, likewise an actual evolution of what has been desired and what achieved in life, an *adding-up* of life – all this is in contrast to the pitiable and horrible comedy Christianity has made of the hour of death.<sup>6</sup>

This attitude of absolute personal autonomy in birth, life, and death, proposed by Nietzsche seems to have caught up with the present day generation in a far more subtle manner.

Following, perhaps, the footsteps of Nietzsche, there are many contemporary philosophers who argue for absolute autonomy in the case of life and death decisions. A dangerous line of argument, for example, is initiated by Peter Singer, the most vibrant philosophical exponent of consequentialist approach to ethics in the West and the one who could be

<sup>6</sup>Fredrick Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols in The Twilight of the Idols and The Anarchist*, London: Penguin, 1990, 98.

considered most responsible for the startling changes in the moral attitude that seem to be fashionable today, in the following passage:

... the fact that a being is a human being, in the sense of a member of the species *Homo sapiens*, is *not relevant* to the wrongness of killing it; it is, rather, characteristics like rationality, autonomy, and self-consciousness that make a difference. Infants lack these characteristics. Killing them, therefore, cannot be equated with killing normal human beings, or any other self-conscious beings.<sup>7</sup>

The slippery slope is obvious in the sentence that follows the quoted passage. He continues: "This conclusion is not limited to infants..." The culture of death defended by Singer extends its wings far and wide. After having endorsed the method of "suicide machine" developed and *prescribed* by Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a Michigan Pathologist, Singer narrates the "successful saga" of those proponents of voluntary euthanasia as follows:

There is now one country in which doctors can openly *help* their patients to die in a peaceful and dignified way. In the Netherlands, a series of court cases during the 1980s upheld a doctor's right to assist a patient to die, even if that assistance amounted to giving the patient a lethal injection. Doctors in the Netherlands who comply with certain guidelines ... can now quite openly carry out euthanasia and can report this on the death certificate without fear of prosecution. It has been estimated that about 2,300 deaths each year result from euthanasia carried out in this way.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 182; emphasis added. In this connection it would be worth turning to some of the assumptions of Singer, which are farfetched and baseless. For example, he categorically asserts in his *Practical Ethics* that "the parents do not want the disabled child to live" (183). If this assertion were true, how come that many disabled children continue to live, mostly with their own biological parents? Later, in the same work he holds that life begins in any "morally significant sense when there is awareness of one's existence over time. The metaphor of life as a journey also provides a reason for holding that in infancy life's voyage has scarcely begun" (189-190). The implied sense of the text is that the unborn and the newly born do not deserve the rights accessible to the grownups; the value of their existence is a concession from the *able* and "rational, autonomous and self-conscious" *in actuality*. What does he refer to as "morally significant"? Can it be based on a mere metaphor, "life as a journey"?

<sup>8</sup>Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 176-178; emphasis added.



A glossy but wrong understanding of peace and dignity at the deathbed is proposed to bypass the moral vacuum resulting from the insensitivity to life and its dynamics, when it concerns the lives of the yet-to-be-born, yet-to-be-self-conscious, dependent and disabled, sick and dying. It is put forth as the only way to enhance the standards of living and the quality of life of those who are already born and grown up, especially in the context of the limited available resources in this world. If at all anybody feels guilty in adopting such an approach, Singer recommends an abandoning of "those doctrines about the sanctity of human life,"<sup>9</sup> as such doctrines tend to 'emotionally' and 'intellectually' curtail the culture of death unleashed by him and other subscribers. According to Singer, acceptance of any doctrine founded on the inherent value of life and its inviolability is tantamount to "the refusal to accept killing."<sup>10</sup>

We have no difficulty in accepting death, as it is inherently part of life itself. In fact, acceptance of death should accompany a properly valid moral perspective. Equating death with killing, however, is a farfetched attempt, and a morally unacceptable stand, irrespective of the mode and the need of killing, especially when it comes to taking the life of a human being – in any form.

## 6. Kantian Firm Yeah to Life: A Paradigm from the History of Philosophy

The continued assault on human life calls for serious concern from every reflecting human being. While the number of subscribers of consequentialism and like-minded theories goes up, and the traditional ethical doctrines seem to be almost neglected, we shall not forget the fact that millions of people still continue to subscribe to traditional religious ethical positions; moreover, there are also many an ethical doctrine proposed by various philosophers – I do not mean to say that all such doctrines are perfect and foolproof in their content and approach – which uphold the value of human life as the most important goal in life. One

<sup>9</sup>Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 175. In another book, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of our Traditional Ethics*, Singer announced the death of "old ethics," and proposed that a "new ethical approach" is on its way, although its definitive shape is still to be determined. Thus, according to him, the view of morality coming down to us through the centuries and rooted in various ethical traditions having their foundation in religious faith is outdated and no more operational.

<sup>10</sup>Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 175.

such doctrine can be located in the writings of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who has turned out to be a veteran as well as a contentious figure in the field of ethical deliberations.

Human life assumes the central position in the ethical deliberations of Kant. To him, a human person is an end in himself or herself, and there shall be no other end for any human action. Human beings, according to him, assume this central role as they are capable of giving a law unto themselves, and as they are capable of instilling purposiveness into the nature as a whole. In his quest to epitomise human nature as the highest state of existence in nature, Kant insists that everyone should be a moral being, by living a life in accordance with the moral law. The most important principle that is proposed by Kant for moral application is his categorical imperative. For him, it is the fundamental principle of all reasoning and acting, because "everyone does, in fact, decide by this rule whether actions are morally good or bad."<sup>11</sup> The categorical imperative becomes the primary criterion in deciding the course of action for an individual person. He holds that "... human reason, with this compass in hand, is well able to distinguish, in all cases that present themselves, what is good or evil, right or wrong; ... there is no need of science or philosophy for knowing what one has to do in order to be honest and good, and indeed to be wise and virtuous."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, only those actions that are compatible with autonomy of the will (this being a basic aspect of the categorical imperative) are permitted, while those that do not harmonize with the categorical imperative are considered to be forbidden.

The categorical imperative, then, commands us absolutely either to do an action or to refrain from doing it, insisting on unconditional obedience to the moral law, and expressing a strict practical necessitation or obligation and universal validity. That means, any particular moral law must be objective and beyond personal limits, that it cannot be determined by the desires or inclinations of a particular individual. It must also be impartially applicable among various individuals at all times, allowing no exception as to the changing circumstances and needs: the moral law, according to Kant, is not different for different times and different peoples. Incorporating the necessary and universal characteristics of the categorical imperative, he has expressed the principle (in its strict form, according to

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<sup>11</sup>Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. V, 69 (Beck 72).

<sup>12</sup>Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. IV, 404 (Paton 71-72).

Kant) as follows: "*act on the maxim which can at the same time be made a universal law.*"<sup>13</sup>

The categorical imperative is a self-legislated law, which is at the same time autonomous and universal. Therefore, it is said to be a legislation effected by "each for all and all for each."<sup>14</sup> The nature of the categorical imperative as a universal law stresses that no rule of action is morally acceptable which cannot be considered as a law applicable to everyone and legislated by everyone. The fact that all rational beings are equally self-legislative with regard to the moral law indicates an ideal and spontaneous movement in the direction of forming a community based on the common law leading to a harmonization of all ends. From the stage of accepting a maxim (a subjective principle animating an action on the part of the individual) as a practical rule, moral deliberation concerns itself not primarily with interests of a particular individual or a limited group of individuals but with possibility of a universal community of free men. This is because making a universal law on the part of the moral agent is always possible only in terms of a moral matrix that is communitarian as well as universal in character; this points to the possibility of a kingdom of ends. In a kingdom of ends everyone treats oneself and others never merely as means; instead taking into account the self-legislating autonomous nature into consideration, all treat others as ends-in-themselves and thus they respect the humanity shared by all human beings. This kingdom ensues both from the power of legislating for oneself, and the imperative to treat everyone else as an end-in-itself.<sup>15</sup>

According to Kant, a human being is endowed with three original drives or predispositions the fulfilment or realization of which would be

<sup>13</sup>Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. IV, 436-37 (Paton 104). Although Kant has stated that there is only one categorical imperative, he later presents us with as many as five (or more) formulations. See Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. IV, 421-438 (Paton 88-106).

<sup>14</sup>Llamzon, *Reason, Experience and the Moral Life*, 39.

<sup>15</sup>The kingdom of ends, depicted as a perfect ideal state of harmonious existence of individuals in a community, may be seen as a moral utopia far removed from the actual life of human beings which often functions without regard to what ought to be done or not to be done. Kant admits that it can never be fully realized within the order of nature, or at least, that we cannot be apodictically certain about reaching it. In Kant's scheme, however, it is definitely "a practical ideal which must necessarily serve as a model which all finite rational beings must strive toward even though they cannot reach it." Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. V, 32 (Beck 33).

the key to a truly human existence and the attainment of the highest good in the moral world. They are the predispositions to animality, to humanity, and to personality.<sup>16</sup> Animality is our predisposition as a physical being, which strives for self-preservation and preservation of the species as a whole. In other words, it involves our pre-rational or instinctual basis that preserves, propagates, and cares for our own physical being and our offspring. The predisposition to humanity lays stress on our social being, which sees to it that our natural self-development is achieved, whereby we also acquire worth in the opinion of others.<sup>17</sup> Left to itself, it considers man as a rational animal, and is said to involve a capacity to use reason in the service of inclinations. However, Kant holds that the characteristic of humanity is the power to set an end and to work towards its realization, which involves our capacity to choose, and to desire. The third, the predisposition to personality is our power to adopt the moral law as the end, and our consciousness of being obligated to respect it. So, going beyond the concept of a mere rational animal, a human being is considered as a moral and responsible agent. Despite the fact that the first two may be employed against our moral predisposition, for Kant, all of them are truly “predispositions toward good (they enjoin the observance of the law).”<sup>18</sup> Animality and humanity can become unworthy of a human being when they are employed against the moral law, thus against the predisposition to personality. The true nature of a human being can be realized only when all of these operate in a concerted and integrated manner, where, specifically, respect for the moral law, which is our predisposition to personality, assumes the decisive role.

Man, for Kant, is the final end of creation, as without man the mutuality of the subordinated purposes would have no ultimate point of reference. As man by nature is oriented towards morality, and aims at the realization of the highest good in the world, Kant assumes that there shall not arise a further question as to why man is taken to be the final end. Thus, a teleological outlook on nature leads us to picture the whole world as a system that culminates in man as its ultimate purpose, its final end. That is, insofar as we consider man (not merely as an animal) as endowed

<sup>16</sup>Kant, *Religion*, Ak. VI, 26-27 (Greene & Hudson 22-23); see also Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, pages 148-49; Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*, 237.

<sup>17</sup>Kant, *Anthropology* (Dowdell), 270; Kant, *Religion*, Ak. VI, 26 (Greene & Hudson 21).

<sup>18</sup>Kant, *Religion*, Ak. VI, 28 (Greene & Hudson 23).

with rationality and the capacity to guide his actions by the moral law, to that extent we can say that he is the ultimate purpose of nature on earth.

There is, therefore, a responsibility on the part of a human being "to prepare him for what he must do himself in order to be a final purpose;"<sup>19</sup> that is, everyone has to constantly engage in the realization of the moral nature and, thus, the highest good by acting according to principles. So, a human being moulds nature as a purpose having one's own purpose of realizing the highest good at its zenith, not according to any external stimuli or principles, but primarily by the self-given purposes. Realizing one's vocation as a human being together with working towards its realization by moral practice in freedom constitutes our ultimate aim; according to Kant, its realization constitutes culture. It is human capacity to set purposes or ends in accordance with the moral law, and to coordinate all faculties towards its realization. As he puts it, culture "is the aptitude and practical skill for all kinds of purposes for which nature (external and internal) can be used by him."<sup>20</sup>

The highest good is said to be "attainable through human collaboration."<sup>21</sup> Community, for Kant, is not a mere banding together of individuals (even with common purposes),<sup>22</sup> but presupposes the intelligible and intersubjective existence of human beings that makes conscious cooperation possible. This is unique, as a human community does emerge neither merely from intellectual activities (as in the case of pure rational beings) nor from mere feelings of instinct (as in the case of animals) but in the ingenious integration of both in reflection. It is this process that results in evolving a culture, where, as Kant conceives it in his three *Critiques*, reason "is free from all private purposes" and "determines our will to impart to the sensuous world the form of a system of rational beings,"<sup>23</sup> thus evolving the higher dimensions of humanity in community.

<sup>19</sup>Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §83, Ak. V, 431 (Bernard 281).

<sup>20</sup>Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §83, Ak. V, 430 (Bernard 279). This [practical] skill consists in disciplining, that includes "the freeing of the will from the despotism of desires ... according as the purposes of reason require" Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §83, Ak. V, 432 (Bernard 282).

<sup>21</sup>Kant, *On the Old Saw*, Ak. VIII, 280n (Ashton 47).

<sup>22</sup>Kant writes: "Man was not meant to belong to a herd like the domesticated animals, but rather, like the bee, to belong to a hive community. It is necessary for him always to be a member of some civil society" *Anthropology* (Dowdell), 247.

<sup>23</sup>Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A813/B841 and Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. V, 43 (Beck 45), respectively.

The ultimate end of achieving culture being the realization of the Kingdom of Ends, as conceived in Kant's practical philosophy, community is backed up by the universal legislation of the moral law and the harmonious cooperative pursuit of individuals for the highest good.

It is only in the context of an intersubjective framework of a community that we can legitimately speak of the universal legislation and practice of the moral law: Morality, strictly speaking, is not meant for particular groups alone but for the universal community of free human beings. The very basis of the categorical imperative as the universal law assumes, though this is nowhere clearly articulated by Kant, that the self-legislating individual is not an isolated individual but forms an integral part of the community. If not, there is no point in one agent legislating for others, as is implied in the universal formula. This is also the case with regard to the other formulations of the categorical imperative. Moral law cannot be an end-in-itself in sheer isolation, for then it loses its very meaning: The individual agent is to be more explicitly seen as a member of the human society. So also, 'humanity' derives only from community, for if there cannot be a community of human beings, in the Kantian sense, we cannot speak of the general characteristics of being human at all. The very fact that one makes universal laws as a member of the universal kingdom is explicitly communitarian in nature, as is the case with the third formulation of the categorical imperative.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the nature of the universal law clearly implies that a moral agent left merely to oneself is not moral, and hence not human, as his or her self-sufficiency could be derived only in the intersubjective context of a community in which self-legislation is operative and effective.

The rational nature of man, endowed with a capacity for genuine interaction and relating, makes him a relational creature. The origination of obligation and duty which is so central to the moral law points to the necessity of more than a single individual.<sup>25</sup> Hence, social nature is not something added to human beings as part of his or her evolution. As Kant conceives it, "man by his very nature is a being meant for society."<sup>26</sup> It is the expression of our intellectual nature in the form of a community, which is not something externally forced upon us but another vital dimension of

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<sup>24</sup>Even moral autonomy is not an individual autonomy but calls for intersubjectivity. See Kant, *Metaphysic of Morals*, Ak. VI, 454 (Gregor 122).

<sup>25</sup>Kant, *Metaphysic of Morals*, Ak. VI, 442 (Gregor 108).

<sup>26</sup>Kant, *Metaphysic of Morals*, Ak. VI, 471 (Gregor 143).

being consistently rational and moral, which, in turn, is destined for the realization of our social goals through a collective endeavour in the highest good.

Attainment of the highest good is the moral perfection not only of an individual but of humanity as a whole, and such a moral perfection is regarded as "the end of creation."<sup>27</sup> This envisions that individual members are not working for the realization of their mere subjective ends but, by obeying the moral law and cultivating a respect for all persons, there emerges a systematic harmony of purposes within such a community, whereby each member or lower-level community is enabled to go beyond its (instinctual or legal) boundaries so as to constitute a world community or, as Kant names it, a commonwealth, i.e., a community that incorporates "the whole of mankind."<sup>28</sup>

In order to facilitate both emergence and virtuous maintenance of a commonwealth, the "maxims of common human understanding" that Kant presents in the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" may be of help. "They are: (1) to think for oneself; (2) to put ourselves in thought in place of everyone else; and (3) always to think consistently."<sup>29</sup> Although these principles are implied in Kant's law of autonomy, by employing them one can not only guard oneself against errors but can certainly create a disposition for community; in fact, they may be said to be the rules for becoming human (as rational and relational) in a community. Thus, having the moral law at the heart of a community, it strives for the realization of virtue as the highest good, the ultimate realization of which can only be hoped to come in future, though our moral actions in accordance with the categorical imperative make us worthy of it.

Kantian moral approach to life indicates that there cannot be a bioethics that accepts different principles for different peoples and different times: moral law is universal; so too, none can exempt oneself from the moral law: that which is universal is also necessary. Moreover, the variations of the categorical imperative point out that the moral agent, who is capable of self-legislation, submits oneself to his/her own

<sup>27</sup>Kant, *Religion*, Ak. VI, 61 (Greene & Hudson 54).

<sup>28</sup>Kant, *Religion*, Ak. VI, 96 (Greene & Hudson 88).

<sup>29</sup>Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §40, Ak. V, 294 (Bernard 136). It may be borne in mind that if the community were not included in the perspective of the self-legislating individual, autonomy could be arbitrary as well as detrimental to morality itself.

autonomous law, legislated and promulgated in view of the entire humanity: moral law is nothing extrinsic to human beings. Further, a moral person, being the foundation and epitome of morality, has to be always treated as an end, and never merely as a means. All these indicate, especially in the context of our concerns of bioethics, that none among human beings – whatever be the stage of its development or whatever be the condition of its existence – shall be used as a means for the furthering of the apparent good for other agents. This would include the foetus, the new born, the infant, the grown up/adult, the handicapped, the sick, the old and infirm, and the dying; so also this list would include the scientists who are engaged in various types of researches related to human life, medical and healthcare personnel, etc.

The questions such as ‘to what extent can researches into human life shall proceed’, Kantian philosophical initiative would instruct us that it shall in no way take away the humanhood of any one involved. For example, in stem cell researches, ultimately what happens is the extraction, manipulation, and use of the cells of a developing foetus, and the ultimate destruction of a human being at its early stages of existence: ultimately, a foetus is being used for another person’s advantage. This definitively goes against Kantian injunction to treat everyone as an end and never a means; moreover, the life of a human person cannot be violated by manipulation, injury, or killing, as he or she is the source of the highest good, and it is only through the life of human beings that the highest good can be finally realized. To take another example of the surrogate motherhood in which a womb is rented or leased out for a sum of money: Again, it is immoral as the body of a woman is being used as a means for carrying the foetus to term. It is especially so, as the woman in fact makes herself available for another person/persons with a view to economic gain. Human cloning (both reproductive and therapeutic), if succeeded as it is being projected by scientists, also raises similar issues. In both cases, instead of the natural development of a person through the sexual reproductive means, human cloning attempts to *make* or *produce* human persons with a view to alleviate all the negative traits in the human genome, and improve the human race in terms of quality and physical excellence. Kantian approach, I believe, will not tolerate the treatment of a human person as a thing or property, being created through asexual means of reproduction; the imaginative possibility of replicating certain individuals as per the need (or whims and fancies) and availability of resources, is again morally challengeable. Even the therapeutic cloning meets with the danger of



treating a person – though made through asexual reproductive methods – merely as a means for the realization of certain ends of others.

All these shall not be exclusive and individual decisions arrived at by individual human beings; instead they should be moral decisions that we arrive at as members of a human community, the commonwealth of moral persons. In this process, the tips that Kant has given us should definitely be of assistance, as individuals have to exercise their responsibility in this regard. Of course, each one has (1) to think for oneself, (2) to arrive at every moral decision by taking into account everyone else, and (3) always to think consistently. If these are observed, by abiding by the universal and categorical imperative, we would definitely be capable of enhancing human life and remedy any damage that has been done to humanity in and through the novel techniques and scientific advancements that tend to downplay and exploit human life, even if it is in the case of a few individual human persons. If individuals, the society as a whole, the state governments, judiciary, research organisations, and medical personnel were to be aware of these principles, I hope, we will be able to improve and live a fully humane life within the web of human relationships, universally and necessarily.

### **7. Twinkling Hope: Community and Interdependence**

The thriving of human life is possible in the twenty-first century only through the cooperative activity of human beings – although this may seem to be a mirage, an unrealizable fantastic ideal for ever. In fact, the human inventiveness that has characterised the contemporary world in many of its facets has been capable of ushering in a unitary world, a global village with dynamic networking of human as well as technical relationships. Although there are many undesirable and unwelcome attitudes, thoroughly manipulative strategies, and unhealthy practices, that tend to belittle this noble human leap towards a healthy and holistic existence in the globalised world of the present, the healthy trends have proved beyond doubt that interdependence is no more a theory or a sheer ideal, but a fact. In place of independence that had marked the modern times, interdependence has evolved to be the most obvious fact of a meaningful and effective mode of human existence. Thus, interdependence is the condition and quality of human existence in the contemporary world.

In the context of a human society, which by its nature is both intersubjective and interdependent, and from which none can exempt himself or herself, any human community must not allow either the newly formed lives in the womb or the dying persons about to move to the tomb – both being incapable of sustaining their lives without the active cooperation of others – to experience the burdensomeness, neglect, isolation, and alienation that often attends the human lives being experimented, aborted, or those undergoing the dying process. Not only in death, but also in birth, no one shall be isolated and alienated – the most dreaded situation faced by a human being who is part and parcel of a human community.

Further, whatever is the condition of another human being – in life or death – no one shall dare to initiate even an alienated decision-making process. No decision, not even a decision arrived at by a particular individual, shall be a humane decision if it is taken not by taking into account the entire humanity; that is what is implied by the universal dimension of the moral law. Hence, whether it is a decision of life – like, *in vitro* fertilisation, embryo transplantation, surrogate motherhood, or even cloning – or death – as in the case of abortion, allowing someone to die, or euthanasia – the universal moral implications are to be definitely taken into account. None of the above stated delicate and complicated human situations shall be approached as involving only a single individual or family: all of them are to be finally decided in view of the entire humanity, as no individual is an isolated one as far as moral life is concerned.

## 8. Conclusion

It is essential that we convincingly establish the need to evolve, support, and enhance a culture of life in the human society. The specific role of religions and states in this process is an obvious fact. However, the initiative and insistence should primarily ensue from individual human beings, who have to consciously design a perspective of life and carry out their lives to the extent of respecting, supporting, and ennobling the life of oneself and others with a view to further strengthen the foundations of human life, culture, and values. This requires that we are capable of integrating the 'ideal of science' (crystallised in genetic engineering, medical research and practice, etc.) and the 'ideal of personality'

(crystallised in the moral stand in which human person is accorded primacy).<sup>30</sup>

In fact, it is our conviction that human life cannot be lived, and a culture of life cannot be affirmed, promoted, and enhanced in the absence of mutual love and a passionate commitment: a love that is continuously expressed and mutually experienced between persons, and a firm, personal commitment that ensues from a trusting and self-giving person-to-person communion which, I am sure, would last forever as the springboard and cradle of a culture of life. All scientific advancements and technologies, theories and philosophies, therefore, can be approached only within the context of such a loving and caring relationship between or among individual human persons situated within the ambience of a community animated by universally applicable moral principles.

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<sup>30</sup>If the ideal of science were given primacy, human person, especially his freedom, will have to be submitted to the laws of science regulated by the mechanical causality, which would result in declaring freedom as an impossible reality or a mere illusion altogether. On the other hand, if the ideal of personality were given primacy, naturally, the ideal of science would meet a fundamental limit and will have to be rejected, as an overall ideal.