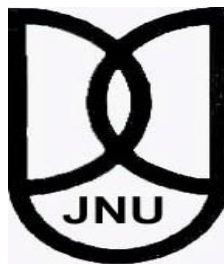


**Personal Autonomy**  
**A Moral Philosophical Inquiry**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**JENIA KAKCHINGTABAM**



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**2017**

Date: 23/07/2017

## DECLARATION

I, Jenia Kakchingtabam, do hereby declare that the thesis entitled, "Personal Autonomy: A Moral Philosophical Inquiry" for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy at Jawaharlal Nehru University is my original work and has not been submitted by me for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University.

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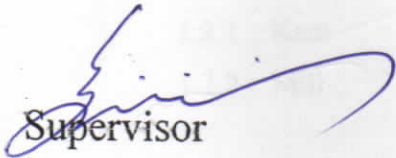


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### CERTIFICATE

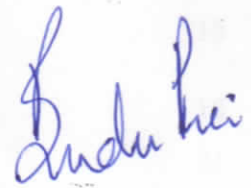
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We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


  
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## **Introduction**

This work is an attempt to understand and analyse the concept of personal autonomy. Here, my main aim is to explore and investigate both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the concept within the framework of moral philosophy. I shall explore this concept with the help of some of the classical and contemporary thoughts and writings found in the domain of moral philosophy. Autonomy can be considered as one of the basic requisite features of human beings. To be an autonomous agent means to be a person who has control over her own choices, desires and actions. She is someone who can make decisions on her own without being influenced by anybody. But what it is to be such a person is a question that does not have an easy answer. The question needs serious philosophical deliberation. Moreover, one needs to know how this concept is interlinked with other important concepts that are essential for a philosophical understanding of a human person. Thus, the relevant questions that deserve our special attention in this regard are—what is personal autonomy? Who is an autonomous person? What role does the concept play in our everyday moral decision making process? Why is it a desirable quality to have? And most importantly, what are the basic conditions needed to be fulfilled for an individual to be autonomous?

In order to respond to these questions philosophically it is important for us to know the history behind this concept. This is important mainly because the idea of personal autonomy seems to have played a significant role in shaping up the discourse of secular morality, which we now cherish in the modern world. By secular morality, we may mean those moral views where every human person needs to follow moral commands and demands purely on rational or reasonable grounds. It refers to those moral principles that essentially guide humans to conduct diverse personal and public activities. Thus here, I shall try to explore the ways in which the concept has been used by classical as well as modern philosophical accounts. Further, I shall critically investigate certain contemporary accounts with an aim to analyse their effectiveness in our moral philosophical explanation of human person. With the help of such analysis I shall try to examine how this concept has been used in articulating our practical decision making process. Here, I would be mainly concerned with the ways in which the contemporary applied ethicists have made use of this concept in understanding and laying, baring certain practical ethical codes and concerns for performing clinical and professional activities. In point of fact here, I would try to analyse how the notion



of autonomy may be understood to have provided us a springboard for understanding and deliberating upon issues rationally and independently.

The idea of autonomy is captured in the etymology of the Greek terms: *autos* and *nomos*. 'Autos' means 'self' and 'nomos' means 'rule' or 'law'. In ancient Greece it was first used in the context of making independent laws by the citizens as opposed to the ruling power in the Greek city state. Thus, autonomy may be understood as self- rule or self- law or self-government. Gradually the idea, then, got extended to the concept of rational human person. It began to acquire meaning in the context of persons who are capable of deciding and acting in accordance to their own choice and selection. In Greek philosophy Plato conceived the rational power of a person as a capability to determine one's efficiency, condition and circumstances to deliver the right kind of action. However, the nature and skill of cultivating a person's rational power is derived from his idea of a perfect state as described in his explanation of four cardinal virtues. It may be that Plato intends to ascribe the perfect moral features to a person's behavioural aspects by excluding irrational desires and feelings. Plato presumes that the strength of rational power extends a person's knowledge of respecting other person's dignity and rights as his own. Plato asserts that, justice is doing one's own work and not to interfere with other person's right and work.<sup>1</sup>

In short, the idea of personal autonomy basically refers to our capacity to decide things on our own. It refers to our ability to execute a course of action without any interference. To be an autonomous agent means to be a person, who has control of his or her own choices, and desires. Autonomy from the personal point of view signifies the ability to decide and act without any coercion, manipulation, where the individual is not forced to do things according to the will of another. It may be considered as one of the basic requisite features of human being. To be autonomous means to have a certain capacity to exercise the unique ability of human being to define her own nature and life. Autonomy from the normative aspect is to have certain freedom and rights in the context of social, moral or legal policy and institutions. Thus, acting autonomously signifies self-determined actions to pursue desirable plans of life by human agents in different spheres. In the contemporary world, to protect and safeguard the autonomy of an individual person may be considered as one of the important issues of any secular morality. Having autonomous power means the power of human beings to develop any thought process on their own, without any constraints. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, 1997, p. 1096.

sense having autonomy means the ability to acquire certain rights and dignity with regard to one's aim and interests in a society.

Autonomy may enable the human agent to act upon and realise their authentic goals of their life with the power of self-control. It may help them to restrain from certain coercive and immoral acts and not to accept and blindly follow imposed rules and regulations without knowing the reason. The most important of personal autonomy is the ability to critically evaluate one's own decisions and actions. Hence we may say that autonomy is required not only to restrain certain interference but also to realise the limit and extent of one's actions and decisions, that is, the self-reflective capacity. Autonomy in the sense of one's ability to do things freely may often be confused with the concept of liberty. By liberty, we may mean the protection of rights of people from certain external interferences, for instance, against the tyranny of the rulers. But the notion of autonomy has a deeper meaning and significance. The absence of certain restraints does not set to define the meaning of autonomy in its conceptual entirety as applicable to person. The important feature of being autonomous is the ability to raise a question about what to choose and how to act in a given situation. Thus, the idea of autonomy is the capacity to evaluate one's way of life with sufficient reason. It refers to the ability of the person to take the decisive role to solve a conflicting situation or problem.

In this dissertation my main aim is to investigate and understand the concept of personal autonomy within the framework of moral philosophy. The dissertation aims to analyse certain problematic that may be roughly outlined in the following few points—

1. First, like most philosophical concepts, the concept of autonomy also finds its origin in the Greek period. Although the original Greeks were primarily concerned about the political dimension of autonomy, they also extensively used this concept in the context of individual liberty and freedom. Thus, the modern idea of personal autonomy cannot be adequately grasped without an engagement with its Greek origins. It is important to understand in what sense they used this concept in their moral and political thought process. When we study the concept of personal or individual autonomy within the context of moral philosophy one must note that the central value of the Kantian as well as Millian moral philosophy is mainly drawn from this concept. An examination of this concept would remain inadequate if we do not revisit the ways these two moral philosophers have used this concept in their respective systems of moral philosophy. One of my major concerns in this dissertation

is to investigate and understand how this concept has been used by philosophers across times. Here my main focus will be to critically look at the concept in these two periods, namely Greek and Modern.

2. Secondly, contemporary moral philosophers have extensively dealt with this concept. Their primary research question is to understand what it is to be an autonomous human individual. Roughly speaking, we find four major accounts of personal autonomy that deal with this issue quite extensively. They are, according to a classification made by Sarah Buss—coherentist, reasons-responsive, responsiveness-to-reasoning and relational.<sup>2</sup> Here my major concern is to inquire and understand whether these accounts are adequate and which one (or two or the combination of all) of these accounts is seen to be more effective insofar as the moral philosophical explanation of the practical decisions of the concept is concerned.
3. Third, in order to understand the moral philosophical significance of the idea of personal autonomy we must see how this has been made use to grapple with the major concerns of practical ethics. As has been suggested earlier personal autonomy is a concept that refers to a certain capabilities to act in accordance to one's will. It is a capacity that helps us to make practical ethical decisions in our everyday life. The idea of informed consent is our major concern that has often been articulated with the help of the notion of personal autonomy. It is generally presumed that the person who gives her informed opinion about any given issue is a person with effective personal autonomy. She makes her decision as an autonomous person without the fear of any constraint. Similarly, the issue of paternalism is required to be avoided in any policy making decision because it disrespects our personal autonomy. We can be paternalized by any authority, the state or others, since it is this other that decides what is good for us. It is important to note here that autonomy from the personal point of view involves not only the universal or objective elements in one's moral decision but also it includes certain other subjective elements such as desires, emotions and senses of attraction and aversion that are important to us personally. This dissertation will look into these elements while investigating the significance of personal autonomy in moral decision making process.

The dissertation is particularly centralised on the possibility of autonomy at a personal level. There is a demand to know how reason rationalizes a person's actions by regulating his or her

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<sup>2</sup> See Buss, Sarah, "Personal Autonomy", *Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy*, 2002.

instinctive desires and feelings. It is in this context, that many modern and contemporary philosophers tend to analyze the proper calculation of subjective interests and motives while interpreting autonomy of a person from a moral dimension. For instance, Julia Annas remarks that “I must have a reason for doing it that it is a reason for me, makes me some appeal to desires that I have.”<sup>3</sup> The idea here is to reveal the importance of personal attachment to moral actions that enunciates a person’s understanding and self-realization. In fact this self-realized aspect of a person is the position where Aristotle attempts to raise a question on the capability of doing a certain action by a person. Aristotle’s intention is to cast a perception on the notion a goal-directed choice of a person as distinct from temporary desires and unruly situations. It is here in this regard that a philosopher like Susan Sauve Meyer seeks to articulate that, “establishing responsibility for character is the main goal of the account of the voluntariness.”<sup>4</sup>

Keeping in view the historical explanation of human desires and actions, modern philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill proceed to specify the general interpretation of human rational desires and conduct in a more precise way. Kant attempts to resolve the figurative problem that exists between reason and human desires and motivations. For Kant, the notion of rationality as distinct from divine or absolute normative import, expresses moral freedom of a person to hold a moral objective principle as his own. Kant says that maxims must always be adopted that they can be held universally as objective principles, and so serve for our own understanding of universal laws.<sup>5</sup> While Kant emphasizes the importance of freedom of a person to act, he seems to ignore the significant part of intention forming aspect of a person. Hence, the problem here is to examine how Kant makes an effort to direct a subjective will and interest towards the understanding of universal moral principles. Though many contemporary philosophers appreciate Kant’s phenomenal aspects of attributing rational element to a person, it seems many of them were not satisfied with the idea of suppressing a person’s feelings and desires. Rational will, according to Thomas E. Hill, Jr., “is a power to cause changes in the world on the basis of a rationale, which if spelled out would include our beliefs, aims, policies and an implicit idea of a relevant rational principle.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Annas, 1981, p. 325.

<sup>4</sup> Meyer, 2006, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> Kant, 1998, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, Jr, 1991, p. 18.

John Stuart Mill on the other hand explicates the importance of individual feelings and desires that is expressed in the form of social and political rights. As Mill was against the political and social domination, he always strived to reconcile or harmonise the conflicting problems that existed between the ruler and the citizens or between a social opinions and the individual opinion by means of the harm principles. Thus, we need to examine further how Mill formulates the possibility of personal autonomy from his conception of general utility. Contemporary philosophers assume that Mill's idea of individual freedom is specifically asserted within the domain of liberal rights of a person. As such the principle of liberty seems less compatible with a person's active effort to participate in a decision-making process that tends to manifests a person's autonomy. Wendy Donner, a contemporary philosopher claims that, "autonomous choice must be exercised to make choices in favour of what is in harmony with the person's own nature, rather than what others wish for us."<sup>7</sup>

Though these classical accounts have made attempts to deal with the basic issues involved in the concept of personal autonomy, their interpretations are not enough to understand internal nitty-gritty of the concept. It is the contemporary philosophers who seem to have made some tangible progress in this regard. In the second chapter of this work, I extensively discuss four major contemporary accounts. They are—coherentist account, reason-responsive account, responsiveness-to-reasoning account and relational accounts. Here I shall try to interpret the moral ideas embedded in the structures of these four accounts discussed by contemporary philosophers such as Gerald Dworkin, Frankfurt, R.P. Wolff, Susan Wolf, and Marina Oshana etc. All these philosophers attempt to perceive and comprehend the meaning of autonomy in relation with the diverse social, political and linguistic connections.

Further in the same chapter, in the second section, I shall try to exemplify some basic conditions of autonomy viz. rationality, responsibility, and deliberation. These conditions serve to sanctify a person's legitimate will to form his or her independent and self-governing desires and his dispositional character. Perhaps, these conditions support the above mentioned accounts to operate extensively in diverse spheres of human transactional process. The chapter contemplates on various moral questions such as the questions on the valid ordinance of the authority that requires providing human persons a sufficient scope to express their innovative feelings and actions. It also includes questions on the efficient capability of a

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<sup>7</sup> Donner, 2009, p. 64.

person to accurately produce his or her rational feelings and desires on the basis of voluntary conduct, self-reflective and self-assertive activities. Thus, overall the questions are centred on the active conscious manifestation of a person's choice in relation to the reflexive circumstances where a person bears the outcome of his intended actions. Susan Wolf writes that, "we take responsible beings more seriously than we take non-responsible ones—we treat them as persons and not as objects."<sup>8</sup>

The third chapter deals with some of the practical issues and moral situations that are intimately connected to the question of personal autonomy. Two important practical issues I am concerned with here are informed consent and paternalism. I am also concerned here with everyday world where the concept of personal autonomy may be seen to be playing an important role. This particular endeavour aims to highlight the importance of autonomy that is believed to be significant for a person's knowledge on diverse moral or legal and health issues. It tends to create widespread legitimate features of a person to exercise his freedom and power as free from certain coercive or manipulative factors. And reversely, the responsibility of a person to obey certain rationale commands where a question on the aspect of respect and well-being of a person is at issue. In fact, the entire thesis strives to establish a consistent structure of the moral autonomous understanding of a person as distinct from rough and shallow interpretation of individual actions. However, it is the question of the autonomous features of a person and the structure of one's personal autonomy that receives the fundamental attention of this inquiry.

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<sup>8</sup> Wolf, 1990, p. 6.

## Chapter One

### History behind Personal Autonomy

#### Introduction

The present chapter, which is divided into three sections, would be a historical analysis of the concept of autonomy. I shall, in the first section, basically deal with the philosophical reflections of Plato and Aristotle on the concept of autonomy. Like most philosophical concepts, the concept of autonomy also finds its origin in the Greek period. Although, the original Greeks were primarily concerned about the political dimension of autonomy, they have extensively used this concept in the context of individual liberty and freedom in relation to individual motives and actions. They have indicated the possibility of the notion of autonomy in terms of reason, where reason guides a person's desires and feelings in the context of choices they make. It is important to understand how and in what sense they used this concept in their moral and political thought process. With regard to Plato's concept of personal autonomy, I would specifically refer to his work in *The Republic* and for Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Further, I would investigate how the modern and contemporary philosophers have interpreted and evaluated the notion of personal autonomy based on the discussion of Greek philosophers.

The second section will be a discussion on the notion of personal autonomy as developed by Immanuel Kant in the modern context. For Kant, the autonomy of a person exhibits his rational freedom to follow a moral command. According to him, a moral action of a person specifies his autonomous condition. Kant attaches the importance of rational capacity to a person's action that may be identified in terms of universal moral principles. Here, he claims that every person is obliged to follow this moral command in terms of self-imposed law as distinct from those laws that are externally imposed. This self-imposed law essentially takes the form of universal moral principles which Kant termed as categorical imperatives. Thus, in this regard it is important to analyse how a self-imposed law is validly expressible in terms of moral objective principles.

The third section will concentrate on the notion of personal autonomy as endorsed by John Stuart Mill in his work *On Liberty*, in the context of human liberty and freedom. According to him, the autonomy of a person means recognition of the adequate platform of an individual to develop his own ideas and opinions. However, Mill claims that exercising

one's autonomous capability of thought and action should not come into conflict with the rights and dignity of other individuals. He contemplates the need for understanding the nature of social acquaintance by a person that presents the scope of harmonious relation with other individuals. Thus, there's a requirement for examining the significance of personal opinions and desires in compliance with the rights of other human beings.

## **1. Autonomy in Greek Philosophy**

In this section, as mentioned above I shall particularly deal with two major philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, in whose thoughts the concept of autonomy seems have played a significant role. I shall here basically try to understand how and in what context they have introduced and analyzed the concept in the first place and thereby subsequently paving the way for further deliberation on this.

### **1.1 Plato**

Plato emphasized the idea of personal autonomy in *The Republic*, within the domain of his discussion on the three parts of the human soul. Plato writes that, "the soul of each individual is divided into three parts, in just the way that a city is."<sup>9</sup> Here he analysed the character of a person by comparing his analogy of the tripartite division of the soul with the three classes of a state. As Plato pointed out that every human soul consists of three principles, reason or the rational part, passion or spirit and the irrational or the appetitive part of the soul, the state also consists of three parts, counsellors, auxiliaries and traders. He believed that an individual and the structure of a state have the same nature. According to him, a person's nature and conduct is essentially similar with the classified structure of a state. Reason or the rational principle is the ruler of the soul, whereas the passion or the spirit is the subject of the reason and the appetitive or the irrational part is the most uncontrollable and the largest part that constitutes the human soul. Reason being the ruler of the soul has its own responsibility of guiding and controlling the other two parts. Therefore Plato says that, "to insure that someone ruled by something similar to what rules the best, we say that he ought to be the slave of that best person who has a divine ruler."<sup>10</sup> Here, he viewed reason as the divine ruler which guides human conduct to follow the right path. It acts as a harmoniser where it reconciled the differences of the relations of the three different parts of the soul. In fact, Plato displayed the

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<sup>9</sup> Plato, 1997, p. 1188.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 1198.



importance of reason that may help a person in understanding his problems clearly so that he may be able to determine the right course of decision.

However, Plato's moral psychology that justifies reason or the rational element as the sole guiding principle may not be appreciated by many contemporary moral philosophers. As according G.R.F. Ferrari, "what the rational part of the soul naturally desires is to understand rather than to rule, it will not rule the other parts merely for its own benefit."<sup>11</sup> He agrees with Plato regarding the importance of the calculative rational element which seeks to bring out the rational quality in human soul. However, he does not agree with Plato's view that the calculative part of the soul is simply to rule the other two elements, that is the passionate and the appetitive elements. To say that the main role of the rational part is simply to control the other two elements seems that it has no other function. As Ferrari quotes, "the rational part is not simply seeking to prevail but to understand."<sup>12</sup> He says that the role of a reason is not only to control the passionate and the appetitive part but it also has other significant role of analysing the problem that exists between a person's rational choice and desire. Thus, it is necessary to understand the role of rational element where it compelled the other parts to carry out the virtuous actions that would result from rational desires.

As Plato was keen to bring out the perfect virtuous and just actions from the human soul, he puts his consistent effort to judge human desires and actions from the perspective of calculative rational element. Thus, Plato says, "when the entire soul follows the philosophic part, and there is no civil war in it, each part of it does its own work exclusively and is just and in particular it enjoys its own pleasures, the best and truest pleasures possible for it."<sup>13</sup> He maintained that decisions and actions that would result from the perfect alignment of the rational element with the spirit and appetitive part is the appropriate form of happiness that we human should really contemplate. It is this form of happiness which is worthy of achieving. According to him, we human beings are not perfect as the Divine Being. We always face obstacles or problems in every instance of our existence. Hence, Plato suggests that, it is the nature of human beings that is willing to follow this rational calculation.<sup>14</sup> He asserted that when reason rules and controls our choices in our life, our passion is subject to the authority of reason which prevents us from aspiring false or irrational desires. It teaches us how to live our life by leading us to follow a simple, moderate and noble ways. Plato

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<sup>11</sup> Ferrari, 2007, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, 1997, p. 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 1994.

pointed out that following the path of passions and irrational desires sway our soul to do the extreme form of action that is beyond our control. Hence, he aimed to show the good form of human life that is properly controlled and guided by reason.

However, Plato's doctrine of just soul that would result from exercising virtuous action may not be a satisfactory moral view according to a contemporary moral philosopher. With reference to Plato's view of just and virtuous soul, Julia Annas quotes that, "the just person comes to have an insight into what is absolutely good and just and will act in accordance with its impersonal requirements."<sup>15</sup> She argues that to act justly means not only to meet the demands of moral requirements unreflectively, without any understanding of what one wants to do. In this sense moral act requires some level of personal reasons and understanding concerning the question why one should act justly. In fact, Annas in this regard addresses the problem where a person may be confronted between his desire and moral obligation. But, whatever the case maybe, as far as rational deliberation is concerned, Julia Annas writes, "we need to have a good independent reasons for accepting it."<sup>16</sup> It may be that Plato wants to safeguard the rules of rational actions from certain kinds of rugged individual actions where selfishness and irrational desires takes over the status of rational element. However, she claims that to perform rational actions without any personal interests is not intelligible. An action as such, as perform by an individual requires certain personal desires that may mark the level of competency and reliable status of the individual himself. She argues that Plato's conception of rationality is concerned only with the general principles of moral reason while he doesn't give moral weight to particular individual desires and commitments.

It is true that human beings with different nature have different beliefs, desires and life plans of their own. However, Plato's impartial view of rationality is to provide the idea of good life. Hence to acquire the insight of a good life, it is essential for a human being to cultivate and lead our passionate desires in the right direction. According, to Plato's description of human soul, human soul consists of two elements the better and the worse. When the better rules the worse, then we may say that human soul is moderate or is in harmony with the balance of life.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the word "moderate" in Plato's ethics acts as a rational supportive ground which mends the diverging gap between the two extremes, that is

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<sup>15</sup> Annas, 1981, p. 322.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>17</sup> Plato, 1997, p. 1063.

the better and the worse. Plato explained that, “good judgment is clearly some kind of knowledge, for its through knowledge, not ignorance, that people judge well.”<sup>18</sup> Here he reveals that the knowledge to judge is the ability to investigate the distinct features of the merits of good and bad as incurred by one’s deed and conduct. Hence, Plato writes that moderation is a kind of effective order where one can masters the elements of pleasures and desires.<sup>19</sup> Here, when Plato uses the term “mastery”, he uses it strictly in the sense where a person takes an effort to control the irrational appetites and desires by the means of rational investigative procedure. It is strength, where one masters oneself by taking a controlled decision. It apparently refers to that action where one can specifically realised his rational insight and do what is right to maintain a harmonious symmetrical reflection of life.

When viewed from the moral standpoint, the choice of a person always presents a structure of inner conflict and a problem between reason and desire. Thus, Plato finds it important to describe the nature of human soul into three parts. He assumed, that the division of the soul would help us to analyse where the problem lies and how we ought to make it right by employing the rational means. Reason, as Nickolas Pappas quotes that, “it is not one more impulse among many, but the part of soul by virtue of which I decide between two desires, instead of being simply buffeted about them.”<sup>20</sup> Reason in human soul plays a pivotal role for bringing an agreeable state between a person’s desires and actions. It enables a human soul to decide the right path of pursuing his goals. The role of reason is not simply to deny or accept a given desire emphatically. But, its role is to enlighten a human mind where a person may clearly perceive the distinct notion of rationality and irrationality.

## **1.2 Aristotle**

Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* analysed Plato’s understanding of the human soul with a broader critical outlook on human actions. In fact, he seeks to examine on Plato’s rationality and tries to extend these views to human choice and conduct. Thus, the question of moral inquiry arises when one really talked on the concept of a purposive choice or a goal. As Aristotle quotes, “for choice or purposes implies calculation and reasoning.”<sup>21</sup> He says that a purposive choice involves the analysis of the character of a person who is pursuing a particular plan. It highlights the reason why and by what means a person is pursuing his

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, 1997, p. 1060.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 1063.

<sup>20</sup> Nickolas, 1995, 2003, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, 1906, p. 68.

motivated desires. Aristotle agrees with Plato regarding the importance of rational calculative element in determining the merits of a person's action. However, with reference to the variegated nature of human actions, he exhibits the notions of voluntary and involuntary actions in order to bring out the clear notion of virtuous actions. Aristotle says, that involuntary actions occur, "when the cause lies outside and the agent has no part in it."<sup>22</sup> He says, in the case of involuntary action the agent has no will in doing an act, for instance, a person acting compulsively or in ignorance. On the other hand, a voluntary act is one which is caused by the agent where he knows the particular circumstances of the act.<sup>23</sup> In the case of voluntary action, the action signifies the ability of using one's will in doing an act, where the person is held to be responsible for the caused action.

The purpose for introducing the notion of voluntary and involuntary actions by Aristotle is to define those actions where one can be held responsible from those that one cannot be blamed. Aristotle writes, "praise or blame is given only to what is voluntary; that which is involuntary receives pardon or pity."<sup>24</sup> A voluntary action denotes one's preference and will to act on a particular motivation. But, involuntary action is done in the way as it is given to the agent where he sees no alternate means of doing it. Here in this regard it may seem that having a will to act may be similar with a deliberate purpose or choice. However, Aristotle claims that, "an acts done upon the spur of the moment is said to be voluntary, but not to be done with deliberate purpose."<sup>25</sup> He differentiates the deliberate choices made by an individual from the notion of voluntary actions. For him, the choice of a person specifies a goal-oriented purpose. In the case of a purposive choice, a person determines the possibility for attaining his goal and pursues a plan accordingly. Aristotle explains that, "we do deliberate about are matters of conduct that are within our control."<sup>26</sup> Having a choice means putting a rational effort by the person to work out his plan effectively. It refers to an innovative power to do certain things where one can define the meaning and purpose of his own decisions and actions.

Indeed, Aristotle distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary actions in order to describe the appropriate circumstance where one can take responsibility for his own actions. Susan Sauve Meyer, a contemporary moral philosopher recognized the category of voluntary

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle 1906, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

actions as the basis for the explanation of the choice that an individual makes. However, Meyer argues that Aristotle's notion of voluntary actions fails to explain the nature of human character. Meyer quotes that, "a person's actions, in addition to her motivation, express her character."<sup>27</sup> She explains that it is the character of a person that endorses him to act in a particular direction. In fact, it is the character of a person that is closely associated with the concept virtue or vice and it provides the ground for the explanation of involuntary and voluntary actions. Aristotle's inquiry on human actions may not fulfil the contemporary moral philosophical view. However, he may have indicated the presence of the notion of human character in his explanation of responsibility of one's actions. Susan says that, 'it is no accident that Aristotle raises the issue of responsibility for character in a context in which responsibility for ignorance is at issue.'<sup>28</sup> Defying the Platonic view that doing wrong or unjust actions is due to ignorance, Aristotle set out to define the notion of just actions in a more refined way. Susan makes it clear that it is in the context of responsible actions that Aristotle clarifies that ignorant actions done by the capable person is to be held responsible for it. Aristotle thus, asserts that it is only in the domain of voluntary actions that the question of one's capability of doing an action is raised. Aristotle quotes that," the term involuntary is not properly applied to cases in which a man is ignorant of what is fitting."<sup>29</sup> A voluntary action is distinguished from an act of compulsion or ignorance. In the case of voluntary actions, a person is compelled to act on certain motivation and takes responsibility for the praise or blame that follows. As Aristotle says, "actions that are concerned with means then will be guided by choice and so will be voluntary."<sup>30</sup> In fact according to him, a person's action is the originating cause for shaping the means in order to bring about his desired consequence. Though a human being cannot foresee the expected goal, he surely has the ability to form the possible means within his control to realize it.

According to the contemporary notion of moral responsibility, Aristotle's explanation of responsibility infers the idea of causal relation between a person's choice and its corresponding actions. Thus, John M. Cooper says that, "perhaps what is required for this would be a moral conscience or the capacity to tell what is morally good or right from what is morally bad or wrong."<sup>31</sup> Cooper argues that Aristotle did not clarify the situation morally

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Sauve Meyer, 2006, p. 140.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, 1906, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> John M. Cooper, 2012, p. 44.

which impels a person to act in a certain way. Further, he did not take into account other external forces for which a person is not responsible for causing the act. As such one needs to clearly evaluate how one acts in a given situation with reference to his motivation and character. However it is to be noted that Aristotle's explanation of actions of choice does not set to cover all the natural occurrences of man's behavioural aspects. Aristotle writes that, "we do not censure natural ugliness but we do censure which is due to negligence and want of exercise"<sup>32</sup> The imposition of responsibility on man's action of choice deals only within the scope of one's ability and power to act. Perhaps, it is the power of recognizing one's capability as well as the limit of exercising his courageous will in different spheres. Hence, Aristotle says that, "courage is the observance of mean with regard to things that excite confidence or fear."<sup>33</sup> When Aristotle speaks about human courage, he draws the same ideological meaning as Plato, in the context of exercising virtuous and rational principles of action. Here, a courageous action means the effort of acquiring a noble goal that stretches the ability and will of a person to choose the right course of action. Thus, Aristotle writes that "the rule that the exercise of a virtue is pleasant does not apply to all the virtues, except in so far as the end is attained."<sup>34</sup> Here, he pointed out that the act of implementing virtuous actions is not always about achieving happiness or pleasure as Plato has defined. But it is all about imparting one's plan in the right direction and striving to achieve the desired goal even in the midst of pains and dangers. In fact, Aristotle addresses those human actions where human beings would have to face the consequence of their own actions with maturity and understanding.

With reference to human choice and conduct, we may say that both Plato and Aristotle explicate the importance of reason in decision-making process in order to realise one's true nature. Further, they also describe the significance of virtuous principles that guide human nature and character. However, there are certain differences in their methodical interpretation of judging rational actions from the irrational ones. For Plato, the rational element is derived from the universal idea of Goodness which is supposed to guide human conduct to follow the right path. Aristotle, on the other hand investigates the various phenomenal factors that influence human actions. Aristotle did not accept Plato's ideal nature of good as the standard of a virtuous person. Aristotle specifically distinguishes good deeds of a virtuous person only within the context of deliberate choice. Nevertheless, Plato and

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, 1906, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

Aristotle admit the power of rational calculation as the only means that guides human conduct. It is true that Plato deduces knowledge of truth from divine rules and every human should try to realise this knowledge. However for Aristotle, rational deliberation signifies a person's intentions and knowledge of particular circumstances as distinguished from external influences or fate. Aristotle observes the various grounds of general human behaviour, tastes and preferences from which a person acts. Plato describes and suggests those perfect rules which human beings should highly value though it may hard to find such rules in worldly human nature. However, with the changing time and situation human beings confront new conflicts and problems that need tackling from a different perspective. This is the reason why Aristotle presents a wider notion of human actions where one can efficiently solve a given problem with a better understanding. However, despite noticeable differences between Plato and Aristotle, they both reckon the element of rational understanding in human thoughts and actions.

## **1.2 Modern Moral Philosophy**

The principle of rationality is the main guiding principle of human motives and actions in the context of both early historical and modern periods. In this section, it is important to understand how the modern philosophers addressed the notion of rationality with respect to a person's choice and motive in relation to his wide variety of situations and circumstances. Here in this section, I will specifically discuss Immanuel Kant's and John Stuart Mill's idea of rationality within the sphere of moral reason. In their efforts to understand human intentions and actions, it is necessary to know how and in what sense they have used reason as the compatible means in defining the autonomous status of an individual from a moral dimension. And further, I will analyse how the contemporary philosophers view their moral interpretations of human choice and conduct.

### **1.2.1 Kant**

It was Immanuel Kant who explicitly developed the notion of autonomy in the form of free-will of a person. According to him, rationality and freedom presupposed each other. Kant says that, "the idea of freedom presupposed the moral law, namely the principle of the autonomy of the will itself."<sup>35</sup> The concept of rationality and freedom paves the possibility for autonomy because the ability of a person to choose a particular action rationally implies

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<sup>35</sup> Kant, 1997, p. 55.

the idea of freedom which Kant termed as Practical Reason. Kant writes that, “it must be proved as belonging to the activity of all beings that are rational and endowed with a will.”<sup>36</sup> He defines rational human beings as those who use their autonomous will that may give worth to their own existence. To be rational means the ability to understand as a unique person as endowed with a free-will. When Kant uses the term rational will of a person, he uses it specifically in the moral sense as distinct from the mere autonomous will of a person. He says that rational beings are called persons<sup>37</sup> as distinguished from other entities. He assumes that rational persons are those human beings who realise their self-reflective capacity to understand the grounds of their own existence. It implies the idea of valuing and respecting one’s own form of humanity through his actions by refraining from certain kinds of imperfect actions that may act as a barrier to his moral self-understanding.

Kant believes that all human beings are affected by the contingent sensible experiences resulting from subjective desires and inclinations. However, at the same time, he says that humans have the freedom of the will to dissect all his relative feelings and desires as directed by the empirical benefits to moral universal human desires. Kant writes that, “the will is thought as a capacity to determine itself acting in conformity with the representation of certain laws.”<sup>38</sup> He assumes that the autonomous will, indicating the freedom of a person determines the formation of universal moral laws. Thus, he explains the requirement of acting in accordance to a moral law. In that sense, a person should not allow himself to be dictated by impulsive desires and feelings. In fact, Kant tries to specify man’s nature from the standpoint instinctual behavioural aspects of human. As such he prescribes the necessity for objectifying subjective human actions which gives rise to universal objective principles. Kant’s sole intention here is to illumine a person’s humanity by protecting it from certain kinds of fallible human actions. Hence, he presents the possibility for universalizing human actions in the form of moral commands or laws which Kant termed as categorical imperative.

A moral contemporary philosopher, Christine Korsgaard agrees with Kant that, “the human mind is essentially reflective.”<sup>39</sup> Korsgaard says that the human mind has the scope for reflective thinking. Unlike animals, human beings have the ability to subject their impulsive desires to the rational will. However, she argues that, Kant’s categorical imperative

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<sup>36</sup> Kant, 1997, p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 37. Kant assigns moral worth to the concept “person” to establish the worth of moral autonomy over the will of an individual where he intends to find the common basis of human actions.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Korsgaard, 1996, p. 92.



merely imposed on a person a moral law. It only constraint a choice of a person that is it has the form of a law.<sup>40</sup> Korsgaard explains that Kant do not clarify the content of the categorical imperative. Such an imperative only enforces a moral command over the will of a person in the form of a moral law. She holds that Kant simply places limit on human actions, which carry forward the moral normative obligation. The notion of free-will for Kant is the causal concept of rationality that explicates the reason why one ought to follow a moral law. However, he does not explain how a moral law is the law of a free-will of a person.

Indeed, Kant is also aware of the problem for assigning moral worth on one's personal freedom to act which has its own personal worth. Thus, Kant says that, "we cannot see how this is possible, and hence on what grounds the moral law is binding."<sup>41</sup> He understands the practical problem of transcending our personal freedom to act according to the moral law. However, he finds an alternate means for explaining, where one can visualise the worth of adopting moral autonomy. The peculiar feature of common human motives and actions is that human beings are particularly receptive of only their well-being and happiness. A slight deflect from their possible condition of happiness makes them vulnerable to certain kinds of immoral or fallible acts. It is here from this view that Kant ascribes the interests of moral law to every human being. He says, "the law is valid for human beings, since it arose from our will as intelligence and so from our proper self."<sup>42</sup> According to his moral philosophical reflection, every human being desires to be morally good, though it is not in their ability to do so. For him, a person's will to act freely that is made possible by reason signifies his intellectual representations of human actions. Intellectual representations refer to human intelligence of representing their actions into a conceptual unity on the basis valid moral norms. It is only in the domain of intellectual ability that a person has the possibility of deriving objective moral understanding of human actions.

Kant's moral principles arise only in the form of objective requirements, devoid of subjective inclinations and feelings. But according to Thomas E. Hill, Jr., a contemporary moral philosopher, human rational actions indicate one's voluntariness to act. Hill writes that, "to say that human beings have a will, then, implies that they can make things happen intentionally and for reasons where this is ultimately understood by reference to their

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<sup>40</sup> Korsgaard, 1996, p. 98.

<sup>41</sup> Kant, 1997, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

policies, ends and underlying principles.”<sup>43</sup> Human actions on the basis of certain rationale principles are not simply to objectify their actions on the basis of valid universal principles. But they are the result of the creative power of an individual to cause a purposive change. Hence, it necessarily implies the significance of a particular human decision that marks the growth of individual capacity of knowing the world from its own perspective. Hill argues that rational will of a person is not merely to choose a decision among some limited options.<sup>44</sup> According to Hill, to act autonomously presupposes a rational deliberative account that demonstrates one’s preference and choice. A rational action is not about directing one’s motives only on moral obligatory grounds. Rather it purports to highlight a person’s capacity to choose and act on diverse human existential aspects.

Kant’s moral consciousness that encourages human beings to abide by moral laws has its fundamental reasons for understanding the worth of humanity. For him, human sensible nature to fulfil their subjective needs tends to suppress the authentic essence of human nature. So Kant writes that, “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”<sup>45</sup> Kant’s imposition of moral laws on human action is to define the goodwill of humanity. Thus for him, from whatever perspective a person may act, his actions should lead to the path of human solidarity. The idea is to prevent oneself from getting distracted by the fluctuating nature of our senses. In this way, he believes that understanding oneself on the basis of moral laws may create a coherent relation between individual freedom and humanity.

Thus, Kant states that, “so act that you use your humanity, whether in your own person or in the other person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.”<sup>46</sup> He considers that the basic principle of humanity is to harmonize one’s individual intentions and actions with the intentions and actions of other people living in the same world. The fact is that human beings are not alone in the world. It presumably means where one should not preserved his rational ideas but also to extend for the growth of better human civilisation. The moral rational principles are derived from the notion of acceptability of human actions. As such individual actions and decisions with particular incentives and benefits cannot serve as the ground unity of human actions. Thus, Kant proclaimed that that

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas E. Hill, Jr, 1991, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup> Kant, 1997, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

the rules of morality apply to all human beings equally. However the rules should not be viewed as something that is externally imposed but as that imposed upon oneself.

According to, Thomas Hill's moral philosophical views, there are various obligatory reasons for a person to act where he thinks it to be right for him to act. He says that there may be different ways of specifying the appropriate ways and means for a person to control and define his own life.<sup>47</sup> Hill exemplifies that a person may find certain rationale purpose for acting other than restricted moral obligation principles. Rational will of a person involves the ability to carry out his dispositional capacity, to value their own autonomous identity without any constraint. Thus, Hill argues that Kant overlook the importance of individual human values. It seems that actions of moral rational person are incompatible with the actions of ordinary person. Further, Kant did not explain specifically the nature and character that a rational person should possess.

It is to be noted that when Kant uses the expression, "autonomy", it encompasses the dignity and respect that a person has, in relation to other humans. He asserts that without realizing this worth, all human skills, capability, talent that is required for the growth of human existence have no meaning. Hence he writes, "consequently every rational being must act as if he were by his maxims at all times a law giving member of the universal kingdom of ends."<sup>48</sup> As a matter of fact, he assimilates autonomous will of an individual with the objective moral principles. Thus, there is a necessity of indispensable practical moral approval in one's actions that may possibly direct his will to the end of goodwill of all. According to Thomas E. Hill, the fallible condition of human life indicates the nature of conflict of a person's choice in relation to the choices of other persons.<sup>49</sup> Human existence in this world is associated with unavoidable chaos and conflicts. Thus, Kant introduced Practical Reason that is less concerned with the immediate individual choice but with understanding human values and interests categorically. Therefore, Kant explicates that, autonomy is the basis for defining the value and worth of human life.<sup>50</sup> Where the autonomous will of a person accept and confer the dignity and respect of human relationship in a larger social framework that is fairly describable in terms of moral sense.

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas E. Hill, Jr., 1991, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> Kant, 1997, p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas E Hill, Jr., 1991, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> Kant, 1997, p. 43.

### 1.2.2 Mill

John Stuart Mill's notion of personal autonomy came into prominence within the context of his discussion of social, legal and moral rights which is expressible in the form of liberal rights. In his book *On Liberty*, Mill is primarily concerned with the liberal rights of an individual that is based on the harm principle. The harm principle of Mill emphasized the legitimate freedom of a person to exercise his decision and actions except on the condition, that his actions and thoughts should not cause harm to other human beings. In recognition of one's freedom to act, Mill says, "he must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment, to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision."<sup>51</sup> According to him, when a person has decided to act, his actions should necessarily presuppose the idea of what is good for others. Man cannot exist in isolation but only in relation to other individuals living in a society. Here, Mill indicates the importance to pre-determine one's choice and conduct in the light of particular social convention. Nevertheless, Mill emphasized that it is the specific right and suitable condition of a person to use his authentic faculties to determine and interpret his own life.<sup>52</sup> With reference to human choice and motivations, it is eventually the person himself who endorse to bring about a desirable change or result by his own conduct. However, it is essentially required that a person's desires and impulses are properly shaped that corresponds to the appropriate form of human nature and conduct.

Wendy Donner, a contemporary thinker says that, for Mill autonomy and individuality are interrelated features.<sup>53</sup> Mill claims that the autonomy of an individual is defensible from certain kinds of illegitimate and external constraints. At the same time Mill also explicates the importance of social relations in conformation with the individual rights. Thus, Mill advocated that the autonomous understanding of a person is not only to exercise one's personal choices but also to be aware and informative of the social and cultural norms. Mill fortifies the importance of social opinions within the context of his discussion of rights of a person. Donner says that, "Mill contends that autonomous agents generally are deeply immersed in communities and intimate relations with other."<sup>54</sup> He says that Mill regarded that the rights of a person are deeply embedded in the idea of social and cultural life. The purpose for asserting the idea of social recognition is not to follow and act only on the basis of social

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<sup>51</sup> Mill, 1863, p. 113.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>53</sup> Donner, 2009, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

customary norms strictly but to engage oneself in the community and social relations. Mill believes that a person's active relation with other people in the society would help him to determine his personal opinions and motivations with a better understanding and reliability.

When Mill presents the rights of a person in terms of higher social character, there underlies the meaning of acceptability and utility that concerns not only the rights of an individual but also for other humans. Mill writes, "a person whose desires and impulses are his own- are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture- is said to have a character."<sup>55</sup> According to Mill, man is a part of social phenomena. As a matter of fact Mill exemplifies the importance of learning social and customary rules. In that way, a person acquires the knowledge of intellectual ability or moral understanding. It facilitates a person's awareness of his own position and identity concerning his expressive desires and conduct in a particular society. It is also important to note that promoting the rights and welfare of others does not mean to compensate one's personal interests and feelings for the larger good wholly. Mill says that, "individuality has its proper field of action."<sup>56</sup> Mill consistently acclaimed for a suitable and favourable environment and circumstances for a person to grow and sustain his capability. It implies fixing a person's aims and interests in a proper way where one could achieve progress and development.

However, Wendy Donner claims, "that autonomous choice must be exercised in favour of what is in harmony with the person's own nature, rather than what others wish for us." Donner argues that the decisions and choices that one makes springs, from the individual inclinations and beliefs. Though it requires a social platform and recognition in order to exercise one's autonomous activities, it does not mean that one needs to conform to social norms completely. Perhaps, the idea is about the acceptance of individual choice and conduct that rightly fits within the scope of social and customary character. Donner, thus quotes that, "autonomy and individuality come together to produce a life that is our own, that is authentic to our character and feelings."<sup>57</sup> Human beings are endowed with different and distinct faculties and abilities to specify their own way of life. The fact is that it is not possible for

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<sup>55</sup> Mill, p. 116. Here Mill endeavours to prevent the possible clash of interests between individual and the masses. He tries to find a way where the individual rights and the social norms would be reconciled and treated as equally significant from their own perspective.

<sup>56</sup> Donner, 2009, p. 148.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 64. Here Donner points out the difference between individual choice and the customary choice distinctively where each has its own separate roles to play.

customary norms to be perfectly compatible with the particular choice of a person. Each has its own part or roles to play in different scopes of human activities.

The notion of liberal rights of Mill makes people aware of their position and dignity in a social life. Mill claims that, “it really, is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it.”<sup>58</sup> It is here in this stage, that Mill introduced the moral implication that underlies human conduct. In his moral explanations, he indicates that human opinions and feelings play a pivotal role that induces a person to act. He exemplifies that action by itself interprets no meaningful reason but only when it relates to a person’s intentions and feelings. He does not condemn the strong feelings and passions of a person if it is guided by good reason. He writes that “we are eager for improvement in politics, in education, even in morals though in this last our idea of improvement chiefly consists in persuading or forcing other people to be good.” Human progress and development indicates a conscious effort by a person to make a desirable change in a society. In that sense, it is evident that a person should be given an adequate platform free of constraints to grow and discover preferable change and make improvements. He ensures that there should be enough space within the society for a person to contribute to the progress and well-being of the larger humanity. For him, this autonomous claim of a person appears in the form of rights where every human being needs to follow its implications with a normative sense.

Mill’s notion of common acceptance in a person’s action is to express a state of balance between individual character and customary or social norms. Jonathan Riley, contemporary liberal theorists observed that, “Mill devotes quite a lot of time to his point that complete liberty of choosing as we like short, “short of injury to others” is essential to individuality and its cultivation.”<sup>59</sup> Riley says that, Mill ascribes freedom to a person’s action. At the same time he places importance on other-regarding activities where a person needs to consider the happiness and utility factors of other humans. Riley notices that there are some ambiguities in Mill’s principles of liberty. Riley says that an individual’s spontaneity to choose his own course of action is not compatible perfectly with the action of improvement and desirable changes with reference to a particular society. Improvement or making desirable changes may involve some sort of coercion or manipulation that diverts one’s personal feelings and interests from its natural standpoint. Riley says that Mill’s utility principles tend to implies that there is no problem or tension between a person’s interests and

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<sup>58</sup> Mill, 1863, p. 140

<sup>59</sup> Riley, 1998, p. 77.

the norms of social welfare.<sup>60</sup> Riley claims that the scope of individual liberty is limited to the rights of a person to have active and free thoughts. It may not include the interests of social welfare. The spheres of individual and social actions are distinct from each other. Social rules have its special legitimate norms of guiding and controlling human beings lives and conducts.

Mill however, offers a strategic formulation of analysing and investigating a problem that existed between individual choice and social conventions. By saying this Mill does not intend to propose a new rule that deviates from the existing one. “The only things that it is sought to prevent are things which have been tried and condemned from the beginning of the world until now; things which experience has shown not to be useful or suitable to any person’s individuality.”<sup>61</sup> One of the basic features of a person’s actions that prelude any factors for judging the degree of its human personality is to recognise the power and limit of toleration, responsibility, capability and choice. He suggests that autonomous action is not only about accepting or refuting the norms of social acceptance. It refers to the case of taking a precise care of not only causing harm or constraint to other people’s life but also protecting oneself from certain harmful effects. He says that, “a person who shows rashness, obstinacy, self-conceit—who cannot live within moderate means—who cannot restrain himself from hurtful indulgences—who pursues animal pleasures at the expense of those feeling and intellect—must to be lowered in the opinion of others.”<sup>62</sup> Here, he suggests the worth of realising social norms that pertains to the rights and interests of a person. He explains the situational context where moral or legal rules may interfere in a person’s conduct if it may prove to be pernicious not only to others but also to the person himself.

In fact, Mill’s notion of liberal rights was influenced by two factual historical experiences of mankind with reference to the relation between individual power and the common customary character. As Wendy Donner writes, “Mill claims that individuality is an essential component of self-development and a condition of happy life. This is the part of Mill’s argument for individuality. The second prong of his argument for individuality lauds its social benefits.”<sup>63</sup> In the historical phases of human struggle individual power was conceived as antagonistic to the character of general custom. The reason may be due to absolute dominance by each phase of existence at different historical phase that resulted in chaos and conflict. The first phase exposed the tyranny of individual power where the rights of the

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<sup>60</sup> Riley, 1998, p. 79.

<sup>61</sup> Mill, 1863, p. 156.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>63</sup> Donner, 2009, p. 66.

people to express their desires and opinions were seen as rebellious. In the second phase the strong opinions of the masses suppressed the individual capability for not conforming to the general acceptance. Thus, he explicates the condition where the value of individual feelings and sentiments is inculcated within the scope of social interaction. Donner claims that, “Mill’s theory is holistic and the excellence of individuality and autonomy are balanced with those of compassion, co-operativeness and community.”<sup>64</sup> In general what humanity demands from an autonomous self is something that is agreeable to all. The idea of this acceptability specifically reflects the rights of a person’s with reference to his motives and conducts for the development of his spiritual and physical character.

### **1.3. Discussion**

The philosophical enquiry on the autonomous status of an individual both from the earlier historical and modern period highlights the striving power and will of a person to claim his legitimate rights. It reflects the efforts of knowing the true nature of a person with the help of his rational ability. The rational capacity of a person portrays the efficiency and competency of his physical and mental character where he can significantly investigate the distinct nature of good and bad, right and wrong actions. Hence, a rational autonomous action of a person seems to display a problem or a conflict between a person’s natural desires and a rational deliberation to achieve the right kind of action.

As already discussed the rational autonomy of an individual signifies the process of cultivating one’s desires and conduct in order to create harmony and order in a person’s life. The notion of rationality tends to imply certain rules and laws in a person’s action theoretically or practically. The purpose of directing a person’s desires according to a particular rule is to make people aware of the worth of human beings life that may result from self-controlled decision. Plato writes that, “all our deeds should insure that the human being within this human being has the most control.”<sup>65</sup> The statement points out the importance of directing human particular tastes and preferences to a rational desire in order to abstain from imperfect and irrational desires. Plato believes that this rational realization that may be essentially reflected in a person’s decision-making process is the genuine way of knowing and experiencing the right things.

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<sup>64</sup> Donner, 2009, p. 69.

<sup>65</sup> Plato, 1997, p. 1197.



However, Aristotle while accepting Plato's idea of rationality as the appropriate form of investigative means to infer a person's character is not satisfied with Plato's psychological way of objectifying particular human desires into universally acceptable desires. Aristotle says that, "choice or purposes implies calculation and reasoning."<sup>66</sup> According to him a purposive choice is concerned with the ability to fulfil a desired goal or purpose. Having a choice means not only to express mere willingness to grasp the formal meaning of truth or falsity of human deeds and conduct. But it also concerns with the individual capability to face and challenge various immediate circumstances without any prior preparation and knowledge. Plato interprets the notion of rational human actions theoretically that follows from the idea of perfect universal approach. Aristotle on the other hand, advances the practical normative means where a person expresses his voluntariness to choose a particular course of action. In the historical domain, both Plato and Aristotle are concerned with self-regarding moral virtues of a person by legitimising the possible means to realise their life-plan within its control.

In the modern context, Kant specifically introduced the moral autonomy of a person where he imposed the worth of following the universal moral principles over the will of a person. In fact, Kant tries to comprehend the distinct relation of the practical world of sense and the conceptual unity of the world of understanding through reason. Here, it is important to note that the world of sense and the world of understanding are not two contrary terms. Rather, the world of sense is the defining criteria of the world of understanding. The world of understanding refers to the power of human intelligence where one can know his proper self. Kant expressed that, "a rational being must regard himself as intelligence (hence not from the side of his lower powers) as belonging not to the world of sense but to the world of understanding."<sup>67</sup> The world of understanding acts as a formal conceptual unity in guiding individual deeds and conduct categorically that applies to the will of every human being. Indeed, Kant's world of understanding is inspired by the possible existence of the element of pure cognition however he never admits the means by which human knowledge can colonise the world of pure sense. Kant is aware of the limit where his Practical Reason is not allowed to cross. Hence, he ascribed its possibility only in terms of practical philosophy instead of speculative as Plato does.

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<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, 1906, p. 68.

<sup>67</sup> Kant, 1997, p. 27.

Kant's consideration on prioritising moral autonomy rather than the mere autonomous will of a person may be compared to the contemporary accounts of human decision-making process as enunciated by Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt. Dworkin says, "that autonomy should have some relationship to the ability of individuals, not only to scrutinize critically their first-order motivations but also to change them if they so desire."<sup>68</sup> Dworkin emphasized that the purpose for introducing this account is to provide explanation regarding a person's ability and capacity to rationalize their motivated desires. However, Dworkin does not explain this evaluative power of a person exactly not in terms of strict Kantian universal moral obligation. But with reference to human conscious nature and will, the purpose for introducing this account necessarily concerns to safeguard a person's interests and identity from certain kinds of influential factors such as manipulation, deception etc. Kant is also concerned with the same intention of safeguarding the rights and dignity of a person that signify not only self-regarding but also other-regarding moral actions. Though for Kant, the moral freedom of a person involves the process of understanding the problem of contingent human sensible experiences.

As a matter of fact, the word "person", signifies the active self-reflective and self-evaluative character of a human being. Harry Frankfurt, a contemporary moral philosopher, connotes the term person in a very unique sense of human ability as conceptually distinguished from other humans and animals who passively follows their instinctive desires. Frankfurt writes that, "the essential difference between persons and other creatures is to be found in the structure of a person's will."<sup>69</sup> Frankfurt says that a person as distinguished from other humans has a will to act upon his effective desire. By effective desire, it refers to the ability of an individual to stand on his chosen desire with the intention of accomplishing his purpose or goal. Whereas for Kant rational freedom of a person finds its validity in the form of objective moral laws by abstracting particular human desires. And, as such for Kant a person's voluntary actions can be defined only in terms of human moral intelligence to universalise particular feelings and inclinations. Therefore, Kant considered the phenomenal nature of human sensible experiences as involuntary human actions which covers a wider aspect than Aristotle's notion of involuntary actions. Aristotle claims that actions of pity or forgiving are involuntary actions but for Kant it includes the entire human passive sensible nature.

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<sup>68</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> Frankfurt, 1971, p. 6.

Mill retains the basic features that are required for a person to be autonomous which Kant elucidated in his moral explanations such as rights, dignity, respect etc. However, Mill takes into account a person's feelings and opinions as a constitutive factors in determining a person's autonomy by refuting Kant's rigid moral objective views. Mill says that, "we have a right, also, in various ways, to act upon our unfavourable opinion of anyone, not to the oppression of his individuality, but in the exercise of ours."<sup>70</sup> According to Mill, it is necessary for a person to be aware of his own rights on the condition of without causing any harm or injury to any other individual. The act of acknowledging the rights of others in conformity with its own rights presupposed the importance of social relation thereby resembling a social-relational phenomenon<sup>71</sup> as developed by Marina Oshana, a contemporary moral philosopher. According to Oshana, a person's autonomy is appropriately determined by the particular social situation. Oshana claims that mere subjective psychological states cannot define a person's autonomous identity, values and position without any social relation. Mill also explicates the importance social relation but according to him the relation involves the fact of mutual understanding between societal rules and the individual opinions. On the other, Oshana exhibits the importance of recognising one's inherent autonomy from the perspective of external social criteria.

## **Conclusion**

The diverse philosophical views on the notion of autonomous actions of human beings both by the Greek and Modern philosophers provides a comprehensive account of the nature and character that a person should have. The historical and the modern accounts, suggests different human principles of actions from the context of moral, legal and social that may require for a human being to develop as a rational person. Further, it also signifies the idea of responsibility and obligation that underlies the meaning of a person's autonomy. In fact, the awareness of one's autonomous status enables a person to raise authentic questions of its own existence as well in relation to other human beings living in a society. Perhaps, it points to the specific feature of a person to understand human problems in different aspects that may bring about the requisite changes from time to time.

Thus, the claim for the basic autonomous rights capacitates a person to think and rationalize his natural and crude human thoughts. It may help a person to discern between

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<sup>70</sup> Mill, 1863, p. 149.

<sup>71</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 49.

good and bad which may at times locate the worth for a person to act beyond their normal customary and social bounds. The intentions about such individual power does not symbolise an exclusive deviation from the social norms but to accept the difference or change only for the better. The distinct feature of a person's nature and conduct is not simply to assimilate spontaneously with the social norms but to understand a problem in the right way that fits to capture a human personality.

## Chapter Two

### Personal Autonomy in Contemporary Moral Philosophy

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I shall critically investigate the four important accounts of personal autonomy given by contemporary philosophers. These accounts are coherentists, reasons-responsive, responsiveness-to-reasoning and the relational accounts.<sup>72</sup> Here I am following a rough classification made by Sarah Buss in her article on personal autonomy in Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. In order to acquire a more comprehensive idea of autonomy of a person with relation to the apparent contemporary world, I would analyse the effectiveness of these accounts in our moral philosophical explanations of human person. Contemporary philosophers make an effort to co-relate and expand the notion of personal autonomy from various aspects of reasoning such as internal and external psychological abilities of a person, political and social with reference to the above mentioned accounts. The purpose for analysing the notion of autonomy from these diverse aspects is to understand the underlying moral implications that are believed to be present in all these four major accounts.

Contemporary philosophers such as Gerald Dworkin, Harry Frankfurt and many others have talked about a coherentist account of personal autonomy. Coherentist account aims to rationalize the relation between a person's autonomous status and his internal motives by introducing the hierarchical accounts of decision-making process. Reasons-responsive account, on the other hand, specifies a person's autonomous will in compliance with the possible external set of choices and plans. Robert Paul Wolff claims that autonomous will of a person signifies the moral condition of a person where a person can take responsibility of an action by his own reason of choice. Responsiveness-to-reasoning explicates the importance of not only rationalizing our motives in terms of external values but also instigates on the reason of internal wants and desires. Susan Wolf claims that autonomy is not only about following the idea of valuing certain plans of actions on the basis of reason but it also involves realizing our inner desiring selves. Further, relational account suggests the requirement of the external social criteria for a person to think and act autonomously. Marina Oshana emphasized the socio-relational account to measure the authenticity of one's preferences in the light of social

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<sup>72</sup> Buss, 2002.

values and facts. Its main purpose is to enable a person to evaluate his autonomy, as his identity on the basis of social character.

The second section concentrates on the possible analysis of the necessary conditions of personal autonomy which may be mentioned as follows:

- a) Self-awareness: It refers to the abilities of a person who chooses his plans in accord to his will. A person should be in a position where he can reflectively aware the purpose of his goals in the light of his autonomous plans and decisions.
- b) Acknowledgement of responsibility: It is a condition where a person pursues his autonomous decision with sufficient reason why he is adopting a particular plan. An action cannot be counted as one's own if an individual is not ready to take responsibility for that particular action.
- c) Rational deliberation: It implies a determination and reliability of exercising a person's will into a desired action. The autonomous situation of a person enable him to understand a given problem and to decide to take an independent consideration as what and how he should do to achieve his motivated plan.

The third section is the critical discussion of the above two sections regarding the various compatible and incompatible issues that have been raised on the notion of autonomy of a person.

## **2.0 Four Major Accounts of Personal Autonomy**

The purpose for introducing the four accounts of autonomy, that is, coherentist, reasons-responsive, responsiveness-to-reasoning and relational is to present the diverse ways and procedures concerning how a person exercised his autonomous power in relation to his certain external and internal given circumstances. Sarah Buss<sup>73</sup> has talked about several accounts of personal autonomy. However, for the present purpose I will discuss only four specific accounts that may be considered as important.

### **2.1 Coherentist Account**

Coherentist account suggests that, “an agent governs her own action if and only if she is motivated to act as she does because this motivation coheres with (is in harmony with) some

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<sup>73</sup> Sarah Buss analysed the different accounts of personal autonomy as viewed by different contemporary philosophers in Stanford Encyclopaedia of philosophy.

mental state that represents her point of view on the action.”<sup>74</sup> Here, it is important to mention that the nature of harmonizing a person’s psychological motives and his actions may differ according to different philosophers. Here I will discuss the issues of coherentist account as proposed by Gerald Dworkin and Harry Frankfurt.

## **Dworkin**

Autonomy with reference to a person has a wider perspective than those traditionally accepted notions such as freedom, voluntariness etc. It is inherently related with a person’s feeling, character and the ability to tackle a given situation that may highlight the purpose of his own life. Gerald Dworkin argues that, a person’s autonomy signifies his ability to choose a particular preference to act or not to act, upon relative desires.<sup>75</sup> Dworkin says that, autonomous condition of a person specifies that one can critically raises his reflective ideas to assimilate his ability with the first-order desires or to hold a different view. The idea of reflection symbolised one’s conscious act to realize a certain plan of life and make it effective in his actions. He points out that, “liberty, power, and control over important aspects of one’s life are not the same as autonomy.”<sup>76</sup> The idea of liberty, freedom as the notion of absence of restraints in a person’s action is not same as the autonomous status of a person in meaning and significance. The absence of certain restraints does not set to define the meaning of autonomy in its conceptual entirety as applicable to person.

The difference between humans and animals is that humans have the ability to grow and develop to that extent that may enable for the formation of conceptual knowledge of human character and conduct. He claims that, “our normative and conceptual theories would be deficient if the distinction between levels were not drawn.”<sup>77</sup> He says that, without this conceptual knowledge, it would become impossible to analyse human character and conduct. It is true that human beings have different desires and feelings however there has to be some concrete foundation of human nature on the basis of which different types of human actions may be judged. He writes that, “by exercising such a capacity, persons define their nature, give meaning and coherence to their lives, and the responsibility for the kind of person they are.”<sup>78</sup> Here, he addresses the possible means where a person may adopt a higher-order of

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<sup>74</sup> Buss, 2002.

<sup>75</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 15.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 20. When Dworkin emphasized the importance of a second-order reflection, he is not saying that human actions itself needs to be verified only at this higher level.

reflection in accordance to his capability and requirements. Man confronts various types of external and internal involuntary constraints in diverse ways and hence, there arises the necessity for adopting this higher-level capacity in order to protect oneself from certain coercive and manipulative factors. Here, it is important to mention that he does not ascribe any specific criteria where a person may realize the worth of adopting the higher-level of understanding.

Dworkin maintained that the appropriate way of viewing a person's autonomous actions is that it depends significantly on his capability, circumstances, feelings and desires where he may decide to become submissive or to restraint from certain rules. Hence, it may not be reasonable to identify autonomous condition of an individual with any of the accepted ideals, values or the notions of freedom that have been historically developed. As a result, Dworkin expressed that, autonomy of a person comes into unavoidable conflict with other social values and ideals.<sup>79</sup> He explained that a problem may arise when the notion of autonomy is equated with any ideals or values. The notion of autonomy has no determinate standard or values in the socio-political context of a society. He pointed out that autonomy of an individual is not absolutely compatible with any established rules or principles. It can neither be identified as a condition free of constraints legally, or politically where a person may acquire in the form of rights or submission to any moral ideals or values absolutely. What autonomy requires is the understanding of a person's own capacity to act in a given situation where he could clarify the reasons why he acted in a particular way. Autonomy cannot be defined as a theoretically recognized principle that undermines or encourages any kind of human actions.

Human being faces certain involuntary constraints in the course of their phenomenal lives. Hence, it is in the domain of autonomy where one has the possibility to know and investigates diverse circumstances and act accordingly. It is here in this context, that the notion of rationality is regarded as the important element in defining the autonomous condition of a person. In fact, Dworkin claims that human beings in accordance to circumstances and requirements "can legitimately think of the sanctions as being self-imposed."<sup>80</sup> A person may accept certain rules or principles if he sees a reason for following it on the basis of his intentions and beliefs. For Kant, the nature of self-imposition is directed in the form of objective moral obligations divested of all subjective feelings and desires. Kant

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<sup>79</sup> Dworkin 1988,p. 25.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.23.



puts his effort to deduce a categorical objective formula in the domain of human acting ability. He says that, “it is certainly true that the notion of autonomy has been linked with that of responsibility.”<sup>81</sup> When autonomy is viewed from the moral standpoint, it addresses certain objective criteria that need to be considered such as respecting the autonomous rights of other people, acting with the intention of maximising utility and the idea of acceptability etc. The purpose of proposing all these conceptions reflect the rights of a person to exercise his own choices and plans. Hence, these conceptual contents may be regarded as an informative ground concerning how a person should pursue his autonomy in different aspects.

It is important to note that people do not possess the same nature and ability. He states that, “it is not the case that all persons have an equal capacity.”<sup>82</sup> As a matter of fact, it is not possible for all human beings to get access to the same level of knowledge. Thus, the process of inferring the categorical understanding of human desires and actions may become problematic. Autonomy indicates the authoritative will of the agent where he is aware of the path of his life-plan that coheres with his ability to act. He says that, it would be fair and sensible, if a person is competent in realizing his unique ability and skill to do certain things in his life.<sup>83</sup> He explains that recognition of persons as self-conscious human beings is to know his capacity to act differently. Perhaps, Dworkin adopted a holistic moral approach of understanding human beings ability to engage in different fields of life-activities. Unlike Plato’s implications of formal impartial moral laws, Dworkin claims that it is indispensable to investigate critically a person’s efficiency level, environment, circumstances etc. It is this diverse capacity that we need to respect and determine its significance in the growth of human life.

Dworkin writes that, “a central feature of moral principles is their social character.”<sup>84</sup> Here he claims that autonomy of a person when viewed from a moral dimension attaches importance with the social values and principles. The reason is because our beliefs and ideas are influenced to a larger extent by our family, society, culture etc. Both in the case of moral and ordinary autonomous activities, people always refers and relies on some authority, whether it is legal or social or some experts. In the case of ordinary activities we may be accepting the authority without any critical reflection while in the case of moral actions we

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<sup>81</sup> Dworkin, p. 28. Here Dworkin is trying to point out the implicit moral reasons that are associated with the notion of autonomy.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

may be concerned to raise questions about its legitimate acceptance. Thus, Dworkin suggests that, a moral agent must use his autonomous ability to know and specify own moral choices.<sup>85</sup> However making independent moral choice does not implies that a person has to originate his own theoretical moral account. It is not reasonable that an individual has to completely refute his natural circumstances so as to make a choice, a moral choice. The claim of inventing independent moral choice as the essence of autonomy may lead to the rise of inevitable conflicts with the established moral authority.

Dworkin maintained that, autonomy is coherent with the moral objective principles where a person may evaluate his desires and actions on the basis of moral principles to know what is right or correct.<sup>86</sup> In the domain of autonomy of a person, we may examine actions of a person in terms of moral principles and authority in order to match the worth of a person's capacity and willingness. In the case of scientific investigations too, people relies on the objective methodical procedure based on factual observations. The common feature between these two concepts is the presence of valid objective principles. Further, Dworkin claims that, we human beings don't have enough time and cognitive skill to examine the validity of objective principles and knowledge.<sup>87</sup> In the domain of practical science we may accept the authority without independent reasoning. However, in the case of autonomy we may accept judgment of the authority not in the absolute terms but that necessarily shapes our independent ideas and concerns. It should be ensured that moral authority should influence one's beliefs and consent in order to highlight the better perspective of a person.

Literally, autonomy of a person depicts the authoritative will of a person to act. And as such the notion of autonomy may assume a person as the cause of its own independent moral rules. Dworkin writes that, "one role of moral theory is to secure convergence in judgment, agreement by moral agents as to what should be done in particular situation."<sup>88</sup> The notion of autonomy of a person, as the freedom to act purely from the individualistic point of view has the possibility to subside the actual interpretation of autonomy. Further it seems that autonomy of an individual from a moral dimension involves the intellectual knowledge of human beings. He claims that the purpose for introducing objective ideas in morality is to acquire a sense of common foundation of human intentions and actions as distinct from those fragmentary and partial understanding of human decisions and actions. Here he intends to

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<sup>85</sup> Dworkin 1988, p. 38.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

present the legitimate objective moral understanding of human beings. He says that a person can have an idea of objective moral understanding that is independent of truth.<sup>89</sup> In quest for objective moral judgments, one may infer the value of truth from the idea of objective morality. Here the problem is that when we recognised moral judgment in terms of its specific truth-value, the resulting formal conclusion may not be compatible with the diverse phenomenal descriptions of human actions. Thus, the higher-order reflection of human actions marked the process that leads to the formation of some meaningful constitutive ideas of human actions and decisions.

### **Frankfurt**

Frankfurt tries to give critical explanation of human actions with a lesser stress on the social, legal or moral conceptions. His explanation is specifically centred on particular human nature and conducts in order to have a clear notion of a person's autonomous status. With regard to human intentions and actions, Frankfurt writes that, "they are capable of wanting to be different in their preferences and purposes from what they are."<sup>90</sup> He points to the presence of peculiar characteristics of human capacity as distinguished from animals and other species. Human beings have the unique nature of adopting their prior thought process that may compel a person to bring about a harmonious relation of his acting ability in relation to his thought capacity. Here, it is important to mention that though Frankfurt shares some similar conceptions with Dworkin regarding the possession of reflective capability by human beings, there are certain differences in their methodical interpretations. For Frankfurt, the term "wanton"<sup>91</sup> refers to those humans and other creatures that possess the first-order level of desires as they cannot define themselves beyond their psychological and physiological instinctive attitudes.

Further, Frankfurt puts special practical effort while endorsing the requirement of second-order reflection. He writes that, "it is in having second-order volitions, and not having second-order desires generally, that I regard as essential to being a person."<sup>92</sup> Frankfurt argues that achievement of mere second-order desires does not signify that it is a person's own desires in a true sense. In the case of second-order level of desires, an individual may be able to form a will or a certain plan though he may not be aware as how to initiate the

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<sup>89</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 59.

<sup>90</sup> Frankfurt, 1971, p. 7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11. Frankfurt claims that the term "wanton" is not sufficient to describe the word "person" as they are not in a condition to act in a definite way in accordance to its own ability and purpose.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

effective process to achieve it. It may be that the individual may find himself in a conflicting situation where he has to engage in certain hypothetical investigative procedure that paves the possibility for changing his plan or to adopt alternate plan or procedure. Thus, Frankfurt claims that, “it is the notion of an effective desire-one that moves (or will or would move) a person all the way to action.”<sup>93</sup> By effective desire, it refers to those desires where a person is moved to act, with full determinations and puts his conscious efforts to achieve his decisive plan. Frankfurt says that the term effective desire has no similarity with any momentary feelings and intentions. It implies the will of a person to hold on a certain plan or goal that impels him to act or to refrain from doing a certain act.

In emphasizing the will of a person as the important factor to allocate the autonomy of a person, Frankfurt maintained that rationality is not the sole element that helps in recognizing a person’s autonomous desires. Frankfurt says that, “the essence of being a person lies not in reason but in will.”<sup>94</sup> A person as distinguished from a wanton always strives and shows his consistent efforts to accomplish his desired goal though he may or may not succeed. On the other, a wanton may not rely on his will for the formation of his self-reflective ability. The difference between a person and a wanton may be illustrated by citing an example of two narcotics addicts from Frankfurt’s account. Frankfurt says that, “one of the addicts hates his addiction and always struggles desperately, although to no avail, against its thrust”.<sup>95</sup> Frankfurt explains that this unwilling addict may have faced certain conflicting situation but still he has a will to stand on his chosen desire that may consider as his own. On the other, “the other addict is a wanton.”<sup>96</sup> The wanton addict due to lack of concern may not be able to get a clear insight of what he truly desires. The wanton is not concerned to make himself aware the scope and the occasion where he may determines the reliability between his desire and his will.

The peculiar problem of human beings is they do not always find themselves in an appropriate situation where they are free to act in accordance to his will. Frankfurt indicates that, “having the freedom to do what one wants to do is not a sufficient condition of having a

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<sup>93</sup> Frankfurt, 1971, p. 8.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 11. Though Frankfurt does not deny the necessary connection between reason and the will of a person, he refute to give explicit importance only to reason in determining a person’s autonomous motives and wants.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 12. This particular addict is an unwilling addict whom by his own will and effort struggling to resists his own instinct of addiction.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

free-will.”<sup>97</sup> As distinguished from manifesting our freedom of doing certain things, freedom of the will implies a specific way of analysing a relation between our ability to act and our chosen will. It points to the possibility of understanding a higher level human capability of placing a person’s wants and desires significantly from his own perspective. A will, as distinct from instinctive behaviouristic expressions defines a person’s decisive plan to pursue his goal of life. Thus Frankfurt maintained that, “a person’s will is free only if he is free to have the will he wants.”<sup>98</sup> Possessing a free-will by a person requires a sense of mature understanding where a person has an active capacity of understanding a problem practically. It is not identical with the actions of a person where he acts only when he finds the circumstances favourable. When a person formed his will, he voluntarily accepts it along with the constitutive apparent problematic scenario. And as such forming a will by a person does not exclude the possibility of certain involuntary external or internal constraints.

Perhaps Frankfurt claims that, “having the freedom to do what one wants to do is not a sufficient condition of having a free-will.”<sup>99</sup> A person may be said to be autonomous when there is a compatible relation between his desires and will. In fact, there is no clear distinct concept that demarcates a person from a wanton. For instance, having certain definite desire to act directly by an agent does not entail that he is a person or that a wanton does not have any definite desire and that he is always in a conflicting situation. A person endowed with a rational faculties may fail to realise what he actually desire for as certain conflicting issues may intervened and the problems may sway him to pursue the desire that is not consistent with his will. In this sense, Frankfurt talks about the requirement for second-order volitions. It is the stage where one particularise his wants and desires in the form of his will. Here in this level a person is already assumed to know his apparent problems and thus, struggles to resist the problems. As such he comes to realise the limits of his action where his will is allowed to exercise for achieving his purposive plan.

### **2.1.2 Reasons-responsive Account**

Reasons-responsive or externalist account explicates that, “an agent who is unresponsive to the reasons for “standing behind” or “backing up,” certain motives and not others is not in the proper position to authorize her own actions.”<sup>100</sup> The connection between autonomy and

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<sup>97</sup> Frankfurt, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>100</sup> Buss, 2002.

responsibility necessarily presupposes the existence of reason where a person may adequately formed his own valid opinions and motives. Robert Paul Wolff holds that, “every man who possess both free-will and reason has an obligation to take responsibility for his actions, even though he may not be actively engaged in a continuing process of reflection, investigation and deliberation about how he ought to act.”<sup>101</sup> Wolff says that a person who is already assumed to possess the capable notion of reason and free-will are obliged to take responsibility of their performed actions. And as such Wolff maintains that it is not required to inquire on the internal normative psychological aspects continuously, to know a person’s active efficiency and self-reflective awareness.

Relying on the rational authoritative power of a person, Wolff says that, autonomous person follows the rule of reason as his own and not in the form of moral dictates or command.<sup>102</sup> As distinct from Kant’s notion of moral imperatives, Wolff explains that the reason for a person following a command is not all about following its authoritative merits but also, because of its beneficial reasons as compatible with his desires and motives. In compliance with his personal desires and intentions, a person may compensate his own autonomy in the context, of foreseeing his greater beneficial aspects. For instance, a person may find it reasonable to give his consent to a doctor to perform certain medical examinations, keeping in mind his better health prospects. In every segments of our phenomenal life whether in moral, political or social, the commands of the authority is present, though in some it is present in the subtle forms. The impact of authority is deeply embedded in a human being’s social and cultural life that we began to impose its commands on our self in the form of rights and responsibility. In the moral sphere, a person is required to obey moral laws in order to accept and recognise the deeds and conducts that he performed.<sup>103</sup> When a person becomes aware that he is morally autonomous, the notion of self-legislating act is imposed on the person where he feels it right to follow. Though in the moral sphere, the issue of legitimacy and worthiness of the command is attached with the person’s autonomy.

Based on the historical experiences of authoritative rule, Wolff maintains, “that people believed that authority is the right to command and correlatively the right to be

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<sup>101</sup> Wolff, 1970.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

obeyed.”<sup>104</sup> As people are culturally and socially situated, they are always under the authoritative command of a state or group or any other form of institutionalized authority. The authoritative command as distinct from coercive or forcible commands acquires our beliefs that we have a right to follow its commands. The legacy of traditional authority instilled in the minds of people, the notion of its acceptance purely in the obliged form that, the importance of investigating its legitimacy with the help of reason is not considered as valid. Hence, the relationship takes the form of total adherence only by one side of group to the other. It thus, paves the possibility of the paradoxical stands that may arise between autonomy and responsibility. Wolff says that, people are aware of only the coerce nature of the authority where it impels the people to follow its orders.<sup>105</sup> History witnessed that human beings are essentially affected by the political dominance, where they become more or less submissive to the authoritative rules. It is here in this regard that the autonomous will of a person may pose problematic issues on the question regarding the legitimate ruling nature of the authority.

The term autonomy in its most literal sense means self-rule or self-law. In fact from this perspective Wolff tries to find a reconciliatory way of mediating the differences that exists between the autonomy of a person and the authority. Wolff says that, “if men rule themselves, if they are both law-givers and law-obeyers, than they combine the benefits of government with the blessings of freedom.”<sup>106</sup> Wolff says that the democracy is the appropriate scope where a person has a reason for exercising his autonomous capability. It is the condition where a person may perform a simultaneous role of freedom and responsibility. Wolff believes that in this sense the perplexed relationship between the authority and the autonomy of a person may be reduced to a greater extend.

Wolff is of the opinion that the democracy offers each individual the opportunity to choose those rules where they feel it right and acceptable. The purpose for introducing this democratic ideal is to make humans beings aware that how a social and cultural life influenced our implicit rational thoughts and abilities. Wolff advocates that, democracy makes a person realized his rights and freedom and his corresponding duty and responsibility.<sup>107</sup> Wolff explains that when a law is formed by the will and consent of the

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<sup>104</sup> Wolff, 1970.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Here Wolff tries to examine as how the impact of authoritative rule affects the corresponding autonomous moral understanding of a person.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

people, the law itself takes the form of sovereign legitimate authority. Every person or citizen accepts the law and follow its rules in the form of duty. In this way, it maintains the relationship of identity of interests between human beings, in the midst of differences in their positions. It is possible that due to changes in time and situations, a conflict may arise when a law explicitly rules the people. It is here in this stage that people may express their discontent feelings and views against the domineering laws and strives for the appropriate means to resolve the problems to maintain harmony.

Wolff's approach for explaining a person's self-defining conceptions from a practical dimension is to make human beings aware the moral problems such as manipulation, deception etc. The purpose is to make a person aware of his reason to choose his own independent motives. Wolff thus assumes that, democracy seeks to unite the feelings and interests of the people that results from the valid autonomous actions of a person.<sup>108</sup> A person's claim to authorise his own actions essentially presupposed his awareness of social rules and principles. Further a person exhibiting his autonomous conditions cannot simply base only on his static individual conceptions. Thus, Wolff suggests the priority for refining and renewing one's choices and preferences with reference to the social and political circumstances. It is here, in this regard that the possible extension of our autonomous decisions is required to confer legitimacy and validity.

Further, as society grew larger and its corresponding structure and pattern changes, there is a necessity for shifting a person's autonomous views to a new level of efficiency. The purpose of this suggestion is to keep in pace the individual independent reasons of acting with the changing trends of a society. Wolff claims that, a person should understand the actual objective structure of the social world.<sup>109</sup> Here, Wolff intends to secure the genuine feature of a person's autonomy from explicit diverse practical social affairs. He maintains that the best way of safeguarding and retaining an individual autonomy is to form authority where the consent and feelings of the people would be recognised. Thus, he suggests for the formation of the democratic form of government where a person has a right to exercise his autonomous capability and a reason to take responsibility for his performed actions. When a person finds the scope to express his feelings and opinions in the social system, a person may be able to define the worth and respect as a human being.

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<sup>108</sup> Wolff, 1970.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



Wolff says that, “each individual is born into a social world which is already organized into a regular pattern of behaviour and expectations.”<sup>110</sup> Human beings, in order to adapt and stabilise themselves in the world of humanity, engages with the various roles and principles that a society offer to them. It is within the objective social norms that a person relocates his reason to adopt certain established social principles or not. A person’s autonomous character does not demand a separate free world to legitimise his own rules and actions. What it demands is the right to recognise his autonomous power, knowledge and ability in the social functionaries. The significance for defining a person’s autonomy in the system of social governance is that besides providing a person a far-sighted protection from certain constraints, he may also protect himself from various self-deceptive influences.

### **2.1.3 Responsiveness-to-reasoning Account**

This particular account suggests that, “being autonomous is not the same thing as being guided by correct evaluative and normative judgments.”<sup>111</sup> It claims that the notion of ascertaining autonomy to an individual in terms of choice-making, reasons and the idea of valuing certain alternative plan may not capture the meaning of autonomy adequately with reference to human desires. Susan Wolf addresses certain paradoxical meanings that seem to occur between the notions of our desiring and valuing selves. Wolf tries to examine the distinct relation between values and desires that plays a pivotal role in determining a person’s autonomy. Wolf says, it seems that human desires correlates to some factual collections of information where their valuing self draws some valid conclusions from it.<sup>112</sup> Following the traditional views of an autonomous person, there’s a tendency to synchronise values and desires not only from the perspective of self-view but also from the point of view of other participants. For instance, we may bring into consideration Kant’s moral autonomous view of universalising, objectifying, and rationalising individual’s desires and feelings that leads to a higher moral aspect of humanism.

The ability to form a higher-level autonomous capacity makes us to believe that this ability is determined by some power that exists beyond our desiring selves. Wolf asserts that, “our valuing selves are in sense themselves observers and judges of our merely desiring

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<sup>110</sup> Wolff, 1970.

<sup>111</sup> Buss, 2002.

<sup>112</sup> Wolf, 1990, p. 51.

selves.”<sup>113</sup> The problem here is that how our higher aspect of valuing selves justifies and controls our desiring selves. Logically, it may be that our valuing selves evolve itself in the form of reflection which without this link, the idea of coherencies would lose its meaning and significance. Still the difficulty is that when we identify autonomy of a person with this higher aspect, it seems to deprive its own literal sense, where it authorized a person to act in accordance to his desires. There’s a possibility that this higher-level of reflection may grant its power of autonomy to think and act only to those persons who possess acceptable qualifications. Hence, the question is that whether the transition of desiring selves into valuing selves is compatible with the autonomous condition of a person.

The imposition of restrictions on our desiring selves is considered to be valid so that our valuing selves may expresses it rules and principles along with a tag of rationality and acceptability. In accordance to this view, Wolf says that, a person who values and acts in accordance to her desires may not considered being an autonomous person.<sup>114</sup> Wolf says that it is true that we generally consider that human beings have the power to think critically with reference to their motives and desires. However, exclusive attachment of the importance of reason only to our valuing selves may not be appropriate to describe autonomy with reference to human wants and feelings. Further, there is no established standard by which we set apart desiring selves from the valuing selves, except that by suppressing our feelings and impulses. Wolf explicates that rational choice of a person does not exhibit the importance of choosing one particular plan or alternative over others.<sup>115</sup> Wolf intends to disclose the nature of those other alternatives which our reason does not support. Autonomy may not be interpreted only in the strict sense of adopting a higher rational faculty but it also means the process of knowing and experiencing other plans that lacks rational intimation.

Wolf explains that autonomy of a person indicates his ability to know his primary choice that reveals his desire to act in accordance to a rationale choice or not.<sup>116</sup> Autonomy displays the concerned of a person about how and in what manner to act. It signifies the autonomous will of a person to do or not to do certain decisive actions. The choice of a person does not mark a compulsive one-sided relationship only with the rational values. In fact, having a reason does not subsequently impel a person to act. As Wolf says that, a person

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<sup>113</sup> Wolf, 1990, p. 49. Wolf tries to examine the conflicting role played by a person’s own self in terms of “desiring” and “valuing” selves while defining the autonomous condition of a person.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

may find the value of acting against the reason though he might not desire to act against it.<sup>117</sup> An individual may find a good reason for not being followed certain acceptable rules or principles though he may not really intend to act on it. For example, the only son of parents may value the pleasure of spending his earnings in enjoying a holiday instead of taking care of his old parents though he may not really act on that decision.

The assumed inherent connection between autonomy and rational values does not pacify all rational human beings to follow the same rational deliberation. Wolf claims that, all persons do not have the same tastes and preferences in relation to their differences in situations and as a member of a particular community.<sup>118</sup> Human beings do not have the same nature and characters due to differences in their natural or biological and other environmental conditions. This circumstantial difference brings about a certain observable distinctions in a person's character and conduct. Even if human beings follow reason that may consider being right, their ways of viewing and understanding autonomous condition may not be the same. Further without having any issue of being autonomous, a person may act in accordance to reason what it seems to be right at any particular moment. Based on the diverse characters and conducts of human beings, we may say that autonomous desires is not all about following the rational values that comes in the form of resisting our natural desires and motivations. The pre-supposed inseparable connection between reason and values may make a person to choose those actions that may disregard the unique features of being a responsible human.

Wolf intends to simplify the various grounds or positions from which a person exercises his autonomy. According to her view autonomous desires needs more extensive analysis as regards how it affects a person's nature and conduct. She says that, the difference between an autonomous and non-autonomous agent cannot be based on a person's psychological ability to analyse the value of reason only.<sup>119</sup> The distinct nature between autonomous and non-autonomous persons cannot presumably incline only on reason where it regulates the norms and principles of autonomy. When we configure rational attributes to our autonomous desires, it creates a seeming contradiction of our self in two parts, that is, valuing selves and desiring selves. Autonomy as such may not solely relate to a person's striving power to achieve a higher virtuous outcome from his actions. Further, it is not reliable to identify absolutely with the capacity to choose only one course of rational action among some

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<sup>117</sup> Wolf, 1990, p. 57.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

alternatives, by setting a limiting boundary to a person not to desire anything else beyond the available alternatives. Rational choice, in fact, may not refer only to one course of action because we may come across such a situation where the existent alternatives may have equal importance.

Perhaps, the subtlety and intuitive understanding of autonomy of a person may not be compatible with reference to only ideal rational values. Wolf says that, “a person who always consults and acts according to reason in this sense might be found unattractively cold, straitlaced, lacking in spontaneity.”<sup>120</sup> One of the important features of being an autonomous person is to maintain flexibility in his motivations in order to sustain with the changing situations and time. The idea to derive solid rational values from the diverse aspects of human actions offers only a limited aspect of human actions. Wolf asserts that, autonomy of a person is determined by the possible means which he acquired to achieve his plan and not simply to make a choice among a few available alternatives.<sup>121</sup> The peculiar tradition of calculating or measuring the degree of merits of one’s autonomous actions on the basis of higher rational values emphasize only the rigid patterns of human actions. What it lacks here is the worth of skill and innovative decision of a person.

#### **2.1.4 Relational Account**

This account suggests the external social-relational criteria that may account for the development of autonomy of a person. According to this account, autonomy is considered to be an acquired realization where a person develops his own self-conscious personality within the traits of social character. As stated, “if an agent’s point of view does not reflect her respect for herself and for her ability to set her own ends and assess the reasons relevant to pursuing some ends and others, then the direction her reasoning takes cannot be attributed to her.”<sup>122</sup> Marina Oshana offers a socio-relational perspective of understanding a person’s autonomy. Oshana claims that, “autonomy understood as a self-government, is a socio-relational phenomenon.”<sup>123</sup> The relation between a person and a society forms an interconnected part that may help a person to determine his autonomous situations. As distinct from internal psychological conditions, it is believed that a social-relational criterion suggests a wide variety of alternatives that may present adequate scope for a person to choose his purposive plan.

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<sup>120</sup> Wolf, 1990, p. 56.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>122</sup> Buss, 2002.

<sup>123</sup> Oshana, 2006. Oshana supports the external social criteria where a person may practically choose his own course of actions.

According to external relational contemporary account, it is maintained that the fulfilment of internal subjective desires is not sufficient to define the autonomy of a person. Oshana says that a person as distinct from other species is characterized with the attitudes to think and deliberate her power and ability.<sup>124</sup> Following the specific prototype process of stating autonomous capacity of an individual on the basis of psychological attributes such as preferences or making independent choices may not constitute its meaning sufficiently. The reason is that a person may be psychologically independent yet he may not be autonomous. Despite a person's achieving a desirable psychological complacency with his approval and consent may find himself in a static bound situation. The realization of a person's autonomy involves the practical cognitive ability where one can acknowledge the process of growth and change in his personal activity. A social relation may enable a person to enhance his own identity and position in a socially interactive environment.

Oshana claims that seeking a subjective contentment on the basis of voluntary choice and willingness may not be regarded as the only valid expressions of autonomy of a person. Citing the example of a contented slave, Oshana writes that, "the slave is content does not indicate that he is self-governing."<sup>125</sup> A person who becomes slave by his own will is not an autonomous individual by the very fact of his own existence. Autonomous condition signifies a person's legitimate authority. Oshana elaborates that, "being a slave means that how he shall live is largely and key respects, no longer up to him."<sup>126</sup> Absence of certain degree of constraints or forceful intervention or in some positive sense to receive some favourable opportunities or benefits does not exclude the fact that a slave is in a condition of bondage. The condition of slavery signifies the state of being trapped in someone's control where a person has no independent will to control his own life. For Oshana, the condition is true for both types of slavery that, whether one is in a condition of forceful or voluntary slavery.

The possible extent where a person may exercise his autonomy cannot be determined within the enclosed boundary of certain traditional norms and principles. Perhaps, what is required is a larger social exposure that enables a person to co-relate his desires and motives

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<sup>124</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 62. Oshana does not completely reject the importance of internal or psychological conditions of a person. She explicates the requirement of external social criteria so that a person may be able to develop his autonomous ability within a comparative social world.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 50. Here Oshana raised an argumentative explanation against the view of those contemporary philosophers who maintain the possibility of forfeiting one's independent status by his own autonomous choice. She tries to show that autonomy reflects a person's self-dependent structure and ability that may necessarily be cognised as his own identity.

with the human interests globally. Oshana states that, traditional autonomous moral principles exhibits only the fundamental ground of self-managing motives and actions.<sup>127</sup> The historical moral principles demonstrate only the neutral moral norms where it enables a person to understand his obligations in the midst of social life. However the manifestations of the authentic role of a person may not fulfil the historical values and ideology. The trend of identifying the autonomous desires of a person according to the historical moral aspects may not assure that he is really self-governing.

The mode of assigning social position and roles to an individual may be considered as autonomous even though he may be under the influential control of social recognition. Oshana claims that, a person can be considered autonomous even though her self-identifying character and reflective element may not be present.<sup>128</sup> The requirement of social connection with a person's psychological motives is to make known of his factual identity and status. The purpose of this realization within a social acquaintance is not simply to refute or accept existing social norms but to identify his appropriate status and character. It is in the world of difference that a person may become aware of his own unique identity. Oshana asserts that the realization of an autonomous status of a person involves the explicit process of knowing oneself merely than an implicit one.<sup>129</sup> Autonomy in the real sense is not for achieving the personality which one is really not. But it refers to the process of optimizing one's original identity with a sense of self-respect. A social relation enables a person to evaluate and develop his choices by engaging effectively in social activities.

In fact, autonomy of a person simply does not depict his specific skill and efficiency to act only for a relative period of time. Oshana remarks that, "what decides a person's autonomy is not simply the interval of time for which a person behaves (or fails to behave in a self-managed way)."<sup>130</sup> Autonomous decisions of a person manifest the very condition of his life. To understand autonomy only in terms of specified acting purposes may create a conflict in explaining and justifying the autonomous human motives and conducts. Autonomy promotes the power of skill and novelty in wide ranges of human activities in various social as well as personal aspects. Accordingly Oshana explicates that, episodic or relative descriptions of self-determined life of a person tends to ascribe the importance of autonomy

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<sup>127</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 68.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

only on the basis of momentary requirements or conditions.<sup>131</sup> Relative understanding of autonomous actions and decisions lacks the broad cognitive ability of a person to analyse various problematic situations with greater efficiency. Further there's a tendency to hamper or suppress the practical ability of a person as his autonomous decisions may arise only from a limited accessible options.

Oshana says that explanation of autonomy of a person from a social perspective adapts the external realistic claims to address autonomy of a person from a realistic account.<sup>132</sup> Oshana explains that autonomy understood from the social and cultural account creates realistic perceptions of human intentions and actions. It exemplifies the practical dispositions of a person where he may effectively exercise his autonomous skill and activity. As a matter of fact, the notion of autonomy interpreted from a social relational account encompasses both the psychological and the external criteria for choosing the possible alternatives by a rational person. Oshana writes that, "personal autonomy must be conceptualised as a depiction of what is at issue for individuals who are situated with others in the real-world content of moral, social and political exchange."<sup>133</sup> Oshana asserts that autonomous capacity of a person that revolves only within the domain of psychological ability tends to promote a gross conception of autonomy. Thus, in order to understand the different implications of autonomy, a person should participate in a social roles and interactions.

## **2.2. Proposal for the Conditions of Personal Autonomy**

Here in this section, I propose to evaluate the three basic conditions of personal autonomy, that is, Self-awareness, Acknowledgement of responsibility and Rational deliberation. There are also certain other conditions like Control, Epistemic competence that may essentially presupposed the conditions of autonomy. However for the present purpose, I would be referring to only these three conditions, as the important implications that may be accounted for the explanation and justification of autonomy of a person is comprehensively subsume under these three conditions.

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<sup>131</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 71.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

### 2.2.1 Self-awareness

The peculiar characteristic or nature of human being considered as autonomous person is that they have the power of reflective thinking. The word “reflection” explicates the cohesive attempt of a person to visualise its aims, plans and purposes intelligibly within a social phenomenon. In fact, the notion of self-awareness may be more or less related with the word conscience. As Gilbert Ryle remarks the word conscience means “self-knowledge” or “self-consciousness.”<sup>134</sup> The word “self-knowledge” suggests the independent inert power of a human being to recognise and identify himself as a unique person. However, the fact is that the act of introspecting oneself is not possible without the existence of conceptual knowledge that may function as social, political, moral or linguistic.

Ryle says that a person’s endowed with a conscience presupposed his ability to cognize the general conventions and formulas.<sup>135</sup> The effectiveness of the general rules or principles that may be reflected in a person’s dispositions appears in the form of acceptable rules. Conscience as such is the internal or psychological functional activity of a person that co-relates with the external criteria or rules. If there is a coherent assimilating process with the internal and external realm, then the general rules provides the adequate scope for a person to promote and develop his projects and plans. However, if there arises any conflicts or confusions that may create a gap between a person’s will and the rules then, the rules may stop functioning in the form of acceptable commands.

Ryle asserts that conscience of a person makes him to realize his will and the power of reasoning.<sup>136</sup> The act of conscience involves a person’s inherent capacity to perform a particular plan that highlights his discretionary ability. The word discretion signifies a person’s efficacy to adapt to a certain established norms or to refute its principles that may have some moral worth. For example, I may decide to change my prior intention to attend my friend’s birthday party as I may felt the importance of taking care of my ailing father. This particular act may be considered as morally desirable act that may also enrich my act of attentiveness and cognition of the present situation. However, it is still yet to be analysed that whether the act of care or concern indicates an autonomous act of a person. Ryle claims that a person’s nature of being cautious or showing concern in a particular case is not compatible with the

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<sup>134</sup> Ryle, 1940, in his *Collected Essays*, p. 186.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*



autonomous actions of a person.<sup>137</sup> It is important to note that an autonomous action of a person does not exemplify any actions or motives of a person that exists beyond a socially recognisable form of human actions. It only specifies the possibility of enacting a person's own understanding and knowledge within a practical social realm, with a belief of making things right.

The fact is that though there is no definite converging point between a person's conscience and his autonomous status, we may explore some relevant points that may provide certain important hints about being an active conscious person. Ryle says that a person's conscience helps him to examine his own conducts and deeds adequately in social phenomena.<sup>138</sup> According to Ryle, a person's adaptive nature to environment, culture and society does not incite his conscientious ability immediately. Human beings existence in this world is normative in character. They exist as a member or as a part of an objective social world and nature. It is also true that humans regards themselves as a conscious human subject endowed with particular feelings, wants and beliefs. Hence, there are many other human agents with their own beliefs and rules that may have less relevance with a person's direct experiential understanding and knowledge. There's a possibility of arising a diverging gap and conflict between other people rules that may function as imperatives in relation to a person's wants and intentions. In that sense a person may acquire the importance to locate its aims and aspirations on the basis of his own will within social phenomena.

Ryle says that conscience as such is not an element to judge human thoughts and actions but it only guides human actions.<sup>139</sup> The manifestation of one's own conscience requires the attention and the actual feeling of a person that exhibits his character in solving a particular problem. If we take a closer look at human beings phenomenal life, we can say that humans are vulnerable to express their mistakes and imperfections while performing any social act or acts that express his personal habits or conducts. The fact is that as distinct from general rules that function in a pure academic form of knowledge, conscience articulates the operative rules. By operative rules, it indicates a person's dispositional skill to handle and control an apparent problematic situation. It presents a situation where a person uses his reflective ability in doing certain act. Ryle says that, "reflecting does or does seem to qualify

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<sup>137</sup> Ryle, 1940, p. 190.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

an autonomous activity.<sup>140</sup> Reflection as such reveals the calculative and efficient thinking of a person to solve a conflicting situation that tends to pose the questions of moral convictions.

Satya P. Gautam asserts that when a human being view himself as a person, he take himself as capable of doing something on his own.<sup>141</sup> A person in knowing himself as a conscious subject also acquires and possesses the understanding of other human selves in the form of reciprocal relationship. It is in the midst of these continuous social interactions that a person derives the meaning of its own identity and ability. A person realized that he has the capacity to make certain changes, to develop his innovative power that may bring about the requisite changes. For this reason, Gautam claims that, a person's self-cognising acts indicates that he is not merely a living thing but also who participates in a socially active environment.<sup>142</sup> Here, it is to be noted that when ascribe oneself the status of a unique person, it does not exclude the fact of being human as possessing certain generic features. However our pre-determined temporal existence is not sufficient to define our thinking and acting ability. Thus, the notion of autonomous ability of thinking and reflecting demonstrates our will and authority to take certain initiative in our life that requires our practical approach from the first-person perspective. And as such autonomous activity does not signify a complete detachment from the worldly existence.

A person may express his autonomous feelings and desires while engaging in some personal issue or issues related with others. According to Gautam, the means that shapes or moulds a reflective consciousness of a person takes place through the medium of a particular society.<sup>143</sup> The continuous process of assimilation of a person with the natural, social and cultural situation induces a sense of regularity and uniformity in a person's behaviour and acting impulses. As a matter of fact, a person inherits the qualities of generalising from the larger patterns. However, human beings simply do not act or behave purely in the receptive form. The act of learning various cultural, social and linguistics conventions by employing diverse signs and symbols enhances our efficiency to deny or accept certain rules and principles. It is from this efficient learning that a person formulates the ideas of self-practicing, investigating or evolving that introduces the act of choosing. When a person

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<sup>140</sup> Ryle, 1940, p. 470.

<sup>141</sup> Gautam, 1983, p. 64.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

attaches importance to such kinds of experiences, there arise the senses of voluntariness that may have a co-ordinating effect with his autonomous condition.

### **2.2.2 Acknowledgment of responsibility**

The specific criteria for judging a person as possessing of distinct attributable faculties and capacities such as will of strong or weak, brave or coward, respect or contempt marked a separate roles and identity in a social environment. Susan wolf says that, “it seems reasonable for us to distinguish aspects of our behaviour and personality from those which we apparently are not.”<sup>144</sup> The presence of these qualities in human being’s character is the basis for qualifying him as a responsible person. It is here in this sphere, that the extent and limit of a person’s ability is taken into account. Wolf claims that, “an agent who has a will—that is, who has desires, goals or purposes and the ability to control her behaviour in accordance with them—can be responsible for anything at all.”<sup>145</sup> A responsible person necessarily presupposed his effective awareness of his own will as different from other humans. A responsible person must not only necessarily be able to form his own individual will but also be practically intelligible of his own actions, that is, to be praise or blame as a moral agent.

Perhaps, it is important to analyse the peculiar characteristics of a person who is worthy to grant the status of responsibility as distinct from other conditions like ignorance or incapability etc. Wolf remarks,—“we take responsible beings more seriously than we take non-responsible ones- we treat them as persons and not as objects.”<sup>146</sup> Generally, the notion of responsibility seems to suggest the moral understanding of a person on the level of intellectual efficiency. But in addition to it, there may be deeper meaning and significance that needs to be highlighted. The notion of responsibility reflects the self-governing act of a person that differs from the expression of his ordinary behaviouristic activities. And as such it indicates the condition of basic freedom where a person may impute his reasonable effort to realize his purposive plan. When a person is assign to possess free acting capacity as an agent, he may able to take control of his actions on his own will that may reduce the risk of certain internal and external constraints such as coercion, manipulation or self-deception.

It is commonly held that the notion of responsibility presupposed the condition of autonomy of a person as it entails the notion of voluntariness in one’s actions. However, the

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<sup>144</sup> Wolf, 1990, p. 6. Here Wolf asserts the natural tendency of ascribing certain qualities and attitudes to human being that we may regard him as a responsible person in terms of assumed capacities and efficiency.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

implications of strategic efforts to realize the notion of responsibility in terms of self-control will and freedom of a person presents a dilemma that whether it should be interpreted in terms of rational intellectual efficiency or in terms of ordinary construction of human desires and intentions. P. F. Strawson described these two different opinions into two aspects, that is, the optimists and the pessimists. Strawson says that, the optimists held that a person's behaviours and conducts should be regulated in accordance to the authority of moral principles where he can be judge as right or wrong.<sup>147</sup> The optimists connote the notion of compulsive moral freedom and responsibility with respect to human intentions and actions by imposing the importance of objective moral choice. They emphasized the significance of determined human relationship with an expectation of moral goodwill in the appropriate social circumstances. The pessimists argue that, "if the thesis is true, then the concepts of moral obligation and responsibility really have no application"<sup>148</sup> as it exclusively diverts our perception of ordinary human relationship based on natural human feelings and wants.

Strawson tried to find a mediating or common point that would reconcile the differences in the views of the pessimists and the optimists that may help us to inquire the proper autonomous status of a person. Strawson admitted that there are certain cases where the application of moral regulating attitudes may not be reasonable to apply within the domain of ordinary inter-personal relationship. In the first case there are situations where certain unforeseen, ignorance or accidental conditions may enforce the rise of inappropriate circumstances. As Strawson said that, "they invite us to see the injury as one for which he was not fully, or at all responsible."<sup>149</sup> It is a case where certain contrary situations with respect to a person's feelings and intentions blocked the autonomous authority of a person while performing an act. It presents the possible cases where each side has a right and reasonable views to express their feelings and resentments and not simply making demands to others to follow it. In fact it highlights the situation where we may blame the occurred portion of the incident but not the subject.

Further, there may be a case where a person performs an action willingly and yet he may not be considered responsible for the act. This condition led us to perceive a person doing a certain act as possessing a different personality. Strawson maintained that, "they invite us to view the agent himself in a different light in which should normally view the one

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<sup>147</sup> Strawson, 1962.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. Here Strawson continues to explain the proceeding argumentative process between the pessimists and the optimists.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

who has acted as he has acted.”<sup>150</sup> This situation placed the person in a different paradigm beyond the normal position. Thus, the case indicates the requirement of intellectual skill to inquire the agent’s action. For instance, we may consider a case about a person who is absolutely under the control of some external supervision or power as in the case of hypnosis. Furthermore, there are cases where a person performing an action may not be in a fully stable moral condition. For example, act of pity or love. In such a case we cannot employ our proper reasoning faculties to judge it, but instead requires our emotional faculties to acknowledge the situation. For instance, when a child is committed to an act of theft or robbery due to hunger, it requires our special attention of solving the problem and to investigate the circumstantial condition.

The diverse cases of contingent human actions and intentions seems to suggests that the notion of responsibility does not fully signify one’s autonomous authority and will to act in a certain way in a consistent manner. On the other side, it also tends to explicates that the manifestation of one’s willingness and desires to act does not designate persistent moral reactive attitudes. Strawson denotes that, the truth of human existence is that they find themselves in the world of human inter-personal relationship.<sup>151</sup> The fact about human nature and characteristics is that it is not possible to frame a static account of human actions as referred to their intentions, desires and beliefs. Human beings experiences and confronts new problems that needs to be tackled from different perspective. Human beings experiential existence in a social world generates new attitudes and feelings that may be futuristic in nature. Thus, there’s always a tendency and readiness for a new experiential relationship, social roles and activities within a social convention. Strawson admits that the optimists views of attributing moral approval and justification to the varied structure of human feelings and beliefs and the pessimists opinions for refining human actions and intentions by forming a desirable objective human attitudes is not reliable.

As viewed from the common framework of human freedom to resent certain injury caused by others or to refute certain responsibility imposed by others necessarily assumes the basic autonomous features of a person to express their feelings and actions. However, we may say that certain specific time and situations assigns us to employ certain techniques and intellectual skill to solve a given problem. Strawson claims that, ‘human mortal existence is imperfect and accidental in nature and hence, we may rely to some intellectual expertise to

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<sup>150</sup> Strawson, 1962.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

solve a specific given problem.<sup>152</sup> Human beings are equipped with contingent sensible nature of good and ill will or high and low efficiency skill etc. In certain cases we need to cultivate a higher intellectual capability that requires our extra effective efforts to maintain equilibrium condition in a society. For example, in certain rare cases we may require to attend a special condition in helping a psychologically disorder person in order to regain his normal consciousness. Further, in some other case we may feel appropriate to morally condemn a person for his heinous act with the intention of reforming him and to make him realized his normal social life.

Strawson intends to describe the diverse aspects of human actions and conducts and its expressive outcomes based on the factual human relationship. In fact, the criteria of ascribing the notion of responsibility or to judge human actions cannot be limited on few accounts of human feelings and inclinations. In that sense, the scope of acquiring the knowledge of a person's will and authority is incompatible with any of the attempts to deduce human feelings and actions in terms of the categorical moral understanding. The imposition of the moral reactive attitudes on the ordinary interpersonal relationship seems to refute our own apparent form of existence. However viewed from another dimension of human relationship, we may at times feel the requirement for the suspension of ordinary reactive attitudes to focus on the special connection of human relationship. Hence, it may not be possible to describe the real existential account of human conditions on the basis of concrete objective interpersonal attitudes. However, the demand on the acceptance of the moral attitudes with the intention of regularising the whole common objective attitudes of human experiential relations is not acceptable.

### **2.2.3 Rational deliberation**

The notion of rational deliberation indicates the efficient ability of a person to evaluate his plan of life. Marina Oshana states that, "autonomous agents are rational in the sense that they can formulate, and are disposed to follow through with, plans for actions that are conducive to the realization of ends important to them."<sup>153</sup> Rationality implies the ability of a person to adapt and sustain his determined efforts and will to initiate his own course of action. The rational person claims that they have the basic rights and freedom to choose and consider an

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<sup>152</sup> Strawson, 1962. Considering the many- sided relationship that correlates the diverse aspects of human nature and ability, we may emphasize the requirement of adopting a higher intellectual moral attitudes in so far as the circumstances demand.

<sup>153</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 78.

independent purposive goal of his life among the ranges of available alternatives. It also indicates the effort of a person to withdraw his compulsive apparent situation that may obstruct in the process of realizing his motives. In that sense a person needs to possess the skill of dynamism to carry forward his autonomous plan that corresponds to changing time and situation.

Perhaps, reason is considered as a specific faculty that rationalizes or that provides a constitutive rational explanation and justification of a person to perform an action. From this aspect, Donald Davidson, a contemporary philosopher considers that the act of rationalizing involves a sequence of meaningful events that exemplify the reasons for performing an action. Davidson suggests a causal explanation on the basis of reasons that compels a person to deliver an act. In fact, Davidson wants to illustrate only the accurate reasons that cause a person to manifest his actions intelligibly. For instance, when Davidson cited the example, “I flip the switch and illuminate the room. Unbeknownst to me I also alert the prowler to the fact that I am home.”<sup>154</sup> Here in this example, according to Davidson, the reason to illuminate the room validates the action of flipping the switch. The reason intensifies a person’s conviction to perform the particular action. Davidson claims that reason for an action correspondingly signifies that the action was intended and hence, excludes the possibility of any unintended consequences.

Davidson postulates that reason for an action enables us to understand the exact intention of a person under specific circumstances. The particular reason also enables a person to locate the factual description of his wants and beliefs as distinct from other unintended conditions. In that sense Davidson denotes that, “the primary reason for an action is its cause.”<sup>155</sup> For example, the statement, I gave you the injection because I wanted to get you relief from the pain. Here the reason to make someone to get relief from the pain is the primary reason that verifies the act of injection. Thus, reason plays the pivotal role in justifying a choice of a person as affirm by the explanatory account. The reason clearly establishes the self-governing act of a person where he is committed to take responsibility that signifies his autonomous decision. Davidson says that, “to know a primary reason why someone acted as he did is to know an intention with which the action was done.”<sup>156</sup> To recognize the reason for a particular action is to admit the truth of the description of the

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<sup>154</sup> Davidson, 1963.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. According to Davidson reason for an action specifies the purposive intention and action of a person that makes it possible to infer only the factual descriptions in terms of causal events.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

action. As such the description on the basis of reason commensurate a person's choice and will.

The purpose of explaining the complete description of an agent's action is not only to reveal his inner attitudes or beliefs. As Davidson comments, "central to the relation between a reason and an action, it explains the idea that the agent performed the action because he had the reason."<sup>157</sup> According to Davidson, mere descriptions of an agent's motives and intentions is not sufficient to state the reason for an action without relating to a wide variety of external social, moral, economic and linguistic contexts. In fact such explanation will help us to interpret the actions of a person where it equates the value of reason with the exact account of individual choices and desires. Considering his own example, Davidson wants to ensure that the intention to turn on the light rationalizes the act of flipping the switch, and that the agent is not responsible for the rise of any unwanted consequences such as the act of alerting the prowler.

Davidson maintains that there is certain possibility in the realm of human actions and intentions where we may derive the minimal notion of causal events. Indeed, he is also aware of the problem of ascribing causal laws that seems to infer the particular human desires and actions categorically in the logical form. Hence Davidson says that, "it is necessary to know that some law covering the events at hand exists."<sup>158</sup> Davidson supports the basis of empirical generalization as distinct from the logical. By empirical generalization, we may refer to that event where the cause is intuitive and perceptive that enables to describe the evidence directly at the time when the causal relation occurs. Davidson assumes that primary reasons for an action reflects the appropriate scope of a person's choice and will that he intends to accomplish at a particular moment. As such Davidson claims that one does not need to posit human reasoning faculties such as belief, moods and emotions to state the reason for an action besides the apparent existent of primary reason.

Perhaps, Davidson sought to secure the basic understanding of human actions and desires that may come into conflict with other external uncontrollable circumstances. However Satya P. Gautam emphasized that, "reasons for actions are normative in character in the sense that they appeal principles of action rather than to empirical generalizations."<sup>159</sup> The self-defining understanding of a person speculates a mature and innovative capacity to alter

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<sup>157</sup> Davidson, 1963, p. 33.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>159</sup> Gautam, 1983, p. 80.



or to prefer that indicates the process of rationalizing his own acts. The rationale purpose of a person's action connotes the normative insight that deals with the activities of doing the right thing and that may imply a moral worth. Gautam asserts that a person's capacity to relocate his wants and desires presupposes his idea of the conceptual understanding of human objective world.<sup>160</sup> The rational deliberation of a person contemplates the act of analyzing and evaluating his wants and feelings with reference to the acceptable patterns of societal norms and principles. The act of rationalizing demand a considerable time-consuming process of knowing a person's own psychological motives that may coherently transcend into practical reasoning.

The appropriate account or situation of the rise of rational deliberation of a person involves a wide variety of factors. The word rationality, as distinct from ordinary instinctive behavior relates to a person's skill to choose and perform certain roles that may announce his self-efficiency and authoritativeness to govern the mission of his life. According to Gautam, "the significance or meaning of an action cannot be observed as an immediately perceptible property of the agent's performance."<sup>161</sup> The reasoning capability of a person is not something external to our conceptual understanding of human intentions and motives. It is here in this context that the extensive conceptual information explicitly influenced a person's characters and conducts that are grounded on human experiential relations. As a matter of fact, mere descriptions of varied and fluctuating human actions have no essence until it is placed within the common acceptable framework. There should be a sense of meaningful reference and link between a person's rationale intentions and the established principles of human actions. Immediate disposed acts cannot be recognized as rational dispositions.

A rational action of a person stimulates his inert capacity to reveal his unique personhood intelligibly and, at the same time expresses his adaptive nature to sustain and accommodate within a particular culture and social environment. This balancing act itself gives rise to spectrum of autonomous human nature and conducts accompanied by diverse attitudes and beliefs. The social-position of a person creates a phenomenon of active and self-conscious interpersonal objective attitudes. This objective general pattern of human actions provides the relevant basis to explain and justify human intentions and actions that may grant a person's action as rational or irrational. However, the general principle of human actions does not guarantee that one has to follow its rules absolutely. In fact, the rules and principles

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<sup>160</sup> Gautam, 1983, p. 78.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

serve as a conditional valid means to appraise a person's self-defining actions that may be appreciated or condemned in relation to other people beliefs and desires.

### **2.3 A critical appraisal**

The act to demand and render autonomy from the personal point of view generally comprehends the idea to reconsider, relocate certain conflicting issues or problems in diverse aspects of human feelings and actions. It is here in this regard that a person claims that he have certain basic rights to take certain authoritative decision that implies the notion of self-control and self-regulation. As autonomy depicts the legitimate power of a person, it becomes essential to determine the existence of this notion in different spheres of influential human activities. Autonomy of a person naturally acquires the importance of affirmation, explanation and justification with reference to his motives, feelings and actions. As such autonomy of an individual presupposed the active conscious cognition and understanding of his situation, ability in relation to his desires and wants. The notion of autonomy may be interpreted in two different related terms that is, in terms of autonomous desires and in terms of performing or doing an act.

When we speak of autonomy from the perspective of a person, it literally reflects the genuine features of a person that may prompt his efforts to refine and reformulate his initial conditions and circumstances. The aim of proposing the changeable characters and conduct is not to undermine the possession of one's generic features and attitudes but to exhibit the means of enlightening a person's motives and feelings. Thus, it is necessary for us to inquire and explore the autonomous status of a person on the basis of four major accounts as previously discussed. Further, it is requisite to understand how the subsequent basic three conditions demonstrate its effectiveness in describing and stating the functionality of all the four important accounts. The three conditions act as rudimentary principles where it enables a person to form his autonomous thoughts and dispositions. Gerald Dworkin indicates that, "it is a capacity that we have a responsibility to exercise and that grounds our notion of having a character."<sup>162</sup> As according to Dworkin the word responsibility from the autonomous aspect of a person testifies his ability to relate and organize his active disposition to exercise his intended feelings. In fact, the word responsibility generally signifies the obliged condition of a person to follow certain commands that may impose internally or externally. Thus, it is

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<sup>162</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 32.

important to analyze how the condition of responsibility determines the autonomy of a person with reference to his will and ability.

The notion of responsibility is often assimilated with the notion of higher rational intellectual capability of a person. It seems to denote the extra sensibility and cautiousness of a person in making certain decisive plan or goal. However Gilbert Ryle says that, “to be cautious, provident, etc. is not just to acknowledge or enunciate certain propositions which may be true for everyone.”<sup>163</sup> The notion of responsibility from the standpoint of autonomous condition of an individual implies the calculation of the extent of his thinking ability in proportion to his acting capacity. Though in many instances the notion of responsibility may be observed in the form of commands, it can never become operative without the presence of one’s dispositional capability. Frankfurt says that, “when a person act, the desire by which he is moved is either the will he wants or a will he wants to be without.”<sup>164</sup> A voluntary decision incites the act of responsibility. And as such it is distinct from the mere responsive behavior of a person to do certain things. The notion of responsible actions from the personal point of view specifies an act of preference that proceeds from one’s willingness to accept or not to accept it as a rule that may guides his conduct. It is here in this regard that reason is describe as the compatible element that helps in making a person’s actions intelligible.

The nature of apprehending autonomy by a person displays the use of reason to confer or to deny the existing norms or principles and to reconstruct his choice and plans. Robert Paul Wolff points out that, “only because man has the capacity to reason about his choices can he be said to stand under a continuing obligation to take responsibility for them.”<sup>165</sup> The autonomous decision of a person entails that he has the right to obey or not to obey the command. In fact reason provides authority and freedom to a person to have a choice that exhibits his consent to mould his static obliged situation and to activate his self-reflective capacity. Here in this regard, it is important to note that rational autonomy of a person does not present a pure detach view that seems to prove arbitrariness while operating his rational decisions and actions. Ryle says that, “its exercise is behaving or trying to behave and not

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<sup>163</sup> Ryle, 1940, p. 190.

<sup>164</sup> Frankfurt, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>165</sup> Wolff, 1970.

describing or recommending.”<sup>166</sup> The autonomous act of a person refers to his inclinations that reveal his disposition to resolve a conflicting issue.

Perhaps, autonomy as a self-authoritative will of an individual develops when a person is determined to take certain convictions in his life that recommends a better prospect on the basis of self-introspection. In that sense Ryle explicates that, “the proper manifestations of my skill are my performance and not mere direction to others.”<sup>167</sup> The nature of conducting and operating a will of a person pertains to the expression of his inner self-defining activities that may never exist as the same rule of conduct with reference to other person decisions and actions. It is here in this phase that one requires cultivating the moral aspect of respecting the rights and dignity of other persons living within a society. The act of incorporating self-regulating rule without relating oneself within the domain interpersonal relationship tends to indicate the notion of solipsism. Dworkin says that though there is no satisfying principle of substance to verify a person’s autonomy, one can contemplate the essential connection of a person’s inner motives with the social and moral values.<sup>168</sup> It is not reliable to infer the substantial causal formula of human actions as it may deprive the sense of unique rational deliberation of a person that demonstrates his autonomous identity. At the same time, we cannot refute the relational character of a person as it is from this objective attitude that the essence of autonomy of an individual came into being.

A social relation is a factual and spontaneous interactive process that occurs essentially to a person’s life. Marina Oshana claims that the self-governing attitude of a person that reveals in the form rational choice and deliberation is derived from the nature of social-relational activities.<sup>169</sup> The conscious feeling of autonomous condition of a person presupposed the existence of self as distinct from other selves. As a matter of fact the notion of responsible person assumes his engaged thought-reflective capacity that contemplates human’s interactive feelings and intentions. A social relational process is not to be understood as a mere acquired intermediate conscious activity of a person. But it is the basis from which a person’s reasoning capacity originates. The act of reasoning necessarily involves the idea of modifying certain proven historical concept of reasoning and the enactment of meaningful

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<sup>166</sup> Ryle, 1940, p. 188.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>168</sup> Dworkin, 1998, p. 28.

<sup>169</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 71.

personal independent plans and purposes within the interim of social or cultural and linguistic conventions.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose for introducing the four contemporary major accounts of autonomy is to have a clear idea about the internal intricacies of the autonomous status of a person. Through these accounts we get to know how a person is aware of his rational disposition in relation to other human beings. It also points out that human beings as distinct from other creatures may exercise their authority and their ability in relation to their circumstantial situation and condition. The notion of autonomy also makes a person realize his normative insight in order to heighten his approach to tackle a given situation. More importantly, the idea of autonomy from the contemporary aspect depicts a human rational will to exercise his choice of actions that cannot be interpreted only in terms of his highest faculty or intellectual efficiency.

The contemporary accounts provide the harmonious understanding of human actions and decisions that proceeds from their authentic knowledge of self-perception to the practical skill of announcing their adaptive and sustaining efforts to thrive within a social world. It also demonstrates the importance of the voluntary actions of a person that may appear in the form of accurate apprehension of oneself in diverse ways that may enable him to maintain flexibility in the process of realizing his plan of life. Further, it also emphasizes that the autonomous decision of a person reflects not only his exclusive personal importance. But it also attaches the faculty of preparing those roles and actions that are meant for others intelligibly where he may or may not succeed. In fact, the autonomous role of a person exhibits the active approach to control and understand oneself as well as to acquire the power to restrain from certain coercive and deceptive factors.

## Chapter Three

### Personal Autonomy in Moral Practice

#### Introduction

This chapter attempts to highlight the importance of autonomous personhood in practical decision making situations. It is maintained that the notion of autonomy provides the legitimate and the relevant ground of authority and authenticity where a person may acquire his conscientious power that may gain his efficacy to act or not to act on certain desires. In this sense, we may say that autonomy is not all about demanding the rights and liberty of an individual but also to manifests and understand the promotion of moral practical activities that portrays the concept of rational human being.

The first section involves the critical discussion of the relation between paternalism and personal autonomy on the basis of moral reasoning. Literally, the term paternalism may be viewed as a concept where it restricts a person's liberty to act on the basis of some justified legitimate grounds. Dworkin remarks that by paternalism, "I shall understand roughly the interference with a person's liberty of action justified by reasons referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, or values of the person being coerced."<sup>170</sup> Here, it is essential to determine on what legitimate ground, the concept of paternalism connotes the moral principles of right and good of a person from a moral perspective that may assure the autonomy of a person.

The second section would analyse the special connection between autonomy and informed consent. Informed consent refers to the act of securing consent of a person in a decision making process that explicates the necessity of protecting the rights and respect of a person. The doctrine of informed consent is specially used in the field of medical, where it indicates a relation of trust and faith between a doctor and a patient. Gerald Dworkin asserts that, "individuals have the right to be treated as persons, as masters of their own body, as responsible for their decisions, as makers of choices."<sup>171</sup> According to the rule of informed consent, a patient seeks to provide a total disclosure of his health condition before undergoing any special treatment or medical examination. The agreement facilitates the right of a patient to know his own body where a doctor needs to respect this medical autonomy of a patient.

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<sup>170</sup> Dworkin, 1972, p. 20.

<sup>171</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 103.

The third section attempts to investigate the influence of morality in the course of ordinary human worldly affairs. Christine Korsgaard claims that human persons are responsible to know their own duty and at the same time, they must know the reason for doing it.<sup>172</sup> Human persons are endowed with different qualities and attitudes such as good or bad, coward or brave, shame or respect. The possession of these attitudes presupposed that humans have the capacity to form conceptual knowledge of rational human conducts and characteristics. It is from this conceptual knowledge that a person derives the normative significance of valuing his own form of humanity.

### **3.1 Personal Autonomy and Paternalism**

The notion of paternalism, as signified by its own literal sense denotes a very sensitive and a problematic moral situation. Paternalism asserts the right and reasonable process of the authority to intervene in the personal freedom of an individual with the intention of guiding and protecting him from doing certain actions that may prove harmful to him. Perhaps, the moral implications of paternalistic interferences may involve the idea of legal justification that may help a person to understand and follow its rules appropriately. Gerald Dworkin introduced two types of paternalism, pure and impure paternalism. Dworkin says that, in pure paternalism, the category of persons whose freedom is restricted is equivalent to the category of persons whose benefit is designated.<sup>173</sup> The concept of “pure paternalism” restrictively applies to certain class of persons who might be benefitted by following the paternalistic rules that corresponds to direct responsive actions. For instance, a rule may prohibit three persons riding on the same motorcycle with the intention to prevent and protect them from fatal accident. While in the case of “impure paternalism”, a rule may be apply to a class of persons though all the persons whose freedom is restricted may not be benefitted equally by the implication of that specific rule. Such a rule is meant to protect the interests and welfare of a particular community or society.<sup>174</sup> With regard to impure paternalism, the paternalistic interferences may be extended to other persons who might not involve in performing the restricted action, with the intention of protecting the welfare of a community or a class of people. For example, a concerned authority may initiate the rule of restricting the local people from swimming in a community pond, with the intention of keeping the pond clean and safe for consumption.

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<sup>172</sup> Korsgaard, 1996, p. 91.

<sup>173</sup> Dworkin, 1972, p. 22.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, we may assume that the reason for promoting paternalistic interventions to certain human individuals implies the measure of safeguarding the benefits and lives of the people from the perspective of moral principles. However the question that, to what extent the concept of paternalism is attributable to the notion of autonomy of a person is an important issue that needs to be clarified. Autonomy may be defined as a self-governing and self-determining decisions and actions of a person. Considering the autonomous aspect of a person, Dworkin claims that the act of intervening a person's liberty is not always compatible with the act of interfering in his self-governing attitudes in a consistent way.<sup>175</sup> Thus, in this sense a person may accept paternalistic rules on the condition that it may require a person's active understanding of the prescribed rules rationally. Here, it is to be noted that paternalism as distinct from other standardised codes of conduct are left with no alternatives for a person to choose certain course of action. In the case of paternalistic interferences, a person or a class of persons are compulsive to abide by the rules where the person has no alternate means but to follow it, though the notion of utility and beneficial factors may attach with the rule.

As paternalism exhibits interference with the freedom of a person to do a certain thing, one may recognise paternalistic rules only from a legal perspective. As according to Dworkin, "paternalism might be thought of the use of coercion to achieve a good that is not recognized as such by those persons for whom the good is intended."<sup>176</sup> The idea of coercion that is implemented in the act of paternalism may have many other social or moral implications. For instance, the purpose for enacting certain parental rules in a family is to give a proper guidance to their children. Here the act of coercion may be interpreted in the form of care or concern by the parents for their children to become a rational person in the near future in a society.

Further there may be a case where an ailing mother abandoned her child by leaving him in an orphan house as she has no power or ability to feed and nourish the child. Here the reason for abandoning the child by the mother is to protect the life of her child as she is not in a stable condition to take care of her child. The use of coercion with regard to the freedom of an individual may not be an act of paternalism in the proper sense of the term. Dworkin elaborates that the question of justification of paternalism develops when the autonomy of a person becomes a problematic issue with regard to the paternalistic interference.<sup>177</sup> The

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<sup>175</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 14.

<sup>176</sup> Dworkin, 1972, p. 23.

<sup>177</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 124.



immediate intervention in a person's liberty with the intention of giving him a better life may not be traceable in a simple linear process. The paternalistic intervention may stipulate the questions concerning the prospect and prediction of a person's way of life that may necessarily strike the efficiency of his decision making capacity. It may involve a person's ability to utilise his rationality and maturity to adopt certain external imposed norms as his own or not. In such a case a justificatory explanation is required that why a person should assimilate and value the act of paternalism into the existing structure of his life. Thus, in this sense, we may contemplate that paternalistic acts should function on the basis that it may furnish people with adequate information and reasons for limiting their self-determining acts. In this way, paternalism may seek a person's willingness and voluntary consent, to embrace it by the person as acceptable rules on moral beneficial grounds.

While we may view paternalistic interventions as morally motivating and encouraging moral commands, it is essential further to determine that how paternalism moulds a person's character and conduct. With reference to the degree of paternalistic impact on people's actions and behaviour, Dworkin distinguishes two types of paternalism, that is, soft and hard paternalism. According to Dworkin, "soft paternalism is the view that (1) paternalism is sometimes justified, and (2) it is a necessary condition for such justification that the person whom we are acting paternalistically is in some way not competent."<sup>178</sup> In such a case a person may reasonably be considered as ignorant or less competent to know the rational insight of the rule that points to his well-being and safety conditions. On the other, hard paternalism is the view that "paternalism is justified even if the action is fully voluntary."<sup>179</sup> This view presents the case of imposing paternalistic rules to a person's conduct even if he is already aware of the negative aspects of his own actions. In such a case a rule may be enacted in order to prevent the possible irrational consequences from a person's risky actions.

The condition of soft paternalism indicates the necessity for supplying rational information that may add the cognitive efficiency of a person to decide and act as according to the required situation. It suggests the legitimate means for a person to accept a certain standard of paternalistic interferences. Taking the instance of a safety case, a rule may be regulated by a legitimate authority where it prohibits the act of three persons riding on the same motorcycle. As viewed from the safety perspective, it is also possible that people as responsible citizens may also demand to legalise such rules by the concerned authority for the

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<sup>178</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 124.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

sake of protecting and safeguarding the lives of people in the form of rights. The fact is that mere legitimate legal imposition does not guaranteed that people will directly respond to the prescribed rules. In order to secure a person's willingness in the act of paternalism, it may involve the process of analysing certain other factors such as moral, social and economic. It is also possible that those persons who are directly affected by the paternalistic interventions may find some other reasons in order to defend their autonomous decision. For example, people may assume that the purpose for initiating the safety rule may be associated with the economic interests, such as the intention to increase the sales of motorcycles. Thus, paternalism calls for the proper explanation in terms of moral fairness and justification in order to prevent conflict with the autonomous status of a person.

Hard paternalism requires stronger justification on the part of the authority as a person may voluntarily participates in some injurious or harmful actions. For instance a person may engage in the act of selling his body organ in order to fulfil a very important need of his life. In such a case the person may not be allowed to involve in such a pernicious act as it involves not only the act of self-infliction but also affects the moral interests of other persons that implies the notion of respecting a human body. While performing such kind of actions a person may attach emotional ties with the particular action. Hence, it is necessary to inquire the reasons that why and what circumstances compel a person to take the particular extreme form of action. Further we may analyse the provisional safety measures and back-up plans while implementing such paternalistic interferences. The nature of such paternalistic interference is the imposition of restrictive rules by the majority on the minority. In such a case the authority must be available with alternate suggestions and valid schemes so that the persons in minority may not resume to such harmful acts. One of the probable legitimate measures of paternalistic intervention in this case would be the reconciling nature between the majority and the minority where the majority contributes to the well-being of the minority.

### **3.2 Autonomy and Informed Consent**

The doctrine of informed consent in the field of medical ethics refers to the process where doctors need to supply accurate information to the patient to obtain consent from her or her relatives to perform certain medical activities. The doctrine of informed consent illustrates a special relation with the notion of autonomy. Perhaps, autonomy is the venue from which the valid criteria of informed consent may be determined. Autonomy with reference to a person

may be considered as the legitimate power to take control of his own lives, as inspired by the act of rational deliberation. This awareness is the basis where a person derives the significance of moral objective attitudes that consists of respecting the rights and dignity of other selves. In fact, the concept of autonomy presupposed the character of moral understanding between those persons who are mentally and physically fit to understand the moral objective principles.

The doctrine of informed consent promotes the value of rational decision of a person to determine his own good and well-being. According to a medical report based on the ethics of informed consent, it is being maintained if a person has the ability and awareness to form his own goals of his life without any deceptive or manipulative elements, then the choice which a person makes is said to be autonomous.<sup>180</sup> Perhaps, the case of self-determination of a person refers to his cognitive ability to know the plans of the doctor regarding his treatment and health condition. In such a case a patient may claim to secure his rights on the basis of agreement where a doctor needs to fulfil it as it is a way of showing respect to a patient's desires and feelings. Thus, the capacity of a patient to choose a certain type of medical treatment pertains to his freedom to form his own goals and plans. This self-realized decision of a patient protects him from certain kinds of deceptive and manipulative factors.

However, taking into account a patient's well-being and good condition, the doctrine of informed consent involves not only the demand of a patient's freedom and rights. Depending on the physical and mental condition of the patient, a doctor may suggest a sort of medical treatment that may attach the value of benefits for the patient but not in accordance to his preference. A medical report claims that, "informed consent does not mean that patients can insist upon anything they might want."<sup>181</sup> It is important to note that the doctrine of informed consent may not possibly be confined to the same procedure of medical treatment and agreement in all the diverse cases of the doctor and the patient relationship. For example, there may be a case of certain immediate or accidental situation where the doctor sees no possible opportunity to seek the consent of the patient. In such a case the doctor may not disclose the condition of the patient as the patient may not be in stable condition to acquire the information. This particular condition does not affect the autonomous condition of a patient as the life of the patient may be the first priority above all things. Such type of cases

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<sup>180</sup> Making Health Care Decisions, 1982, p. 46.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

may not involve direct participation of the patient in the decision making process, though the underlying principles of informed consent may exist in the passive form.

It is true that in informed consent the notion of self-determination reflects the capability of a person to choose the particular form of treatment that signifies the patient's interests, purposes or goals. However, there is no rigid law to assign the power of self-determining capacity only to the patients with a sound mind. There may be other directive principles that may be initiated for those patients who may not be able to express their preferences for a particular form of treatment. According to a medical report, it addresses that, "following a directive, particularly one that gives specific instructions about types of acceptable and unacceptable interventions, fulfils the instrumental role of self-determination by providing reassurance that a course of conduct promotes the patient's subjective, individual evaluation of well-being."<sup>182</sup> The implications of such rules are also meant for those patients who are unable to take decision of their own by using their rational faculty, for example the patients who are suffering from psychological disease-disorder. And as such the rule of a directive includes those rational rules where the interests and goals for such patients are taken into consideration.

In the act of informed consent, the act of reasoning and deliberation occupy a very important place. As distinct from other professional relationship, the relationship between a patient and a medical practitioner in the domain of informed consent requires not only theoretical reasoning but also normative practical reasoning. A medical report asserts that in many occasions, a doctor may not be willing to accept a patient's self-governing decision initially, as the doctor may feel that the patient is not competent to participate in a health care decision-making.<sup>183</sup> The act of securing information both from the sides of the patient and the doctor explicates the requirement of rationale understanding and interpretation. It presents a case where their mutual differences need to be respected. The capacity for a patient to determine himself as an efficient rational decision maker may not be appreciated by the medical practitioner initially. It may be that the patient may not have the sufficient capacity to express his feelings or may be the doctor may not understand the feelings and desires of the patient. In such a case the concerned authority should relatively set up some investigating plan where a doctor can analyse the decision of a patient properly concerning the well-being of a patient.

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<sup>182</sup> Making Health Care Decisions, 1982, p. 49.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

Further there may also be a case where the patient with his consent and will wants to rely on the authority of the medical practitioner. A medical report comments that, “it is a sense of self-determination lacking in one important attribute active, contemporaneous personal choice.”<sup>184</sup> This case presents the legitimate condition where a patient may transfer his autonomous decision to other persons to decide for him willingly. This particular situation may not involve a patient’s freedom to choose his own course of treatment but his relegated act may not diminish the autonomous value of achieving his goal or purpose. Such kind of actions may consider as a person’s specific way of identifying and motivating his own values of life. For instance, there may be some patients who are capable of making their own choices but they want the medical practitioner to decide what is good for them. The reason may be varies from case to case. It may also be that the patient may feel that the doctor is more competent in taking medical decisions or there may be some patients who want to engage in some other important decision making process. Here in such kind of cases, the patients are already assumed to be aware of their own rights of securing information of their health conditions and hence, there is much lesser chance of manipulation and infringement.

Decision making capacity in informed consent manifests the capacity of a patient to form his own decisive plan or purpose that reflects his care or concern to preserve and nurture his own body. A medical report remarks that, “a choice that has been coerced, or that resulted from serious manipulation of a person’s ability to make an intelligent and informed decision is not the person’s own free choice.”<sup>185</sup> The patient as an active member of a shared decision making process be must able to stand on his firm decision regarding how he would like to continue his treatment. Further the patient is also expected to learn and know the practical approaches of the many sided medical techniques. As distinct from a forced treatment, a doctor may utilise his position, skill and knowledge to draws the attention of belief and faith of the patient towards his prescribed medical procedure. As a doctor and a patient stand on a distinct level of social status, a doctor may possibly use his advanced medical knowledge to change or substitute the entire perception of a patient regarding his physical and mental condition. It is a situation where the patient has no alternate means to express his feelings and desires. It is a case where the patient becomes fully submissive to the prescribed rules which the doctor presents to him.

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<sup>184</sup> Making Health Care Decisions, 1982, p. 50.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

The capacity of a patient to grasp the medical information that may occur in the form of medical explanation operates not only in the form of formal apprehension of medical rules and norms. Viewed from this perspective, “voluntariness is best regarded as a matter of degree, rather than as a quality that is wholly present or absent in particular cases.”<sup>186</sup> The notion of voluntary action in the domain of informed consent is an indispensable part to secure rights and information regarding a person’s health condition. Relying on the important connection between a patient and a doctor, however a situation may arise where certain restrictions may apply legitimately. Keeping into consideration, a patient’s enduring good health and well-being, for instance, there may be a case where the information imparted by the doctor to the patient is partial in nature. The reason may be that the patient may not be in fully conscious state or the process to obtain information may be time-consuming. In such kind of case the person who emerged as a patient may not be in a condition to take rational autonomous decision as the concept of informed consent is not sufficiently applied. It is here in such a condition, where the health care professionals should not use only their medical skills and abilities but should also manifests the quality of a considerate human being that may signify the attune relationship between a doctor and a patient.

### **3.3 Autonomous Persons in Everyday Morality**

The notion of autonomy from a moral sphere exhibits a person’s reflective thinking that depicts his capacity to analyse the conceptual knowledge of human nature and conducts. Human persons are endowed with unique qualities and attitudes where they have their own way of valuing their life. They have their own sense of awareness of defining the meaning and purpose of their goals and plans. This normative feeling infers that a person has a sense of obligation and responsibility towards its own form of humanity. As distinct from static passive conscious features of other creatures, the structure of a human mind has the power to raise a question on his sensible cognitive ability. It is here in this stage that the notion of reason validates the rise of human reflective thinking. Reflective thinking of a person on the basis of reason highlights his authentic way of pursuing his goal with a rational commitment. As a person exists within a domain of social and cultural life, he has certain roles and responsibility that manifests his true form of will.

A rational person as a member of a particular society, culture or groups has different kinds of roles that makes him realized his unique persona in a social convention. Within the

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<sup>186</sup> Making Health Care Decisions, 1982.

arena of social patterns, an autonomous person is expected to perform certain legitimate roles that may be described in terms of instrumental, demonstrative and symbolical values. The autonomy of a person incorporates his self-constituting will in connection with the diverse social relational framework. In fact the claim for the self-governing status by a person requires his justification that reflects the instrumental value of choosing his future-oriented plan or goal. In relation to it a person may attempt to demonstrate his decisions practically that may confer legitimacy and validity in recognition to the value of emotions and sentiments of other individuals. This particular condition symbolizes a person's self-understanding and maturity to reveal the efficacy of his self-deterministic principles. Hence we may say that autonomous role of a person calls for an active and efficient autonomous agent that may genuinely supervise his social role in a society. In fact such kind of roles defines the context of social-relational autonomy where a person may find the scope for expressing his identity and personal status.

The reason for assigning socio-relational autonomy to a person exemplifies the link of objective moral principles with a person's character and conduct. Perhaps, the nature of human relations is correlated with the existence of moral principles and values. The most notable features of autonomy is that it makes a person realized the necessity to explore the notion of rationality in human character and conduct. In fact the moral reasoning process is grounded in the notion of autonomy. Autonomy as the self-determining power of an individual enables a person to understand and apply his rational cognitive ability in diverse spheres of worldly affairs such as legal, public and economic policy, education, health care and various others professional and civic affairs. It symbolizes the presence of confidence and belief of a person to contribute his rational thoughts to the human world. In this way the progressive rational insight of a person stipulates the essential growth in human civilization. The autonomous status of a person qualifies his competent nature to take decisive control of his motivational thoughts.

The phenomenal percept on the objective moral principles may anticipate the imposition of moral norms to all humans categorically. However, Oshana clarifies that autonomy of a person signifies his rational decision that essentially indicates and enhances his knowledge of social relations and public policy.<sup>187</sup> As distinct from the causal law, autonomy provides the scope where a person has the capacity to transform or change his

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<sup>187</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 133.

desires that defines his practical ability to handle a particular situation. The autonomous choice of a person not merely enhances his feasibility to stand on his chosen desire but also expands his view to other persons on the global level of moral autonomous understanding. To that extent, we may say that autonomy functions in a way that encourage other persons in a specific way that may fit to be described an individual as active and informed person. The autonomy of a person implies that a person has his own will to participate as a member in the formation of valid rules and principles of a society. It points to the ability of a person to raise legitimate questions towards the ruling regime concerning the various developmental programmes and the extensive growth of society.

The conception of shared moral principles within the sector of human interactive world does not mean that a person has to observe moral norms in the same way as others do. Oshana explicates that, “autonomy anchors the significance of choice for the reason that having and making a choice symbolizes to oneself and to the world one’s competence to act for oneself.”<sup>188</sup> The conception of autonomy cannot be equated with the established authoritative rules that are meant to be acceptable by all human beings equally. Moral autonomous choice of a person however, also does not mean that a person has to formulate his own moral principles. The fact is that as all persons are not situated in the same circumstances and conditions, they have their own specific plan of understanding and allocating their personal moral matter. It is here in this domain that a person is required to present his rational justification for his performed actions. Here reason is conceived as a distinct ability that activates the awareness of a person’s freedom and rights along with his veritable approach of apprehending the rights and dignity of other persons.

Reason demonstrates a person’s choice that is implicitly assimilated with his interests and belief to act on his certain decision. It is a case where a person is committed to exercise his rational deliberation. In such a case, a person may try to find the appropriate condition to manifests his skill and will that reflects his self-managing decisions and actions. Christine Korsgaard expresses that, “practical identity is a complex matter and for the average person there will be a jumble of such conceptions.”<sup>189</sup> Perhaps, a person’s life integrates many diverse roles such as a son or daughter of particular parents, a member of a particular caste or religion, a student of a specific institution etc. The moral autonomous role of a person endorses his values and goals of his life that entails the worth of self-respect. For instance in

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<sup>188</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 132.

<sup>189</sup> Korsgaard, 1996, p. 107.



the domain of informed consent, a person's participation in the decision making process may protect him from certain coercive and manipulative ingredients.

Autonomy of a person is not limited only within the arena of intellectual description. What autonomy requires is the conscious mature understanding where a person has legitimate control over his own life plan and aims. Christine Korsgaard says that, "when we are autonomous we bind ourselves to do what it seems to us to be good idea to do."<sup>190</sup> To that extent we may confer autonomy to those persons who are responsible to accept or to deny certain social or moral principles in relation to his extrinsic and intrinsic value of choice. The extrinsic value points to the benefits and well-being of a person that relates with his status of getting access to the condition of civil liberties. The intrinsic conception renders a person's satisfying way of developing his personal characters and conducts, where self-determination and self-managing act is considered as vital. To put it, the notion of autonomy may not be confined only within the value of self-authorised actions of a person as the implication of moral reasoning is assimilated with condition of autonomy.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter elaborates the importance of autonomous principles in the established social system or in any legal or civic body with the intention of gaining confidence and trust between a normal civilian people and the authority from the perspective of moral practical affairs. It also elucidates the importance of educating a person the basic elements of self-managing and self-deterministic principles, so that a person may appropriately understand his problems. The purpose for introducing the criteria of self-governing rules is to make people aware of their rights and freedom where every statutory law ought to comply.

It also displays the necessity of acquiring a person's consent and knowledge by the concerned authority before engaging in any sort of functional process where a person's life, respect, values or goals is involved as an important factor. Further it also exhibits the requirement of legitimate intervention by a recognised authoritative figure to prevent a person from conducting harm to himself or to any other person. Perhaps as viewed from this aspect the idea for implying moral autonomous principles in various social systems is to organize and develop a link of better communication and information between human persons.

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<sup>190</sup> Korsgaard, 1996, p. 105.

## Conclusion

Personal autonomy is a very crucial concept in our moral philosophical discussions. In the discussion and debates of pressing issues of our modern day life we almost presuppose some sort of standard understanding of this concept. We may ask, what is this standard understanding? How do we develop this understanding? And how acutely this concept is hidden in our analysis of every moral philosophical issue? These are some of the fundamental questions that emerge at the moment we take the concept seriously. Some of the crucial aspects of the concept of autonomy originate in the discussions of certain earliest philosophical discussions. The historical view that comprises of the Greek and the modern views create a phenomenon where the important questions on the possibility of individual autonomy is raised and analyzed from different facets. Though the historical views may be less compatible with the contemporary perspectives, it provides the basic portal where human persons can learn and inculcate the value of self-determining power in an appropriate manner. Perhaps, the historical suggestions point out the minimal cognitive content in the analysis of the concept of an autonomous status. For instance, the presence of the active principle of reason is described by Plato as the worthy element in calculating the best nature of human self. Plato elucidates that when the good or the rational part controls the worse, then we may say that the person is self-regulated or master of himself.<sup>191</sup>

The rational self-calculating elements are carried forward by modern and contemporary philosophers to a new height which enables them to specify the peculiar importance of autonomous principle in various states of affairs. In this dissertation I have discussed the import of being an autonomous person from both theoretical and practical point of view. We find that the notion autonomy cannot be conceptualised within a static framework of autonomous norms or principles. Autonomy exists as a rational self-defining element that endures and progress along with our changing perceptions and views about our culture, society, people and the world as a whole. The fact is that autonomy assumes different valid forms of human nature and conducts where a person may enhance and develop his own unique form of humanity in different contexts. This is the reason why many contemporary philosophers express their quest to determine autonomous principles within the domain of social objective world. The social world is the particular region where we can properly

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<sup>191</sup> Plato, 1997, p. 1063.

examined the accuracy and the relevancy of the manifestation of autonomous decision of a person.

Perhaps, the notion of autonomy exists in two distinct related forms, that is, autonomy as demand and autonomy as benefit. Here, I assumed that the historical views on the notion of autonomy of a person demands the manifestation of moral virtuous activities from his self-governing principles. This notion of autonomy exhibits a person's rational deliberations in the form of moral responsibility. For instance, we may mention Kant's notion of moral autonomy, where the concept of rights and dignity of a person should be universalised in the form of self-imposed moral law. Further we may consider Mill's notion of liberty where the basic freedom of individuals to determine their own life correlates with the notion of principles of utility and welfare. It is from these views that many contemporary philosophers analysed the legitimacy of paternalistic interventions to a person's autonomy. This case of autonomy ascribes moral understanding to a person's self-conscious activities where other—regarding conception is taken into account.

Autonomy as benefit highlights the importance of the claims makes by a person to any other person or authority to respect his individual identity and values. In this case, we may mention about the democratic principles where a person may seek to express his competent ability in choosing the right representative. Further in the doctrine of informed consent, a patient may claim for his rights and status of being a person. In such kind of conditions, a person feels that his rights and dignity has been deprived and thus, makes a legitimate claim to secure his rights and freedom. This self-deterministic principle allows a person to initiate his own decisions that points to his efficacy of choosing his projects and goals of his life. Further it also depicts the capability of a person to be an active member in a decision making process to protect himself from manipulation and deception.

As discussed earlier, the Greek philosophers were mainly concerned with the psychological moral understanding of a person. For instance, Plato points out the importance of the notion of rationality that guides a person's irrational nature and conduct. Reason, according to Plato, is the element of the human soul that controls the other irrational parts or elements. However reason does not reveal its power spontaneously in a person's instinctive behaviours. Thus, Plato emphasized the importance of cultivating the rational element by every human person. Aristotle, on the other, critically examined the general moral understanding of Plato with reference to a person's capability and situation. Aristotle

described the significance of reason in a person's actions in the form of responsibility. Here Aristotle explicates the effect of rationality in a person's character normatively. The Greek philosophers were not concerned with the freedom of a person to think and act. They have only indicated the importance of reason with reference to a person's choice and will.

It was Immanuel Kant, in the modern period, who demonstrates the idea freedom of a person in connection with the moral choice of a person. Kant points out the practical moral understanding of a person where he can realise his free-will to act rationally. Here it is important to note that, the freedom, which Kant ascribes to a human person, is possible only in the domain of morality. Kant specifically distinguishes between ordinary will of a person and the moral will of a person. Moral will of an individual explicates the ability of a person to objectify his thought and ability as devoid of subjective desires and impulses. To some extent, we may say that Kant considers Plato's moral implications of controlling human irrational desires by reason. Kant, however, does not agree with Plato's speculative moral aspects. In that sense, Kant agrees with Aristotle's normative moral principle that exhibits a person's awareness of his own moral actions and decisions.

After examining, the earlier historical and Kant's moral freedom of a person, Mill emphasized the liberal rights of a person with a new moral outlook on human intentions and feelings. Up to certain degree, Mill reckoned the objective moral principles of Kant, such as universalising a person's actions, as enunciated, in his harm principles. However Mill's discussions on moral actions of a person addresses the importance of a person's feelings and interests that is based on the utility principles. Mill explains that in order to understand the rights and dignity of a person, one need to feel the significance of liberty from his own standpoint. In this way, Mill addresses the scope of social interaction where a person can evaluate his preference and choice in relation to a social character. Viewed from this aspect, Mill shares some similar conceptions with the contemporary philosophers.

The contemporary philosophers critically investigate the traditional conceptions of autonomy of a person. Contemporary philosophers such as Gerald Dworkin, Susan Wolf, Marina Oshana, Robert Paul Wolff etc., examines the many-sided aspects of a person's autonomy from diverse aspects. These philosophers determine the influence of morality in relation to a person's circumstances, environment, culture and social status. According to their view, autonomy reflects a person's ability to know his authentic desires and needs that cohere with his rational deliberation. The contemporary accounts highlight those human

issues where a person's well-being and benefits may be conferred to him in the form of rights. The accounts also look into further issues where a person is required to respect the sentiments and feelings of other human beings. It is here in this phase that the concept of responsibility acquired its valid authority to control a person's decisions and actions. To sum up, the contemporary accounts assimilate and explain the notion of autonomy from the perspective of demand and benefit.

As distinct from the animal world, human experiential world is the place where the demand and supply of knowledge, rights, authority, and status etc., takes place in a persuasive manner. This persuasive nature enhances a person's character to learn and accept the contrary views on the basis of reason. It is from this perspective that the term reconciliation sets to resolve many apparent conflicting problems in the contemporary world. It also reminds the imperfect sensible nature and conduct of a human person. It may be for this specific reason that Kant assimilates the notion of autonomy with the moral obligation to universalise a person's maxim. However inflexible moral commands tends to limit a person's ability to question and discover his self-determining capacity that may exists in the form shared opinions and feelings. Marina Oshana asserts that a person obtain her self-determining power when she analyses her decision in relation to the values and principles of a society.<sup>192</sup> Here it points the necessity where a person may revise and reformulate her illegitimate personal opinions with the intention of safeguarding the rights and dignity of others and for herself.

In my thesis the whole reflective idea that concerns autonomy of a person highlights a person's complex moral features where he employs various skills, ideas and knowledge to explain and justify his own actions. The purpose of giving this justification itself assumes that a person is a rational species who has the ability to give proper estimates to his own chosen desires and actions. However the term rationality cannot be apprehended as an in-built power or strength of an individual that immediately functions on a person's desires and actions. The process of acquiring a rationale power may involve a pattern of systematic calculations and observations of human interactive experiences. It is here in this domain that some contemporary philosophers like Donald Davidson believed that human intentions and actions are explainable on the basis of irreducible causal events. Here the point to be noted is that human desires and conduct as distinguish from the natural causal events accompanies a

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<sup>192</sup> Oshana, 2006, p. 77.

person's feelings, inclinations, goals, circumstances that may have different meanings and values for different individuals in different time and conditions.

Thus, in this sense a person who possesses rational thoughts are qualified as moral agent. Moral agent has a unique sense to participate in a rational decision making process where they take responsibility to produce certain desirable consequences that presents interests and feelings of the existing humanity. They are prompt to express and promotes certain instigative role to reinforce and reform illegitimate and intolerable laws that is adequately describable within the domain of applied ethics. It presents a case where a person is engaged in self-introspection with a moral conviction. For instance, in the contemporary world many professionals and civic groups are required to educate themselves the basic norms of humanities such as informed consent or the moral justification of paternalistic interventions. The moral idea that is embedded in such concepts is that unreasonable and unjustified dominance and monopoly of power by the authority is unacceptable. It also means that those persons who are endowed with intellectual skills and expertise are obliged to respect the values of other humans that exhibits their life plans. Dworkin says that, "persons are embodied creatures; meaning not merely that we have bodies but that we are bodies."<sup>193</sup>

As the topic of my thesis already indicates that it is a moral philosophical inquiry, the recognition of a person's preference, choice, rights and consent are the primary elements that needs to be considered while one evaluates the constituting factors of autonomy of a person. In fact, the legitimate feature that facilitates the development of autonomy of a person emphasized not only the self-governing attitudes of an individual but also co-ordinates diverse humanitarian aspects that are grounded on moral reasoning process. Perhaps, the value of autonomy as distinct from certain fragmentary individual views, synchronise the elements of well-being and benefits of other human selves. Thus, viewed from this aspect autonomous principles rotate around the moral efficacy of a person to encourage his self-determining power and competency to sustain in the human objective world. Perhaps, this self-reflective awareness emerges as the sign of harmony that stabilise a person's decisions and motivations in relation to objective world. This particular thesis aims to present the valid and legitimate nature of a person's autonomous principles that is grounded on moral rules. However, the questions on the nature of reliability and acceptability of this work may not be

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<sup>193</sup> Dworkin, 1988, p. 113.

satisfying as there may be various other consistent views that may mark endless debates in identifying the exact status of autonomy from a personal standpoint.

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