

Kant on Natural Determinism and Freedom of Will: A Reconciliation

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Abstract

Kant, in his essay 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch' holds that the ultimate aim of nature is to achieve perpetual peace. For Kant, nature works both mechanically and teleologically in order to achieve its ultimate aim. Moreover, he thinks that nature compels human beings mechanically to create appropriate situation (which is described by Kant in three definitive articles) for the implementation of six pre-conditions (which are mentioned by Kant in six preliminary articles) to attain perpetual peace. Thus, Kant holds mechanical determinism of nature or natural determinism to answer the question: *why do human beings fulfill these two types of conditions for peace*. But Kant in his moral philosophy admits *freedom of will* as a postulate of morality. Thus, the problem is: *how does Kant reconcile mechanical determinism of nature with human being's freedom of will*. In this paper, I would attempt to explain how Kant reconciles between above two incompatible notions by means of his notion of citizen of two worlds.

Keywords: Nature, Purposive, Highest Good, Antagonism, Unsocial sociability, Egoism, Enlightenment, Reason, Mechanical Determinism of Nature, Ontological Dualism, Free Will, Practical Reason, Sublime, World Citizen

Kant, in his essay 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', states *six preliminary articles* which represent the preconditions for peace, which are described by him as *prohibitive laws* for peace. Furthermore, he proposes *three definitive articles* which represent sole conditions for peace or we may say that there are three definitive articles to describe an appropriate situation which is required for the implementation of the six preliminary articles. Now the question arises: *why do human beings fulfill these two types of conditions for peace*. According to Kant, nature is the guarantee of perpetual peace. He proposes that nature works in two different ways, i.e., teleologically and mechanically to guarantee the perpetual peace.

For Kant, nature, in teleological sense, is a wise creator or provider. The ultimate purpose or aim of the progress of nature is to achieve *perpetual peace* and Kant

describes it as the '*hidden plan of nature*' or '*universal plan of nature*'. Nature has compelled us to follow the path to achieve her '*hidden plan*', i.e., the attainment of true harmony among men.

The question is: *why do we think that the progress of nature is teleological.*

Kant's answer is that nature has given reason only to human beings and human reason demands that *the progress of nature is teleological or purposive*. For, the human reason always works in coherent manner as well as a continuous whole so the reason which is given to man by nature itself is purposeful. Thus, the make-up of human reason compels human to suppose that the nature is also purposeful. There is no other way for the human mind to comprehend it fully. Kant also points out that scientific investigation shows that even development of the non-rational parts of nature follow a natural law to fulfill any particular purpose. That means, *there is nothing in nature which is without a purpose*. For example, physiology shows that every organ in the living body serves one or other purpose. This does not mean that, for Kant, the teleological view of nature is beyond doubt or can be proved. In this connection we may mention Walsh's comments expressed in his book *Philosophy of History*. The principle of teleology in history or nature is neither an empirical proposition nor a necessary truth but is a regulative or heuristic principle which is useful in the prosecution of empirical research but not itself susceptible of any kind of proof.¹

Nature demands that human beings including all of her creatures should be self-preserving. Human beings are essential part of nature's creatures in the sense that mankind is a nature's end or *crown of creatures of nature*. For, she has endowed man with reason. Human being is the subject of the progress of nature. Thus the 'progress of nature' means 'the perpetual progress of human race or mankind' and the aim of progress of human race is to achieve the *highest good* which is no other than the achievement of perpetual peace. Thus, the design of perpetual peace is a secret design of nature which is in favour of realization of human beings' ultimate moral purpose, i.e., *highest good (the attainment of happiness proportionate to virtue)*.

In this context, we may explain Kant's view which states that the nature confers *antagonism* on mankind to bring out the development of all the capacities inherently lying in them. By '*antagonism*', Kant means '*unsocial sociability*' of human beings. Human beings as rational animals have both unsocial and social attitudes. Man has both propensities to come together in society as well as to break up the society.

Kant thinks that human beings possess two fundamental conflicting characters, namely, *animal character* and *rational character*. Like the other living beings, humans possess *animal character* which is mechanical and impulse oriented more specifically which is based on sensuous impulses. The fundamental impulse in man is self love and all our instincts are at first directed to our own preservation and on our own welfare. But *self love* is different from *egoism*; it is a feeling which arises

only in society which leads a man always to prefer himself over others. But primitive man who lived in the state of nature did not make the comparisons which are required for egoism. Thus, egoism is not possible in the case of primitive man who lived in the state of nature. Any human being for his animality tries to fulfill maximum personal pleasure and avoids personal pains. Animal nature of human beings is self-oriented for which they do not consider the effects of his action on his other fellow human beings. Every human being as individual tries to live his own life, and for this purpose sometimes he tries to separate himself from the society. Any human being, for his unsocial attitude, has a strong propensity to separate himself from others and he expects that everything of the world will move according to his own desires. He is always in competition with others for the satisfaction of his own desires. He considers his fellow men as either **obstacles** or **means** to fulfill his own desires. But he being rational realizes that his fellow men also consider him in the same way as he considers them. Actually, he also faces different oppositions from his every other fellow men. On the basis of such experiences, any human being tries to raise his rational power. Human beings cannot eliminate their animal nature, but can control it by the exercise of reasons, since rational nature is possessed by only them. Kant holds that when human beings would be **more civilized** through the process of **self-realization (self-education)**, they will be able to exercise their reasons for deriving the different principles, namely, laws of nature, moral laws, etc. which are objective and at the same time universally true. In this way these highly civilized human beings will learn to admit dignity and value of his other fellow men. He will not consider his fellow men as **a means** but as **an end in himself**. Kant also believes that most human beings are initially engaged to fulfill their animal needs instead of their rational needs; for human being due to his animal nature creates strong temptation to seek pleasure. So, every rational effort of human beings for being moral faces some resistance. But this temptation can be neutralized through self-education and training.

Moreover, nature has a plan for which she has given reason (rationally) to human beings. Humans try to apply his reason on the basis of their previous experiences of insecurity and hostility to each other. They think that it would be reasonable to enter into a society and, they are inclined to associate with each other. Thus, any human being tries 'to conquer his inclination to laziness and, propelled by vainglory, lust for power and avarice, to achieve a rank among his fellow whom he cannot tolerate but from whom he cannot withdraw'². Thus, human beings try to develop their reason for controlling their barbaric or unsocial attitude as well as for being social (cultural). Kant thinks that the development of the reason, which is considered as social attribute of human being, depends on a very long process '**enlightenment**'. The reason is developed 'through continued enlightenment for which the lifetime of a single person is very much insufficient. But, human beings can pass on the enlightenment that they have gained in their lifetime to the next generation and the next generation will start the development of theirs at a higher level than the previous one. This way, the reason of human beings will developed. When the reason of human beings (mankind) is developed, he can control his

animal impulses and can be motivated by reason. Finally, the reasons of human beings will be *fully developed, mankind will be solely motivated by reason and the society of human beings will be changed into 'a moral whole' which will bring peace.*

Kant holds that the unsociable character of human beings has an important role in the development process of mankind which is the secret design of nature. For, human beings face different oppositions among one another due to their unsociable character and without these oppositions with each other 'all talents would remain hidden with all its concord, contentment and mutual affection'³. Culture and art arise from man's socialized unsociability. By providing our unsociable character, Nature makes us competitively passionate and self-willed. Thus nature forces us to develop our latent abilities. The competitive urge of human being leads themselves to cultivate in all respect and to use their reason for developing the arts and sciences. All these things are developed for the sake of competition. Kant holds that, this competition is *essentially healthy*, for without it human talents would remain hidden forever in dormant state. If a man is as good natured as a sheep, his beastly self will remain dormant, then he might not be able to outshine his present state. Thus, for Kant, war and conflict holds key importance to develop human beings as a whole. Kant says, '*Thanks be to Nature*', since she gives incompatible characteristic that is unsocial sociability to mankind for which human beings develop their capacities and ultimately wishes to live 'comfortably and pleasantly', which he describes as *the ordering of wise Creator*.

Nature will attain the goal of perpetual peace without considering any human's intention. This implies that perpetual peace will be attained almost automatically, without any necessary actions on the part of human beings to accelerate its attainment. Nature uses war as its design or plan to force human beings to organize themselves into states and establish the order regulated by law. Kant admits the importance of war. He considers war as a historical force, because the sad experience of war motivated human beings to enter into a lawful society.

To reach the ultimate aim, i.e., to achieve *perpetual peace*, nature works in three different ways, namely,

1. 'In every region of the world she has made it possible for men to live.
2. By war she has driven them even into the most inhospitable regions in order to populate them.
3. By the same means, she has forced them into more or less lawful relations with each other.'⁴

In order to achieve her ultimate goal, she created men as the *most defenseless creature*. Man is not physically so well equipped like other animals in the struggle for his survival. Nature has given him neither the bull's horn, nor the lion's claws, nor the dog's teeth. Man has only two hands for his defense. Now the question is, why did the nature create men as the most defenseless creature? The answer is, nature created men as the most defenseless creature to force for using his *reason*.

Reason is considered as the greatest *natural gift* for man that lies in his capacity for unlimited reasoning (in other words, *free will*). Nature does not give the same inherent tools to man for survival, which are enjoyed by any other creatures, for she has clearly encouraged man to become *inventor*. Nature through the principle of evolution, that is, *survival of the fittest*, compels man to develop his ability of reasoning to compensate his lack of *natural abilities*. Although nature provides man with the capacity of reason, it lies implicitly in human behavior. Kant thinks that the rationality which is inherent in human being takes a long time to come into force. Man can learn to act rationally only through experience; and learning to use his reason is necessarily a long process. Reason cannot possibly change the world over night. It requires *trial, practice and instruction* to enable it to progress gradually from one stage of insight to the next. Man has infinite number of possibilities. But the life time of one individual is a very short span of time to develop all his potential abilities. For this reason, Kant holds that the realization of the true end of the human race can only be acquired by *mankind as a whole*. Kant holds that the life span of an individual man is very short for developing all human qualities and possibilities. By the terms 'progress of nature', Kant intends to mean the progress in the history and mankind as a whole. Nature intends to develop the entire species of human beings to their full potentialities.

On the basis of the use of reason, men made *tools and weapons* for their *protection* from other animals and for *hunting*. Thus out of necessity men used their reason for their *protection* and collection of food. For producing better food, human beings turned to *agriculture*. Human beings not only fought with other animals for food but also fought and competed with each other for the *best hunting and agricultural land*. This process continued ceaselessly until all parts of the earth were populated. Thus, nature employs *war* as a means to bring out the result that men get to live everywhere on earth. Men are scattered to the four corners of the earth by dynastic and military dispute. Lastly, nature compels human being to think about themselves. On the basis of the experience of the *fear or danger of war*, human beings constitute civil societies or states. But no state can enjoy complete security for they are always in the fear of the great havoc and destruction brought about by war. Kant says that *war is undoubtedly the greatest source of evils* which oppresses civilized nations. Human beings of the earth are not only always in the fear of actual war but also never-ceasing and ever-increasing preparations of future wars. All the resources of the state are generally exhausted for the purpose of war which might be used otherwise to educate citizens to build a greater culture. Thus, the fear of destruction of war educates mankind to seek a better way of ordering the common affairs among the states which are at war. Political leaders gradually learn to preserve harmony in the balance of power among nations. When such a method will be devised, we will have a stable international order. But Kant does not believe that bringing about such an order, the existing conflict and hostility between nations will disappear. He hopes that such international conflicts will disappear in the end when the rule of law will be established all over the globe which is called by Kant '*ethical commonwealth*'.

Secondly, Kant hopes that the civilized citizens bring ultimately a peaceful international federation of states. He thinks that there cannot be responsible states without responsible citizens. After a long process of civil education, responsible citizen will be brought into being. Thus it is the interest of every nation to educate its citizens to the highest possible degree. Competition between nations forces **enlightenment** even in the most backward countries. This natural process of enlightenment ensures us to progress towards world peace. So nature compels states to improve their relation with each other by forcing them to enter into a more or less legal relation. Thus men will eventually live in peace with each other.

Kant claims that nature has ultimately achieved the design of the perpetual peace by its mechanical progress without considering the will of human beings. Kant also uses the term 'nature' in **mechanical** sense. Nature works mechanically on human beings as well as other animals to achieve her ultimate purpose. Kant uses the term '**mechanical**' to mean that nature is the natural cause of every events that has happened in the world. Man like other living beings is a part of the external or the sensuous world. The development of this world is completely determined by the natural laws. Thus every action of human being is a product of natural necessity, and the events related to human being are happened in a pre-determinate and unalterable way. This is regarded as the fate of human being. This mechanical course of nature apparently shows that human beings are not free or they have no freedom. But Kant in his moral philosophy admits **freedom of will** as a postulate of morality. Thus, the problem is: **how does Kant reconcile mechanical determinism of nature with human being's freedom of will.**

In this context, we may point out that, for Kant, man is a **citizen of two worlds**, i.e., noumenal worlds and phenomenal world. The notion of '**two worlds**' is used by Kant metaphorically. Thus, we should not consider the literal meaning of this notion. By this notion, Kant metaphorically speaks of one and the same being from two points of views. Thus, this distinction between noumenal and phenomenal man is not an **ontological dualism**. Man as a phenomenal being is **causally determined**, but as a noumenal being is **free**.⁵ As phenomenal being, man is not beyond the mechanism of nature. He is, like a slave, subject to his fate which is determined by unalterable causal law of nature. Thus human beings may consider themselves as parts of the phenomenal world or series of appearances. On the other hand, they may also consider themselves as members of the noumenal or intelligible world, i.e., as active beings they may consider themselves as generating the appearances. Kant writes in his **Critique of Pure Reason**, that causal determinism exists only in the phenomenal world. But if we have grounds for regarding ourselves as members of the noumenal world, we may consider ourselves as free beings. For Kant, we are conscious about the spontaneity of reason when producing pure ideas. We get *a priori* concepts and ideas on the basis of the **spontaneous activity of reason**. The **spontaneous activity of reason** is the ground for considering that we must belong to the noumenal world. This implies that man, when placed in reality, while performing a civil function, is not entirely free, but must be subordinated to the

rules of his surroundings. For example, a man, as an officer, should follow the rule of law regardless of his opinion of it. However, man, as a noumenal being, is independent of the material world. He is free and is permitted to use his mind unrestrictedly to form statements as he considers it appropriate. The ideas of *the two worlds' citizenship* also solve the problem of reconciling *free will* and *determinism*.

Kant gives the answer to the question '*what ought I to do?*' by saying '*act rationally*'. He thinks that all things in nature act according to law but only man as rational being *act according to the conception of law*.⁶ For example, a body falls according to the law of gravitational force; a man would also fall if he stepped from a high place. But he does not step from high place because he has conception of gravitational force, so he knows what will be the consequence if he steps from a high place. Man as rational being has the capacity to foresee consequences of actions, to choose alternative appropriate means for accomplishing a single purpose. Thus man can control his behavior and actions by applying his reason which is called *practical reason* or *will*.

The term '*practical*' is generally used to mean *useful, expedient or prudent*. But Kant uses this term to mean something close to *autonomous action*. Autonomous or self-legislative is a *will* which is not subject to any restraining set of the external laws.

The will is the faculty which makes it possible for human to act according to our own judgments. The human will being rational, can make an independent act in the world. Man, being free as a moral person, can act according to the commands of his consciousness. Human freedom derives from the individual's ability to be self-determining or self- autonomy. The free will is the source of our freedom.

Thus, for Kant, to say '*act rationally*' means to '*act freely*' or '*act autonomously*' as a member of realm of ends which is an ideal community of rational beings. According to Kant, man as a pure rational being or free moral individual obeys the law, since he participates in its legislation and thus has an interest in its faithful execution.

Kant's answer to the question how nature guarantees perpetual peace falls into two parts:

Firstly, the situation in which nature has placed human beings as the *actor* in her great *spectacles* ultimately demands the guarantee of perpetual peace. Natural process leads human beings to spread over the entire globe. Kant thinks that it is made possible by nature *providing the availability of some means of livelihood everywhere* and made necessary by *war*. War is the vehicle of progress for attending eternal peace which is hidden for human beings. For, human beings are mere *actors* and cannot perceive *sublime* aspect of the events occurring in nature.⁷ The sublimity of an event can be perceived by a human when he is with spectacle, i.e., his rationality is fully developed or he is a '*world citizen*'. Human being as a rational being will establish justice and peace depending on his conscious moral

choice. At the beginning, Nature seems to do this entirely on its own without requiring any active human response. This is how nature uses war to compel humans for starting a journey to enter into more or less a legal relationship.

Second part of Kant's account of how the guarantee itself is provided by nature is that human beings as rational beings will establish justice and peace depending on their conscious moral choice. Thus in the second phase nature is not sovereign, but only an aid to man in completing his own rational project.

According to Kant, nature and morality mutually support each other in the pursuit of perpetual peace. Nature provides the external conditions where peace might be possible and morality provides the *will* to take the advantage of the external conditions to attain eternal peace.

References

¹ Cf. H. Williams, *Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 22

² I. Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View', in L.W. Beck (ed.), *Kant Selections*, p. 418

³ Ibid., p.418

⁴ I. Kant, 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', in L.W. Beck (ed.), *Kant Selections*, p. 441

⁵ L.W. Beck (ed.), *Kant Selections*, pp. 20-21

⁶ Ibid., p. 13

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 52

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