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# Moral commitments and the transformation of politics: Kant, Gandhi and beyond

by
**Ananta K. Giri**

**Madras Institute of Development Studies**
79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar
Adyar, Chennai 600 020

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**Ananta Kumar Giri**
**Madras Institute of Development Studies**

## Abstract

At the turn of the millennium, we are confronted with the challenge of an integral remoralization of life as most the dilemmas we face today in our personal lives and the public sphere are moral dilemmas which call for the cultivation of a new moral commitment and a new moral language to talk about our identities and intersubjectivities. The modernist discourse of morality talks about morality mostly in the language of power and this political reduction is in need of rethinking and transcendence today. Both Immanuel Kant and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi help us in this rethinking as they provide us a new language to talk about both morality and politics where, as Kant says, "all politics must bend its knee before the right." The present article discusses the devotion to moral commitments and transformation of politics in Kant and Gandhi. It presents their work in remoralization of politics and presents the zone of convergent illuminations they both share. Finally, it discusses some limitations within the agenda of both Kant and Gandhi as both of them have a filial attitude to authority, an attitude which now needs to be transcended by the spirit of radical democracy whose hour has come.

# Moral Commitments and the Transformation of Politics: Kant, Gandhi and Beyond

**Ananta Kumar Giri**
**Madras Institute of Development Studies**

> It is precisely the same as if I sought to fathom how freedom itself is possible as the causality of a will. There I abandon a philosophical basis of explanation, and I have no other. I could, no doubt, proceed to flutter about on the intelligible world, which still remains left to me...the world of intelligences; but although I have an *Idea* of it, which has its own grounds, yet I have not the slightest *acquaintance* with such a world, nor can I ever attain such acquaintance by all the efforts of my natural power of reason. My Idea signifies only a "something" that remains over when I have excluded from the grounds determining my will everything that belongs to the world of sense: its sole purpose is to restrict the principle that all motives come from the field of sensibility, by setting bounds to this field and by showing that it does not comprise all in all within itself, *but there is still more beyond it; yet with this "more" I have no further acquaintance.*
>
> *Immanuel Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, p. 130-131.*

## The Problem:

At the turn of the millenium, one of the most important challenges that confront us is the challenge of an integral remoralization of life as "morality gets no clear status in the constitution of a structurally differentiated lifeworld" (Habermas 1987: 92) now. The differentiatin of societies and fragmentation of subjectivities which are celebrated with the postmodern celebration of difference have failed to realize the moral bond that exists and ought to exist among us at the mid-point of differences. What to speak of realizing the moral bond in manifold webs of relationships, contemporary movements in discourse and society show very little awareness that most of the dilemmas we face today are moral dilemmas and thus we now need a new moral language to talk about and realize our identities and intersubjectivities. Contemporary challenges urge us to rethink our problems morally and "universalize our interests" from a normative point of view by the establishment of moral communities at different levels of the work of self, culture and society. But while there is an epochal challenge of remoralization of our lives by discovering the bonds that connect the self and the other and the "ties that bind the fate of an individual to that of every other—making even the most alien person a member of one's community" (cf. Habermas 1990 : 20), our preparation in both discourse and practice to respond to these challenges and create transformative bases remains much to be desired. A case in point here is the way we continue to think about morality by making it an adjunct to politics and will to power. Western philosophical tradition from Plato to Hobbes, and even unto Rawls, is characterized by a "politicization of morality"—"the attempt to derive moral principles from political considerations" (Edelman 1990 : 108). In such accounts of morality, "the purpose of moral practices is to secure and maintain for men mutually advantageous social arrangements" and "the content of `morality' ... is a product of the polis" (ibid: 9). But the task of rethinking at the turn of the millennium urges us to realize: "In none of the accounts of morality belonging to this tradition [i.e., the tradition of politicized morality] are the needs, interest and desires whose satisfaction is at issue themselves characterized as specifically 'moral' needs, interests or desires. That is to say, we do not begin with any moral discrimination concerning them. The conception of morality at the root of these accounts itself rules out that possibility" (ibid). And the fact that we cannot even for a moment renunciate power even while talking about the imperative of responsibility comes out clearly in the following lines of Hans Jonas: "It must be understood that we are confronted with a dialectic of power which can only be overcome by a further degree of power itself, not by quietest renunciation of power" (1984: 141).

The hegemony of such an approach to morality where power is an over-arching concern rather than moral bond as an end in itself should not be surprising as acquisition of power has been considered the end all and be all of emancipation in modernity. Power, politics and empowerment have provided determinant frames of self-constitution and social emancipation in the modern world so that everybody now wants to drink the "nectar" of power and nobody is concerned with the direction that power ought to take and the transformative

ends it must serve. This modernist preoccupation with power has now received new lease of life from an interlocutor such as Michael Foucault whose disciples assert that there is no escape from the circle of power and counter-power and any project of a "good life" which is determined to put power in its place and strives to actualize an unconditional ethical obligation of the self to the other is deemed to failure to begin with. But in Foucault himself, we also find a realisation of the limitation of power in ensuring human emancipation as he writes: "In fact, I have especially wanted to question politics—the questions I am trying to ask are not determined by a pre-established political outlook and do not tend to the realisation of some definite political project" (Foucault 1984: 376). In fact, questioning the modernist faith in politics and power in ensuring human emancipation constitutes another significant challenge before us as we enter inside a new millenium. The integral challenge of remoralization of life with which we began this conversation calls for a moral transformation of the field of politics and a moral transmutation of the valorized will to power where power becomes not an instrument of domination but one of *Bhakti* whose objective is to enhance human functioning and capability and facilitate the dawn of a more dignified relationship here on Earth. As Hannah Arendt would tell us, to have power is to act "in concert, on the basis of making and keeping promises, mutually binding one another, covenanting" (Cohen & Arato 1992: 178).

If moralization of life and transmutation of the logic of power are singlemost challenges facing us now, then Immanuel Kant and Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi provide us important insights and resources to come to terms with these challenges and help us go beyond by creating transformative bases of action and reflection. As we take a step towards realizing this goal of an integral remoralization of life Kant and Gandhi offer us assuring friendship and hold our hands and take us beyond the dead end where we are condemned at present. When we read them we find that they talk to us directly and talk to us of a new possibility—a possibility of autonomy, Swaraj, moral duty, and the promotion of the possibility of Nature and humankind. Unlike much of the discursive utterances of the present in academic philosophy and outside, they talk to us in an evocative language which sting us, move us, animate us and provoke us to rethink ourselves and be worthy of new moral relationships. When Immanuel Kant writes in the concluding lines of his epochal, *Critique of Practical Reason*: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe..: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.* I do not seek or conjencture either of them as if they were veiled obscurities and extravagances beyond the horizon of my vision; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence," it moves us to touch both the within and without and be a seeker in this great pilgrimage of life. To connect this with the calling of moral commitment, the subject of our conversation here, Kant tells us that the journey towards the "moral law within me" "begins with my invisible self, my personality, and displays to me a world that has true infinity, but which can only be detected through the understanding, and with which... I know myself to be not... merely contingent, but [have] universal and necessary connection." Furthermore, this journey "infinitely elevates my worth... in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even the entire world of senses..." (quoted in Guyer 1992: 1).

But the moving significance of Kant lies not only in urging us with his heart-touching words to be ever wakeful to the imperative of moral responsibility in our lives, he also passionately strives to transcend the Machievellian distinction between morality and politics and moralise politics. When the whole modern movement was celebrating politics as an end in itself, we owe it to the indefatible courage of Kant that: "true politics can never take a step without rendering homage to morality" and "all politics must bend its knee before the right" (Kant 1795: 96). In this devotion to moralization of politics, Kant shares an evolutionary agenda with Gandhi who was to appear on the human scene 150 years later and provide a new language of politics and morality. The present paper discusses this devotion to moral commitment and transformation of politics in Kant and Gandhi. It is not merely interested in a comparison and contrast between these two masters and cataloguing their similarities and differences. The paper discusses their work in remoralization of politics and present the zone of convergent illuminations they both share. They, no doubt, have differences but there is a need to go beyond the surfaces in holding the hands of these two interlocutors since pure reason in Kant is not the functionalist reason of modern positivism and religion in Gandhi "consists not in outward ceremonial but an ever-growing inward response to the highest impulses that man is capable of" and to be true to religion, for Gandhi, "one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service of all life" (Iyer 1990: 159).

## Moral Commitments

Kant tells us in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* that "if any action is to be morally good, it is not enough that it should conform to the moral law—it must also be done for the sake of the moral law..." (1964: 57-58). Furthermore, "A good will is not because of what it effects or accomplishes....; it is good through its willing alone—that is, good in itself" (ibid: 62). Even if it accomplishes nothing, "it would still shine like a jewel for its own sake as something which has its full value in itself" (ibid). Kant urges us to realise that to be moral is to do one's duty without "some purpose or self-interest" (ibid: 65). In fact, this disinterested pursuit of duty constitutes the core of Kant's categorical imperative: "To tell the truth for the sake of duty is something entirely different from doing so out of concern for inconvenient results; for in the first case the concept of the action already contains in itself a law for me, while in the second case I have first of all to look around elsewhere in order to see what effects may be bound up with it for me" (ibid: 70). Kant further tells us: ".. pure reverence for practical law is what constitutes duty, to which every other motive must give way because it is the condition of a will good in itself, whose value is above else" (ibid: 71). Distinguishing between hypothetical imperative and categorical imperative, Kant tells us: while in the first "I ought not to lie if I want to maintain my reputation" in the second "I ought not to lie even if so doing were to bring not the slightest disgrace" (ibid: 108). Furthermore, universalizability of one's will is a very important characteristic in the consideration of categorical imperative: "Act as if the maxin of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature" (Guyer 1992: 320).

"The categorical imperative clearly requires a kind of impartiality in our behaviour, we are not permitted to make exceptions for ourselves, or to do what would not rationally permit others to do" (Schneewind 1992: 322). It requires us to be virtuous for which we must be "acting for the sake of the good of another" or for our own "perfection" and "viewing these ends as morally required" (ibid: 323). In order to understand both the duty to others and the need for universalizing our will, we cannot have a better evocative example than the following one offered by Kant (1964: 91) himself:

> A man is flourishing] but he sees others who have to struggle with great hardships (and whom he could easily help); and he thinks "what does it matter to me? Let everyone be as happy as Heaven wills or as he can make himself; I won't deprive him of anything; I won't even envy him; only I have no wish to contribute anything to his well-being or to his support in distress:" xxx But although it is possible that a universal law of nature could subsist in harmony with this maxim, yet it is impossible to *will* that such a principle should hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will which decided in this way would be in conflict with itself, since many a situation might arise in which the man needed love and sympathy from others, and in which, by such a law of nature sprung from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the help he wants for himself.

For Kant, human beings must be treated as ends in themselves, "not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will.." (ibid: 95). When they are used as a means, it constitutes a "violation of the rights of man" which Kant condemns (ibid: 97). Moral commiments for Kant requires reverential conduct of life in what Kant calls *Kingdom of ends*: "For rational beings all stand under the law that each of them should treat himself and all others, never merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end in himself" (ibid: 101). But in the *Kingdom of ends*, the human person is a maker of one's law. The human person has an autonomy and it is the unique contribution of Kant in helping us realizing that even while obeying a moral law as a categorical imperative one is not obeying an external command but one obeys a law which one has himself enacted. In the words of Kant: "But the law-making which determines all value must for this reason have a dignity—that is, an unconditioned and incomparable worth—for the appreciation of which—the word'reverence' is the only becoming expression. *Autonomy* is therefore the ground of the dignity of the human nature..." (ibid: 103).

Kant celebrates *autonomy* in the conduct of moral life and distinguishes it from heteronomy which is conformity to a standard. Kant's idea of autonomy is akin to Gandhi's idea of Swaraj but these do not bind human beings in the chains of possessive and annihilating individualism but create a creative and transformative mid-point between the self and the other, the subjective and objective, individual and society. As Kant himself writes: "Hence the principle of autonomy is never to choose except in such a way that in the same volition the

maxims of your choice are also present as universal law" (ibid: 108). The emergence of this mid-point between the subjective and the objective clearly comes out in Kant's third critique, the judgement of taste: "We rely on our innermost feelings of pleasure alone when estimating the beautiful—an aesthetic judgement is one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective—and yet we claim for the deliverances of taste a suprapersonal import. We believe it to be binding for all subjects and not merely for the one on whose experience it is based" (Schaper 1992: 375).

A commentator of Kant writes that "Kantian morality is communitarian, not individualistic" (Wood 1992: 407). But this is a limiting way of looking at the enriching possibility embedded in Kant's approach to morality which transcends the dualism between communitarianism and individualism. In Kant there is a creative conversation between the two at the center of which is the autonomous, autonomy-seeking and autonomy-realizing moral agent. It is a tragedy of western modernity that this aspect of Kant's thought has remained under developed as laterday Kantians and defenders of Enlightenment such as Jurgen Habermas have looked at it with derision the reflective nature of the solitary individual and have been overpowered by an anxiety to make this reflective solitary individual a part of the discursive formation of will (cf. Habermas 1990a). But in this while discourse has triumphed, the capacity for reflection and the ontological depth of autonomy that Kant had hinted at has certainly taken a back seat.

Though there is problem in the above commentator's communitarian / individualistic prism to look at Kantian morality, he is certainly on surer grounds when he writes: "Each of us has the vocation of furthering the moral good of others, and each stands in need of others for our own moral progress" (ibid: 407- 408). For Kant, this makes us members of a moral community. "Though membership in a moral community must be non-coercive, each individual has a moral duty to join with others in such a community. Kant describes this as a `duty sui generis' because it is not a duty of one individual to others, nor even a duty to oneself but a duty of the human race to itself to fulfil its common vocation to progress as a species" (ibid: 407-408). What Kant writes below reflects his contagious evolutionary zeal:

> It is not enough that an action should refrain from conflicting with humanity in our person as an end in itself; it must also *harmonize with this end.* Now there are in humanity capacities for greater perfection which form part of nature's purpose for humanity in our person. To neglect these can admittedly be compatible with the *maintenance* of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the *promotion* of this end (Kant 1964: 97-98).

But Kant makes clear that the realization of this capacity for greater perfection depends upon our strivings. To put it in the words of seekers such as Sri Aurobindo, evolutionary march of Nature and History depends upon the *sadhana* of the seeking souls. In his 1784 essay, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," Kant maintains that "it is not possible to decide through experience whether the human race's history shows it to be improving morally, getting worse, or vacillating endlessly between good and evil" (Wood 1992: 408). But Kant makes clear that the only way we can look at this question is by looking at "*our vocation to better ourselves* (both individually and collectively)" (ibid: 408; emphases added).

Kant makes clear that in this vocation to better ourselves in the pursuit of our moral commitments, there is a need to make a break from our clinical preoccupation with what he calls "personal happiness."1 Kant, again, tells us movingly: "Out of love for humanity I am willing to allow that most of our actions may accord with duty; but if we look more closely at our scheming and striving, we everywhere come across the dear self, which is always turning up; and it is on this that the purpose of our actions is based—not on the strict command of duty, which would often require self-denial" (Kant 1964: 75). But Kant fails to explicitly state that self-denial itself can constitute a source of happiness or what Gandhi calls "joy" for moral agents. What Kant calls self- denial is akin to what Gandhi calls suffering but in case of Gandhi, "A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art and is full of true joy" (Iyer 1990: 382). "Such life is the source of ever fresh springs of joy which never dry up and never satiate" (ibid). Gandhian suffering can redeem Kantian pure reason as Gandhi tells us: "The conviction has been growing upon me, that things of fundamental importance to the people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering. xx Suffering is infinitely more powerful... for converting the opponent and *opening his ears, which are otherwise shut, to the voice of reason*" (Gandhi quoted in Narayan 1968: 202; emphases added).

Both Kant and Gandhi tell us that moral laws have an autonomous existence in our lives. Gandhi tells us: "..morality dwells in our hearts. Even a man practising immorality would admit that he has been immoral. A wrong can never become right. Even where a people is vile, though men may not observe the moral law, they would make a pretence of doing so; they thus are obliged to admit that moral laws ought to be observed. Such is the greatness of morality" (Gandhi 1971: 300). Kant also tells us almost in a similar vein: "There is no one, not even the most hardened scoundrel —who, when presented with examples of honesty in purpose, of faithfulness to good maxims, and of kindness towards all (even when these are bound up with great sacrifices of advantage and comfort), does not wish that he too might be a man of like spirit. He is unable to realize such an aim in his own person—though only on account of his desires and impulses, but at the same time he wishes to be free from these inclinations which are a burden to himself" (Kant 1964: 122).

While morality is rooted in pure reason in Kant, in Gandhi it is rooted in the purity of our hearts. But this openness to human heart in the pursuit of moral commitments is not missing in Kant as well. As Allen Wood interprets, for Kant, "The legislator for a moral community must be someone whose will is in harmony with all moral duties, and someone who 'knows the heart' so as to judge each individual's inner disposition" (Wood 1992: 407). And what Kant himself writes seems as if these are the words flowing from the hearts of Gandhi: "But this is the concept of God as moral ruler of the world. Hence a moral community can be thought of only as a people under divine commands, i.e., *a people of God, under the laws of virtue*" (quoted in Wood 1992: 407).

Gandhi's meditations on morality also reflect the disinterested performance of duty of Kant. Gandhi tells us: "In the path of morality there is no such thing as reward for moral behaviour. If a man does some good deed, he does not do it to win applause, he does it because he must" (Gandhi 1971: 275). And what Gandhi writes below sounds so much like Kant but which reiterates the devotion to duty which has to be part of our moral life: "Just as an action prompted by the motive of material gain here on earth is non-moral, so also another done for considerations of comfort and personal happiness in another world is non-moral. That action is moral which is done only for the sake of doing good" (ibid: 286).

Recent discussion of moral consciousness has drawn our attention to the dimension of a "post-conventional" morality in self and society where one's moral consciousness is not a mere appendix to social conventions and one is able to differentiate oneself "from the rule and expectation of others" and differentiate one's "values in terms of self-chosen ethical principles" (Cortese 1990: 20; also see, Habermas 1990a). Both Kant and Gandhi also point towards this. Gandhi writes: "..it is a rule of ideal morality that it is not enough to follow the trodden path. We ought to follow the path which we know to be true, whether it is familiar or unfamiliar to us" (Gandhi 1971: 280). Kant's foregrounding of autonomy in the work of moral laws and his adoration of relfective judgement in his third critique as compared to the determinant judgement of the first critique which has the danger of making moral action one of "simple subsumption" (Schaper 1992: 369) also points to the post- conventional and radical critique of moral commitments in his agenda.

Gandhi's submission that to be moral is to follow the path of truth urges us to realise that what is law of truth in Gandhi is the law of morals in Kant. In both the paths there is the need to be a servant of one's conscience and none else. Gandhi writes, "...the etymological meaning of conscience is true knowledge. Conscience means listening to the inner voice" (Iyer 1990: 212). Gandhi tells us: "You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare in the face the whole world although the world may look at you with bloodshot eyes. Do not fear. Trust the little voice residing in your heart" (Narayan 1968: 78-79).

Both Kant and Gandhi tell us that the path of morality is the path of the pursuit of an ideal which has an intrinsic significance as a guiding frame and star of our life eventhough we may not realize our ideals fully. For Gandhi, "The day humanity ceases to believe in ideals, it will descend to the level of the beasts" (Iyer 1990: 131). It is interesting that while Kant talks about mathematics while enunciating the domain of a pure ideal, Gandhi talks about Euclid's geometry. In the words of Gandhi: "No one can draw a right angle, yet Euclid drew it up in imagination and gave the engineers a measuring rod by which the world has progressed" (Iyer 1990: 132). But Gandhi also tells us that in the pursuit of one's ideal there arises the need for compromise at many junctures but one has to draw a line how far one can compromise. In the words of Gandhi: "...I ever

compromise my own ideals even in individual conduct not because I wish to but because the compromise was inevitable. And so in social and political matters I have never exacted complete fulfilment of the ideal in which I have believed. But there are always times when one has to say thus far and no further, and each time the dividing line has to be determined on merits" (Iyer 1990: 186). Thus in the pursuit of morality, Gandhi leaves room for flexibility and is not a proponent of ideological orthodoxy. His morality is the morality of an exemplar, it is not of an ideologue (cf. Rao 1996).

But beyond a point, one cannot compromise one's moral conviction and, for Gandhi, one should be prepared to die for the sake of truth and morality. But this death should be a non- violent death "without anger, without fear and without retaliation" (Iyer 1990: 278). Giving the example of *Bhakta Prahallad* Gandhi writes: "For the sake of truth, he dared to oppose his own father, and he defended himself, not by retaliation by paying his father back in his own coin, but in defence of truth, as he knew it, he was preparped to die" (Iyer 1990: 283). By embracing the bullets of his assassin without any malice, Gandhi urges us to understand the integral link between morality and martyrdom, a link which is missing in Kant and the neo-Kantians such as Habermas who confine themselves only within the safeworld of "weak transcendental idealizations" (Habermas 1996; 4; also see, Uberoi 1996).

But both Kant and Gandhi urge us to understand the integral link between moral commitment and aesthetic development of individuals. For Gandhi, art must aid in our "moral and spiritual elevation" (Iyer 1990: 156). Aesthetic sensibility also helps us refine our moral commitments in Kant: "He who has taste shows by his preferences that he values what is beautiful and abhors what is ugly. Having taste is not like having an extra sense, nor like exercising a special intellectual power. It is the ability to respond with immediate pleasure and unclouded vision to beauty in nature and in art, and, further, to communicate this pleasure to others who are capable of sharing it. Communicable pleasure, moreover, informs an attitude of wonder to the world, and he who feels it does not satisfy to possess the objects of his pleasure" (Schaper 1992: 371-372).

Gandhi establishes an integral link between morality and spiritual religion as he writes: "So long as the seed of morality is not watered by religion, it cannot sprout. Without water it withers and ultimately perishes. Thus it will be seen that true or ideal morality ought to include true religion. To put the same thought differently, morality cannot be observed without religion. That is to say, morality should be observed as a religion" (Gandhi 1971: 313). But as is clear from the above lines, Gandhi's meaning of religion is different from the conventional sectarian approach to religion and includes the ethical and the rational religion of Kant. For Kant, "I can have religion...even if I am agnostic, so long as my awareness of duty is enlivenend with the thought that if there is a God, then my duties are God's commands" (Wood 1992: 406). Kant further urges us to realize that thinking of duties as God's commands "has something to do with our pursuit of the highest good": "[Our duties] must be regarded as commands of supreme Being because we can hope for the highest good... only from a morally perfect will; and therefore we can hope to attain it only through harmony with this will" (ibid 406-407). Thus for Kant God is important in moral commitment because it helps the agents to obey their duties as God's commands. But while the God of Kant is a hypothetical God the imagination of which performs a utilitarian function for the sake of morality, the God of Gandhi is an ever- present and unfolding Reality who holds our hands in our moral acts and is a witness to our non-violent death. For Gandhi, the courage for moral action comes from the belief that "God sits in the hearts of all and that there should be no fear in the presence of God" (Iyer 1990: 273). As Uberoi interprets the Gandhian agenda for us: "The martyr is one who must love his enemy in some sense since he or she is the perfect witness (saheed-ul-kamil) that God, who at this time takes an interest in history and politics, does not want his servant to suppose, as the dualist would, that Satanism has any true independent existence, and so *dharmayudhya*, the righteous war, can be transformed into *satyagraha*" (Uberoi 1996: 124).

For Gandhi, moral action should be animated by the *tapashya* of the soul-force and the renunciation of *Yajna*. As we have seen, Kant speaks about self-denial while talking about moral duties but this can be enriched by the Gandhian devotion to *Yajna*. For Gandhi: "*Yajna* means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. `Act' here must be taken in its widest sense and includes thought and word, as well as deed. `Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life" (Iyer 1990: 379). Moral responsibility to the non-human others in this Gandhian agenda

of non-violent *Yajna* can help us overcome the anthropocentrism of Kant. As Gandhi urges us to realize: "All our prayrers, fasting and observances are empty nothings so long as we do not feel a live kinship with all life. But we have not arrived at that intellectual belief, let alone a heart realization" (Iyer 1990: 244).

While rights and duties are significant words which move us in Kant, duty is an animating word in Gandhi. There is a remarkable convergence between Kantian emphasis on Right and Gandhian emphasis on duty and both emphasize that unconditional service to the other is the core of the moral action. For Kant, "Right...is the totality of conditions under which the will of one person can be unified with the will of another under a universal law of freedom ... Every action is right which, or the maxim of which, allows the freedom of the will of each to subsist together with the freedom of everyone" (Kersting 1992: 344). But Gandhi is a critic of the rights-based approach to morality and urges us to realize that we should be concerned only about our duties and once we do our duties, rights cannot but follow. In the words of Gandhi: "As a young man I began life by seeking to assert my rights and I soon discovered I had none not even over my wife. So I began by discovering and performing my duty by my wife, my children, friends, companions and society and I find today that I have greater rights, perhaps than any living man I know. If this is too tall a claim then I say I do not know anyone who possesses greater rights than I" (Iyer 1990: 388). Of course it must be noted here that Kant is speaking of Right not rights which includes Gandhi's emphasis on duties. But the fact that observance of duties requires self-purification as a continued striving in the life of the moral agents is stressed more poignantly by Gandhi than Kant.

## Critique of Power and the Transformation of Politics

The agenda of moral commitment that Kant and Gandhi have outlined before us is not meant to remain as pious words and ideals to be ceremoniously uttered but to transform the foundations of our lives. Moral commitment in Kant and Gandhi is an integral commitment and permeates all the boundaries of our lives, breaking down many a barrier and creating new configurations of intimacy. Both Kant and Gandhi passionately strove to transform the bases of politics with the insights and commitments of morality.

In his 1795 monograph, *Perpetual Peace*, Kant invites our attention to "this stern moral task" (cf. Beck 1957: x) of transformation of politics. Kant begins by stating: "I can easily conceive of a moral politician, i.e., one who so chooses political principles that they are consistent with those of morality, but I cannot conceive of a political moralist, one who forges a morality in such a way that it conforms to the statesman's advantage" (Kant 1957: 37). Kant further tells us: "When a remediable defect is found in the constitution of the state or in its relation to others, the principle of moral politician will be that it is a duty, especially of the rulers of the State, to inquire how it can be remedied as soon as possible in a way confirming to natural law as a model presented by reason; *this he will do even if it costs self-sacrifice*" (ibid; emphases added). Kant condemns those politicians who cannot live up to this task of moralization: "..the moralizing politician, by glossing over principles of politics which are opposed to the right with the pretext that human nature is not capable of the good as reason prescribes it, only makes reform impossible and perpetuates the violation of law" (ibid: 39). For Kant, "Instead of possessing the *practical science* they boast of, these politicians have only practices; they flatter the power which is then ruling so as *not to remiss in their private advantage, and they sacrifice the nation and, possibly, the whole world*" (ibid; emphases added). Kant's critical engagement also draws our attention to the lack of moral reponsibility on the part of professional lawyers: "Their task is not to reason too nicely about the legislation but to execute the momentary commands on the statute books. xxx They make a great show of understanding men (which is certainly something to be expected of them, since they have to deal with so many) without understanding man and what can be made of him, for they lack the higher point of view of anthropological observation which is needed for this" (ibid).

Kant urges us to realize that these politicians and lawyers have "political honor which cannot be disputed—and this honor is aggrandizement of their power by whatever means" (ibid: 41). Kant gives a clarion call: "Let us put an end to this sophism, if not to the injustice it protects, and force the false representatives of power to confess that they do not plead in favor of the right but in favor the might" (ibid: 42). The false representatives of power should realize that political maxims must not be derived from "volition as the supreme yet empirical principle of political wisdom, but rather from the pure concept

of the duty of right, from the ought whose principle is given apriori by pure reason, regardless of what the physical consequences may be" (ibid: 45).

For Kant, "the pure principles of right" have an objective reality which should influence politics, "the empirical politics," as Kant calls it (ibid: 46). For Kant, "The rights of men must be held sacred, however much sacrifice it may cost the ruling power. One cannot compromise here and seek the middle course of a pragmatic conditional law between the morally right and the expedient. All politics must bend its knee before the right. But by this it can hope slowly to reach the stage where it will shine with an immortal glory" (ibid). Protection of the "rights of men" is not a matter of "philanthropy" nor is it a matter of "benevolence" but is a matter of "an unconditional and absolutely mandatory duty" (ibid: 52). In the words of Kant: "One who wishes to give himself up to the sweet feeling of benevolence must make sure that he has not transgressed this absolute duty" (ibid).

Kant stresses the integration of politics and morality: "All maxims which stand in need of publicity in order not to fail their end, agree with politics and right combined" (ibid: 53). Kant helps us understand this: "For if they [maxims] can allow their end through publicity, they must accord with the public's universal end, happiness; and the proper task of politics is to promote this, i.e., to make the public satisfied with its condition. If, however, this end is attainable only by means of publicity, i.e., by removing all distrust in the maxims of politics, the latter must conform to the rights of the public, for only in this is the union of goals of all possible" (ibid).

Kant urges us to realize that while "objectively, or in theory, there is no conflict between morals and politics" subjectively there is one. This, for Kant, lies in the "selfish propensity of men (which should not be called 'practice,' as this would mean that it rested on rational maxims)" (ibid: 45). But Kant urges us not to lose our hearts at this but to utilize this conflict as an eternal reminder of our duties. In the words of Kant: "[This subjective conflict] should serve as a whetstone of virtue, whose true courage (by principle, 'Yield not to evils, but go against the stronger') in the present case does not so much consist in defying with strong resolve evils and sacrifices which must be undertaken along with the conflict, but rather in *detecting and conquering the crafty and far more dangerously deceitful and treasonable principle of evil in ourselves*, which puts forward the weakness of human nature as justification for every transgresssion" (ibid; emphases added). Thus the ultimate objective of moralization of politics is to conquer "the *crafty* and far more dangerously deceitful and treasonable principle of evil in ourselves." This is akin to Gandhi's emphasis on conquest of self as a transformative basis for the remoralization of politics. Gandhi tells us: "To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life" (Iyer 1990: 127). Its objective is to bring about "self-regulation" and a "state of enlightened anarchy" where "everyone is his own ruler" and "he rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor" (ibid: 127). In Gandhi, Swaraj is at the heart of politics which brings together both self-determination and self-restraint. In the words of Gandhi: "The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraints which 'independence' means" (Narayan 1968: 440). Swaraj as the pursuit of politics means both "inner freedom" (ibid: 441) as well as the objective conditions of freedom such as freedom from colonial slavery, patriarchy, and market exploitation. For Gandhi, "The people of Europe have no doubt political power but no Swaraj" (Iyer 1990: 106).

Politics with morality at its heart has to realize, Gandhi tells us, that capture of power is not its most important objective and "Political work must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress" (Collected Works, Vol. 85: 368). And moral progress is the "progress of the permanent element in us" (Iyer 1990: 94). Gandhi further tells us: "...to regard adult suffrage as a means of capturing political power would be to put it to corrupt use" (ibid: 217). The objective of moralized politics is to provide transformative guidance to power and this can be done through non-violent struggle and Satyagraha. In the words of Gandhi: "By its very nature, non-violence cannot `seize' power, nor can that be its goal. But non-violence can do more; it can effectively control and guide power without capturing the machinery of government. That is its beauty" (quoted in Narayan 1968: 446). Gandhi further urges us to realize: "Passive resistance is always moral, never cruel; Passive resistance seeks to rejoin politics and religion and to test everyone of our actions in the light of ethical principles (Iyer 1990: 90).

Later on Gandhi establishes the transformative link between morality and politics through the practice of *Satyagraha*. Reflecting on this towards the end of his struggle, Gandhi shares with us that while passive resistance is more passive and hides a repressed will to violence, *Satyagraha* is an active will to truth and embodies an uncompromising determiantion to fight for its sake and to lay one's life for its cause. For Gandhi truth is God and non-violence is an integral part of *Satyagraha*. In the words of Gandhi, "The word *Satyagraha* should be understood here in its etymological sense. There can be no insistence on truth where there is no non-violence" (Iyer 1990: 384). For Gandhi, "Non- violence is soul-force or the power of the Godhead within us. We become Godlike to the extent we realize non-violence" (Narayan 1968: 153). Furthermore, "*Ahimsa* is not merely a negative state of harmlessness, but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer" (ibid: 154). Civil disobedience in Gandhi is an expression of love which is an important political manifestation of the integral morality of *Satyagraha*. Civil disobedience is a struggle against the system of power which annihilates human dignity and strives to transform it with a spirit of love. It is the embodiment of a "resolute refusal to bend the knee to an earthly power, no matter how great, and that without bitterness of spirit in the fulness of faith that the spirit alone lives, nothing else does" (Narayan 1968: 228). For Gandhi, "Disobedience without civility, discipline, discrimination, non-violence is certain destruction. Disobedience combined with love is the living water of life. Civil disobedience is a beautiful variant to signify growth" (ibid: 213). Furthermore, civil disobedience "emphatically means our desire to surrender to a single un-armed policeman. Our triumph consists again in being imprisoned for no wrong whatsoever. The greater our innocence, the greater our strength and the swifter our victory" (ibid: 210). While engaged in the moral politics of *Satyagraha*, Gandhi urges us to realize: "Whilst on the one hand civil disobedience authorises disobedience of unjust laws or unmoral laws of a state which one seeks to overthrow, it requires meek and willing submission to the penalty of disobedience and, therefore, cheerful acceptance of jail discipline and attendant hardships" (ibid: 207).

## Kant, Gandhi and Beyond

While civil disobedience is central to Gandhi's moral politics of aciton, Kant is ambivalent about it. This ambivalence comes clearly in the following lines of Kant: "The citizen cannot refuse to pay the taxes imposed on him.. But the same person nevertheless does not act contrary to his duty as a citizen when, as a scholar, he publicly expresses his thoughts on the inappropriateness of even the injustice of these levies" (Kant 1959: 87 / 88). Despite the courage of criticism, Kant's support for the logic of the government is in need of rethinking, reconstruction and transcendence today especially in the face of the epochal challenge of radical democracy whose hour now has come. Kant writes: "But only one who is himself enlightened, is not afraid of shadows, and has a numerous and well-disciplined army to assure public peace, can say: `Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, only obey'. A republic could not dare say such a thing" (ibid: 91). Kant is also ambivalent about the full realization democratic civil freedom as he writes: "A greater degree of civil freedom appears advantageous to the freedom of mind of the people, and yet it places inescapable limitations upon it; a lower degree of civil freedom, on the contrary, provides the mind with room for each man to extend himself to his full capacity" (ibid: 91-92).

While Kant is ambivalent about civil disobedience and the grant of comprehensive civil freedom, his disdain for revolution is total. Understandably, writing after the French Revolution, Kant fails to realise that revolutions can be non-violent as well. But what is striking and incomprehensible is that Kant fails to realize that violenct revolutions are responses to the indignities of the system. Therefore the folowing lines of Kant require a critical rethinking from us: "If a violent revolution engenderd by a bad constitution, introduces by illegal means a more legal constitution, to lead the people back to the earlier constitution [it] would not be permitted; but, while the revolution lasted, each person who openly or covertly shared in it would have justly incurred the punishment due to those who rebel" (Kant 1795: 38).

The disdain for revolution has a long legacy in Western constitutional thought which is most clearly evident in the recent works of Jurgen Habermas. If Kant was fighting with the ghost of French Revolution, Habermas is fighting with the ghost of Marxism and the fall of the Soviet system. Habermas tells us in his recent *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions Towards a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*: "..democratic movements emerging from civil society, must give up holistic aspirations to a self- organising

society, aspirations that also undergirded Marxist ideas of social revolution" (1996: 372). Habermas wants to put civil society in its palace and have less grander goals: ".. civil society can directly transform only itself, and it can have at most an indirect effect on the self-transformation of the political systems; generally it has an influecnce on the personal programming of this system" (ibid). But this is a limited programme of reconstruction which does not have the courage to radically interrogate the system itself.

To be fair, Gandhi does share Kant's disdain for violent revolution and Habermas' antipathy towards Marxist social revolution. But Gandhi does not limit revolution to violent revolution alone nor does he limit it to the socio-political one. The most important revolution for Gandhi is the personal revolution of the actors, revolution in their modes of life, in their style of life as it embodies non-violence and *satyagrahic* struggle for swaraj, the experiment with truth as Gandhi called it. But like Kant Gandhi also has a filial attitude to law and authority and likens the relationship between rulers and people to one between father and son. Such a filial attitude to authority now needs to be transcended by a spirit of radical democracy. What Gandhi writes below also requires a critical rethinking from us as we pursue the agenda of an integral remoralization of life: "Reasoned and willing obedience to the laws of the state is the first lesson in non-co-operation. The second is that of tolerance. We must tolerate many laws of the state, even when they are inconvenient" (in Narayan 1968: 205).

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## Endnote:

1. In the words of Kant (1964: 110):

   The principle of *personal happiness* is, however, the most objectionable, not merely because it is false and because its pretence that well-being always adjusts itself to well-doing is contradicted by expeirence; nor merely because it contributes nothing whatever towards establishing morality, since making a man happy is quite different from making him good and making him prudent or astute in seeking his advantge quite different from making him virtuous; but because it bases morality on sensuous motives which rather undermine it and totally destroy its sublimity, in as much as the motives of virtue are put in the same class as those of vice and we are instructed only to become better at calculation, the speciifc difference between virtue and vice being completely ruled out.

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