

Chapter 2

The Individual as the Origin and Purpose of Sovereignty

Your creation as well as your resurrection is but as an individual soul. . .

—*Qur'an, Sura 31, Ayat 28*

Faith has to do with things that are not seen and hope with things that are not at hand.

—*Thomas Aquinas*

2.1 Introduction

To justify interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, powerful nations and supranational institutions most frequently project themselves as the defenders, if not the custodians, of lofty human ideals. Examples of norms frequently invoked to rationalize sundry encroachments on individual and state sovereignties are freedom, equality, democracy, justice, rule of law, human rights, and world peace. The question is, where did these values and ideals originate from? Who knows best what is good for an individual—is it the individual himself or others external to him/her? Are the ideals, which inspire international action, traceable to the “international mind and community” as such, or to divine sources, or are they simply the outcome of social evolution—that is, evolution of customs and practices in a particular society?

This chapter holds that the knowledge of “what is good” for the individual inheres in the individual and not in any party external to him/her. However, while the knowledge begins with the individual, it is the community of which s/he is part that sometimes applies it to attain specific ends. As further argued in the chapter, whether the individual’s knowledge would be applied to serve his interest or of interests external to him depends on the *distance* between the individual and the party claiming to act on his behalf. Individual interest is liable to be the first to be sacrificed in a remote international environment—more so, when values collide and there is no mathematically precise method for resolving the ensuing ambiguity. In such an environment, the interests that prevail are those that are well-articulated and energetically promoted.

This chapter begins by tracing human knowledge to its source—that is, to the individual. In the second section, the chapter highlights the epistemological obstacles to human understanding of reality, truth, and morality. The focus of the third section is on the role of “reason” in arbitrating conflicts arising over the definition of reality, truth, and virtuous conduct. The section also discusses the role of society in the conceptualization process. The fourth section examines the implications of individual knowledge for freedom, while the fifth concludes by finding out where the individual stands under three contending theories of international relations.

2.2 Knowledge of the “*Essence of the Good*”: Its Origin and the Method by Which It Is Acquired

A major essence of being human is the capacity to judge some actions “good” and others “bad”—prior to making the appropriate choices. However, it is necessary to ask how the average human being acquires the knowledge of what is genuinely good as against what is evil. If each individual person comes already equipped—albeit, in *varying degrees*—with the knowledge of the good, the only limit on his/her freedom will be that imposed by whoever gives him/her life, that is, God, for those who believe, or the vaguely defined “nature,” for those who do not.

Spencer (2002:3–12) would not be drawn on the question concerning the “Unknowable,” much less, about whether or not a Deity exists. He responded to the antinomy challenge by evading it—that is, by conceding that those who believe that there is a Deity are as justified in their position as those who do not. He goes on to argue that human beliefs are not as irrational as is sometimes assumed. In his words (Spencer, 2002:3):

And thus it is with human beliefs in general. Entirely wrong as they may appear, the implication is that they originally contained, and perhaps still contain, some small amount of truth.

Idealists and realists hold different views on how humans first came about the knowledge of what is “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong,” and “wise” or “foolish.” To the adherents of the subjective school of idealism (e.g., Bishop George Berkeley, Plotinus, Schopenhauer, and Leibniz), the human mind is conscious of, probably endowed with, the capacity to reflect on ideas of goodness, if not of what lies beyond space and time. According to them, the individual mind is not a slate wiped clean, but a program complete with images, mathematical equations, abstractions, ideal constructs, language skills, musical notes, flashes of inspiration, and, if one may add, evil designs and intentions. Whether awake or asleep, the mind is conscious of itself and its external surrounding.

Good or bad can thus not be known to exist by itself outside human consciousness—that is, unless it already exists in the mind. This view accords with the Qur’anic affirmation on human nature. In Sura 2, *Baqarah* (Ayats 30–33), the Qur’an details how God notified the angels about His intention to create man. The angels responded by asking why God would want to place on earth “one who would

make mischief and shed blood therein.” Determined to accomplish His plan, God proceeded to create Adam and to teach him “the names of all things”—names which were totally unknown to the angels.¹

Similarly, Grotius (1583–1645) regards God as the source and origin of right (Knight, 1925; Finnis, 1980; Brett, 2002). In *De iure belli ac pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*) he notes that:

“What God has shown to be His Will, that is law.”

The dilemma facing Grotius is showing how God manifests His Will. He resolved this dilemma by assuming, like objective idealists, the rationality of human nature:

The mother of right—that is, of natural law—is human nature...The Will of God is revealed, not only through oracles and portents, but above all in the very (rational) design of the Creator.

In their rebuttal to subjective idealism, objective idealists (Plato, Immanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, Herbert Bradley, Hegel, and, if he could pass for an idealist, Karl Popper) argue that knowledge originates and expands only when the mind perceives and becomes one with the observed world. Kant, in particular, holds that reason connects all individuals directly to the phenomenal world and to things-in-themselves. That is to say, one is connected with all. Through transcendental deduction, it is possible, according to Kant, to perceive “conditioned reality” and establish the link between “causes” and “effects.” This is more than one can say for “unconditioned reality”—the world of morals and spirituality. Knowledge of God, freedom, and immortality, for instance, cannot be scientifically validated, but have to be anchored on faith.²

Russell, who had led the British revolt against idealism, notes that limiting knowledge to what is already known—subjective idealism—is mere tautology (Russell, 1912:42–43). Instead of holding that the mind knows because it knows, Russell stresses the part that the mind’s *perception* of external objects plays in the acquisition and refinement of knowledge.

The realists will undoubtedly find the subjective-objective arguments at best, laughable, at worst, diversionary and downright pointless. According to the realists, values, particularly of the moral kind, are nothing but illusions. Norms of right and wrong, they argue, are never *discovered* but *created* by individuals and cultures in response to ongoing challenges. Since they evolve under different conditions, norms and values may be invoked when they serve a clear purpose, and discarded when they do not. For instance, conscience and virtues may turn out to be a liability when an individual or a state is confronted with stark realities—like threats to vital interests or to cherished ways of life. As far as the realists are concerned, man is driven solely by self-interest and not by any higher or nobler ideals. In other words, knowledge of what is good has no meaning outside the interests to be served. In realism, philanthropy or altruism is an irrational concept—a program that the human mind is incapable of understanding, let alone run. As indicated in the succeeding chapters, this amoral view of human knowledge has major implications for any form of cooperative endeavor, be this an endeavor targeted at peaceful cohabitation between

husband and wife, the management of business partnerships, the integration of tribes into nations, or the maintenance of cordial relations between and among sovereign states.

2.3 Comprehending Reality: Epistemological Challenges

Notwithstanding the realist contempt for idealism, the latter has played a significant role in efforts at tracking the sources of human knowledge. One of idealism's contributions to knowledge is the development of methods for comprehending transcendent reality. Plato, an idealist, started from the premise that "the body is the prison of the soul." He then proceeded to find out how the soul could be liberated to comprehend reality, or the Form of the Good. Like his teacher, Socrates, Plato was of the view that knowledge promotes the cause of good just as ignorance does the exact opposite—by propping up evil. The goal of education, according him, is to impart the knowledge of the Good—which goes beyond an awareness of the benefits and pleasures immediately derivable from actions, to total acquaintance with the Form itself, that is, with reality.

A major challenge is how to define reality. Plato's answer was to begin at the lowest level—the level at which reality takes the form of shadows, pictures, and images that could be "conjectured," "imagined," or "visualized." According to Plato, any *opinions* formed on the objects or images are likely to be at best, contestable, at worst, totally unreliable.

The visible form of reality also contains physical objects, the perception of which provides the basis for *belief*. Thus, natural objects like the sun, hills, dense basal vegetation, lakes, and volcanoes will be invested with attributes—some aesthetic, others utilitarian or mystical. While one person sees a "god" in a physical object, another is liable to see a "comparative economic or military advantage." Yet another will see an object of cosmic, impenetrable, or divine significance.

At the next higher level, knowledge of reality manifests as the intelligence needed to comprehend the Forms of numbers, shapes, and other objects amenable to precise measurement and mathematical logic. This contrasts sharply with the highest form of knowledge—knowledge of Equality, Beauty, platonic Love, Truth, and, as to be expected, the Form of the Good.

2.3.1 Empiricist Search for Truth and Virtuous Conduct

In sharp contrast to Plato's overarching, deductive (the realists will add, impressionistic) approach, Bacon developed a new inductive philosophical method which he hoped would assist in the search for the truth. Unlike his contemporaries that relied on formal logic to interpret nature, he decided to start from known and specific experiences before proceeding to formulate axioms and laws. He acknowledged that the successful application of the inductive method required that the philosopher liberate

him-/herself from prejudices, emotions, and other states of mind likely to becloud or distort the truth.

Bacon identified four specific threats to objectivity (“idols”³ or *idola* as he called them in his *Novum Organum*). The first he calls “Idols of the Tribe” (*idola tribus*), which spurs ethnocentric reactions to situations. The “Idols of the Cave or Den” (*idola specus*) is a shorthand for individual biases, while “Idols of the Marketplace” (*idola fori*) are those which lead to misuse of language. Finally, “Idols of the Theatre” (*idola theatri*) are those “which have migrated into men’s minds from the various dogmas of philosophers” and from imaginations. A good inductive method is one that succeeds in erasing traces that these invisible ritual objects might have created (Durrant, 2005:100–102). It is only when the mind is purged of prejudices and emotions that it is capable of seeing nature in its true light—including the forms, as well as their causes and effects. This is the foundation of modern empiricist thought. It is also a guide which postmodernist thinking sorely needs to be able to separate verifiable hypotheses from emotions, and *reason* from *desire*.

Based on the application of the empirical method, Bacon grappled with the ethical challenges of his day. According to him, duty to the community belonged within the province of ethics, in contrast to duty to God which fell under religion. While good habit encourages man to channel his actions toward good ends, there was no universal law or formula that individuals in different circumstances could apply to resolve situation-specific ethical dilemmas. Even though his empirical method differed from Plato’s overarching rationalism, the two agreed on the need for a modest approach to the study of reality. In this sense, they differed with Hume (1711–1776), who believed, rather naively, that by disconnecting morality from its divine source, he had succeeded in uncovering a secular, yet universal, law of right and wrong. By the same token, neither Plato nor Bacon would accept Machiavelli’s blanket categorization of politics as an amoral calling, much less Nietzsche’s contempt for the Judeo-Christian and Islamic precepts of honesty, altruism, philanthropy, penitence, leniency, compassion, humility, love, justice, and fairness.

Hobbes’ view of reality combines Bacon’s empiricism, with Machiavelli’s general proposition linking man’s “evil” tendency to the unending struggle for power. Hobbes’ attachment to the empirical world is such that, despite occasional flashes of idealism, his view of human nature remains undoubtedly that of a realist. According to him, “love” and “hate” merely describe an individual’s inner emotions or feelings, rather than present a true picture of reality. The words “love” and “hate” describe objects that the individual is drawn to or repelled by, respectively (Hobbes, 1985:119–120). By the same logic, the terms “good” and “bad” have no meaning outside their description of individual tastes, preferences, or dislikes.

Hobbes’ relativist leaning is thus predicated on the assumption that human beings are driven by self-interest rather than altruism. His theory of human nature isolated the “selfish gene” before the evolutionary biologists adopted it as a scientific mantra. Man, if Hobbes is right, pursues only what serves his best interests—mechanically embracing what brings gains and pleasure, and shrinking from what inflicts pain or harm.

2.4 Reason as an Arbiter of Conflicting Truths

Yet, the strength in Hobbes' argument is also its weakness. His explicit equation of "reason" with personal aggrandizement (Hobbes, 1985:30–31), or with the pursuit of carnal desires, is what makes his, and the non-Platonic wing of Western philosophy, highly problematic for non-Western societies—including societies that have demonstrated the inclination to embrace the teachings of science and savor the benefits of modern technology. The Islamic world is a good example. While acknowledging the boundless potential of the human mind, and at times showing their readiness to join the rest of the world in the craving for sensual delight, adherents of Islam generally believe that narrowing "reason" down to the calculations made by the human senses is tantamount to endowing the senses with the capacities that they do not possess. They contend that if man is indeed a rational being, history would not keep taking bizarre turns or repeating itself. Reason does make possible the construction of seemingly perfect socioeconomic or political systems. Over time, the imperfections in each system will surface, as those who know how it works apply their knowledge to corrupt it and/or evade its obligations or restrictions. We shall return to this subject later as part of the critique of Kant's association of "reason" with the emergence of the "international mind."

Suffice it to say that under the doctrine of *taoheed*, reason emerges as the unity of the visible and the invisible, internal and the external, the positive and the negative. Whereas, in Western philosophy, obligations to self, to community, and to God fall into different compartments; they are an inseparable whole in *taoheed*. Since God is One and indivisible, His laws are of universal application. His Sovereignty encompasses—in fact, supersedes—all others. God's Oneness is unique since it does not fall within the system of numbers. There is no second, third, or any other god besides Him. In view of the fact that God transcends time and space, neither deductive reasoning nor empirical analysis fully captures (or helps human understanding of) His true essence.

In this respect, the Islamic view of the human mind—and particularly, of the limitations of sense experience—has much affinity with the underlying premises of oriental philosophy. By conjuring up notions of what "lies beyond shapes or forms," Islam, like Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, takes philosophy, Western and non-Western, beyond its neatly demarcated and familiar boundary—that is, beyond sense experience, and to a world in which rational laws fail to make sense. The challenge of explaining the empirical and the invisible worlds is what thinkers have endlessly wrestled with in their search for the infinite, immanent, and transcendent reality—that is, *haqeeqah*, among the Sufis; *Brahman*, among the Hindus; and *Tao*, among the Taoists.

The Taoists, and to some extent, adherents of the Chinese School of Names, tend to be deeply suspicious of assertions founded on sense experience. It does not matter whether the assertions are based on formal logic (i.e., hypotheses and deductions), or on real-life experiences (inductions). Over time, any of Bacon's four idols is liable to rear its head, creep into the thinker's mind, and influence his/her conclusions. Like *Ekwensu*, the Devil incarnate in Igbo folklore,⁴ or the *Shaytan* mentioned in the

Qur'an, the idols' sole mission is to muddle up understanding, frustrate the search for the truth, and project the bad as the good and conversely.

In the same vein, the School of Names harps on the limits of sense experience. According to the School (Fung Yu-Lan, 1948),

To say that something is big because it is bigger than something else (that we know) is to say that everything is big. . . . The Tao that can be (imagined, observed or) spoken is not the true or eternal Tao.

As noted later, the methodological and epistemological obstacles to the search for ultimate reality are too daunting for analytical philosophy. The futility of employing human reason beyond its natural capacity is probably what prompted Hobbes, Ayer, Spencer, Popper, Berlin, and the latter-day logical positivists to leave the incomprehensible to metaphysics, while getting on with the more manageable task of *rationaly* explaining the purpose, workings, and directions of the empirical world. Justifying the decision to abstain on such a momentous subject, logical positivists hold that a person who postulates that metaphysics is wrong or does not exist is a "brother metaphysician with a rival theory of his own" (Ayer, 1936:47). In the logical positivists' view, the ultimate test any philosophical premise must pass is reason. Unless metaphysics begins to make sense, serious philosophers have no choice but to distance themselves from it. Unfortunately, for them, reason has yet to crack the antinomy code implanted in the human mind.

2.5 The Individual as the Foundation of Liberty

The copyright on a significant number of human attributes is frequently, though arbitrarily and erroneously, assigned to particular cultures.⁵ The Samurai ethic is "Japanese"; the Confucian, "Chinese"; and the virtues of reason, freedom, and democracy, "Western." It is seldom realized that by attributing virtues to particular cultures, the classifications ignore the virtues' common origin and "ownership"—specifically, the individual living in every corner of the earth. If truth be told, nearly all the values labelled "Western," "Oriental," "African," or "Middle-Eastern" are nothing of the sort. Insofar as the capacity to classify values—into *right* and *wrong*, *good* and *bad*, *moral* and *immoral*, *just* and *unjust*, *pious* and *profane*, *the urge to dominate* and *the will to resist*—defines humanity in general, it be wrong-headed epistemology to regard awareness of these values as the exclusive preserve of any particular culture.

It is, however, necessary to enter a caveat. While certain types of virtue—for example, reason, freedom, love, compassion, justice, honesty—are universal, their translations into *norms and practices* vary from one locality to another. It is very much like "beauty." That it is in the eye of the beholder does not mean that beauty—or for that matter, reason, freedom, love, justice, as well as honesty—does not also exist in every conscious mind or language.

For instance, "reason" is interpreted in the West to mean tracing causes to effects as well as finding the means to achieve the desired ends—with the ultimate objective

of accumulating gains and minimizing losses, or amassing benefits while reducing costs. It is this interpretation of reason that supports conferring on the “rational” and self-interested individual maximum freedom to make basic economic or sociopolitical decisions, no matter the consequences for others or himself. Capitalism or free enterprise is thus the Western societies’ interpretation of reason. In other societies, “reason” is liable to be construed in a communal, holistic, and meta-economic, rather than *individualistic*, way. The result will be a conceptualization of “reason” that includes “compassion,” “morality,” and “piety”—a conceptualization that produces a broader, but no less logical, interpretation than in the West.

The foregoing analysis highlights the difficulty in tracing “effects” to “causes” and by so doing, determining which moral choices are “reasonable.” This is the dilemma that Cartesian dualism seeks to resolve. By separating the conscious, self-aware, and self-subsisting *mind* from the body, Descartes raises the possibility of man possessing *reasoning* or “knowing” capacity not visible to the naked eye—a capacity that is distinct from that of the body. The two capacities—corporeal and non-corporeal—undoubtedly interact, but the essence of being human lies in the “causative” mind.

Cartesian dualism is thus a variant of Plato’s dichotomy of the body and the incorporeal soul. In the Cartesian formulation, it is possible for an individual to judge a conduct morally right because s/he personally knows (or perhaps thinks and feels) this is the case. Her/his dualistic formulation contrasts with theories of divine inspiration which hold that man “knows” a conduct to be right because the gods have so led him to believe. Indeed, if morality rests on the approval of the gods (rather than God, with a capital letter) reason demands that we ask for the method which has been developed to allow the proposition to be verified in a systematic, non-arbitrary manner, or better still, to confirm that the gods did not fall into disputation over what to approve and disapprove—just as ordinary mortals do on earth. As a key concept in the analysis of reason, causality descends into mere speculation where a single effect can be attributed to several conflicting but *equally plausible* causes, or where one single cause produces different but logically unrelated effects.

Islam’s response to the causality dilemma is to trace the effects of action to one and only plausible Cause, God. Realizing how awkward it would be to hold many “gods” responsible for the state of the earth, Islam, like other monotheistic religions, recognizes the suzerainty of only one Supreme, Boundless, Self-Subsisting, Omnipotent, Incomparable, All-Knowing, Immanent, Merciful, Beneficent, Just, Forgiving, and Everlasting God.⁶ This non-corporeal, indescribable, yet fully aware and responsive God is the origin of all creation, and to Him will all created objects, including nature, eventually return. Knowledge of Reality and of the Good is impossible until the believer knows Who God truly is.⁷ In one of the Hadiths (accounts of Prophet Muhammad’s life and teachings), Allah is quoted as exhorting the believer to know Him before serving Him—“*Aarif’nee qabla an taab’da nee*” (“Know Me before you worship Me”⁸). It was by following this injunction that the Moslem, who had earlier been considered “stupid,” was able to lead Europe back from what Rousseau terms “a state worse than ignorance” to an era in which reason prevailed (Rousseau, 1987:3).

In place of Plato's body-soul dichotomy and of the Cartesian dualism, Islam identifies four constituent elements of man/woman. These are *nafs* (an incorporeal, but conscious and everlasting soul), *af'edah* or *aql* (a mind preprogrammed to think, and to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, love or hate, compassion or wickedness, hot or cold, black and white, or shades between), *qalb* (a heart which, as the seat of emotions, either gravitates toward virtuous conduct and the Form and essence of the Good, or is so "diseased" as to be drawn into earthly temptations), and *jasad* (a body that seeks gratifications to biological and carnal desires, but eventually succumbs to disease, the inexorable march of time, and death).

An individual that is able to control bodily cravings and the heart's desires will be one whose conduct matches that characterized by Imam Muhammad Al-Ghazzali as "praise-worthy" (Faris, 1962). Such a person contrasts sharply with one whose heart has been blighted or corrupted by earthly desires, and who constantly lapses into blame-worthy conduct (like perfidy, hypocrisy, dishonesty, injustice, oppression, cynicism, arrogance, lust, greed, xenophobia, and wickedness).

Islam recognizes individual freedom of choice and the accompanying responsibility. The accent on personal responsibility is in fact a salient feature of Islam. It contrasts sharply with Christianity's emphasis on the cleansing and redeeming power of Jesus' blood. Thus, belief in Christ's divinity is, in Islamic exegesis, neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the amortization of earthly debts, and/or for afterlife salvation. As noted in the Qur'an, "whoever follows true guidance does so to his/her soul's benefit," and one that goes astray has none but him/herself to blame. Sura *Israa/Bani-Israeel*, Ayat 14, is quite specific on the link between actions and responsibility:

Wa laa tazir waazirah wizra ukhraw ("And no bearer of burdens will bear another person's burden").

Thus convinced that each individual will personally answer for his/her deeds on the Day of Resurrection, the Muslim tends to regard his/her core beliefs as rights which are not subject to negotiation with earthly authorities. The next section concludes by examining the status of the individual under three philosophical traditions—realism, idealism, and Kantian rationalism.

2.6 The Individual Under Three Philosophical Traditions: A Summation

There are broadly three contending paradigms in the study of international relations—the realist, the idealist, and the Kantian. While all of them in varying degrees lean toward sovereign states and international institutions, none has responded in any meaningful way to the individual yearning for freedom.

Grotius, a foremost exponent of natural law theory, started off with moral values shared by all human beings. However, realizing that individuals are likely to disagree on the interpretation of the values, he acknowledged the need for order, and for organized government. He expected the new contraption (the state) to operate

within well-defined moral and legal parameters in its relations both with its people and with its foreign counterparts. This is where he differs substantially from the realists.

As far as the deep-dyed realists—especially, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hegel, Morgenthau, Kennan, Carr—are concerned, there is nothing remotely resembling a community of minds on right and wrong, much less, an “international society.” All the institutions that have been created and the laws enacted to sustain international relations are but mere illusions. The reality, as far as the realists are concerned, is an international environment characterized by chaos, total disregard for civilized norms of behavior, and impunity. Every sovereign state, they argue, is out for itself; none cares about the collective good. In such an anarchic state—the new state of nature—what counts is not an appeal to reason, morality, or the rule of law, but access to hard and soft power. Only that state survives which is militarily supreme, economically strong, and capable of outwitting its opponents.

Even if realism’s negative view of the international environment accurately describes the “evil” side of the individual, it still leaves the other “good” side totally unaccounted for. After all, man does not thrive by power and deception alone. S/he needs to be aware of the fact that as s/he is capable of plotting and scheming, so are others. In fact, both the unending struggle for power and the resultant global instability stem directly from this naïve assumption that only one’s interests and calculations matter in today’s highly polarized world. Also by depicting the world in black-and-white, “either us-or-them,” terms, realism prevents the individual from seeing the world with an open mind, and from knowing about life outside his/her own borders.

An alternative to realism is a frame of mind that acknowledges the interdependence, if not the communality (or “common destiny”) of the human race. In Kant’s theory of reason, everything is connected with everything else in the observable world. On the face of it, Kantian rationalism provides the individual an opportunity to evade restrictions that the sovereign state places on his/her liberty. The case of Ireland summarized in Box 2.1 below shows how civil society elements sometimes bypass national democratic institutions to achieve their objectives.

Box 2.1 Logic, Freedom, and Morality in an Ambiguous Environment

Reason is generally believed to be the bedrock of Western civilization. Yet, this concept sometimes takes on different meanings as individuals and groups wrestle with life’s challenges. A clear example is the controversy over the individual’s right to terminate an “unintended” pregnancy. On one side is Ireland with its strict anti-abortion law. On the other are three women who sought to evade the restrictions, and travelled to Britain to abort their pregnancies.

As a predominantly Catholic country, Ireland had, as far back as 1861, outlawed abortion. Under the country’s constitution, the right to life extends

to all, including the unborn. Three women (two from Ireland and another from Lithuania) found the anti-abortion law not only oppressive, but also discriminatory and in direct violation of the European human rights protocols and conventions. One of the litigants added the health dimension, arguing that allowing the unborn to live threatened her own life—that is, her very existence. This raises the question how “reason” was to arbitrate a major conflict—the life of the mother as against that of the unborn child.

The petitioners reckoned that pursuing their rights within Ireland was going to be “futile and costly.” They, therefore, decided to approach an outside body for relief. To fight the infringement on their rights—this affront on the dignity of women—they bypassed the Irish judiciary and headed straight to the European Court of Human Rights.

In its own defense, the Irish government argued that under its laws, abortion, or the termination of an unborn life, was a crime. The litigants knew this. So did the European Union. In fact, Ireland had agreed to a second referendum on the Union’s reform only on the understanding that the reform would leave its abortion law untouched. It further held that for 50 years, the European Court of Human Rights had recognized “the diversity of cultures and traditions in Europe.”

Countries with sizeable Catholic populations (e.g., Poland, Spain, and Malta) will certainly watch the case with interest. It is likely to be resolved in one of three ways. One possible scenario is the Court ruling in favor of the three petitioners. The Court could, for instance, fall back on “reason” and conclude that as individuals, it is the three women who know what is in their best interests. In other words, it is not for the state or any other external party to substitute its judgment for those of the persons bearing the pains of unwanted pregnancies. Besides, the Court might argue that it was not obliged to consider the understanding that Ireland had reached with the European Union before allowing a second referendum to proceed. After all, the Court is not an organ of the 27-member European Union, but of a larger, 47-member Council of Europe.

A second possibility is the Court accepting Ireland’s plea to throw the case out. The discrimination argument would be the first target. Unless the women could cite concrete examples of pregnant women (or men) that went unpunished after undergoing abortion procedures within Ireland, the litigants would have a hard time sustaining the allegation that the abortion law in this particular case was discriminatory. By far, the more substantive issue that would most likely be addressed is the will of the Irish majority on right to life. As individuals, the three women have the right to begin, continue, and end the process of procreation. However, each choice carries its own consequences. If reason supports the women’s right to end their pregnancies *under any condition*, the same reason dictates that they answer to a society whose membership they freely accept. The society may be right or wrong, but it is firm in its conviction

that a mother's right to abort must be weighed against the unborn child's right to live. Two interests are in conflict, and the Irish society has come out on the side of the defenseless fetus.

Where interests clearly conflict, the state is obliged to step in and redress any perceived imbalance. The Irish government, conscious of the fact that the fetus cannot protect itself, has assumed the role of its (the fetus's) defender. To argue that "the rest of Europe" takes a liberal view of abortion simply begs the question. The will of the non-Irish populations does not, in any way, nullify the will freely expressed by the Irish at elections and plebiscites. Indeed, to substitute the will of a distant body like "the rest of Europe" (or the Council of Europe) for the will of the duly enfranchised Irish is nothing short of gross travesty of democratic principles. It will amount to transforming the Irish majority into a European minority to justify marginalizing them and imposing on them canons of behavior they would otherwise find objectionable.

This leaves the third option—referring the case back to the Irish Supreme Court for determination on its merits. An appeal to the European Human Rights Court will then be allowed if and when the petitioners raise cogent points of fact or law that the Irish judiciary might have overlooked. Already, an Irish judge had, according to *The Guardian* of Thursday, May 10, 2007, allowed a 17-year-old girl carrying a headless baby to travel to Britain with a view to terminating her pregnancy. The Irish abortion law has also become less stringent following new court rulings and opinions expressed at referenda. In these recent cases, the Irish at least had the chance to decide for themselves, instead of "the rest of Europe" arrogating to itself the knowledge of *what is good for Ireland*.

Regardless of how the Irish case is finally resolved, excessive lurch toward internationalism might not be the best way to safeguard individual rights. The position of the three unwilling Irish mothers on external resolutions of internal problems is likely to change were the issue at stake to be different—say, export of Irish jobs to foreign countries, or a European assault on a cherished Irish custom and institution.

In any case, by leaning too heavily toward internationalism, the Kantian rebuttal to realism might itself have overstated the case for reason, and might end up compromising what it values most—the freedom of the individual. Freedom is synonymous with freewill. The former means nothing unless given practical expression by the latter. And where individual freewill prevails, the chances are good that one choice would be in conflict with another—as highlighted in the clash between pro-life and abortion activists, or between advocates of same-sex marriage and their opponents, and, for that matter, between the Saudi family of a paralyzed man insisting on the severance of his attacker's spinal cord as reparation, and the Amnesty International's characterization of the demand as retrogressive, savage, and unreasonable.⁹

It is precisely with a view to “banning” conflict and diversity that authoritarian systems seek to restrict personal freedoms and to impose holistic solutions on otherwise-pluralistic environments. By sanctioning unrestrained expansion of the international space in which all are required to look, think, and act alike, Kant’s transcendental idealism risks confusing the will of one with the commonweal. Conflict is inevitable where such a frame of mind prevails.

The phenomenal world may, as postulated by Kant, exist independently of individual minds, thoughts, perceptions, or choices. However, Kant would be among the first to agree that when the mind ponders the world, it sees not a tidy picture of unity, but a time-and-space image frequently blurred by antinomy, paradoxes, and conflict. The case of Ann Coulter, a neoconservative commentator, who sees nothing good in Islam, is indicative of a world increasingly detached from a common understanding of reason and morality. Employing a highly inflammatory language—one that endears her to her right-wing constituents and helps promote her books—Coulter terms Muslims “homicidal maniacs.” Not yet done, she counselled immediate occupation of Muslim countries, the execution of their leaders (including leaders aligned with the West), and forceful conversion of the recolonized peoples to Christianity:

We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity. We weren’t punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That’s war. And this (war on Muslims) is war.¹⁰

Despite the venom and the malevolence, Coulter knows deep down that no rational person would take her seriously. Only her neoconservative colleagues, indeed, saw any merit in her warped thinking and insane recommendation. An example of those egging her on is David Horowitz. Based on his own, totally inaccurate, summary of what Islam preaches, Horowitz openly identified with Coulter and those baying for the Muslims’ blood:

I began running Coulter’s columns...shortly after she came up with her most infamous line, which urged America to put jihadists to the sword and convert them to Christianity. Liberals were horrified; I was not. I thought to myself, this is a perfect send-up of what our Islamofascist enemies believe—that we as infidels we should be put to the sword and converted to Islam.¹¹

More insidious than Kantianism’s fabrication of an “international mind” is the likelihood of the idea being hijacked and then cynically interpreted to justify imperial designs and creeping global authoritarianism. To begin with, a theory founded on unbridled expansion of the international jurisdiction ignores the *distance* between local preferences and global choices, and between choices and accountability. By sanctioning international entanglements that the individual does not fully comprehend, idealism is likely to “externalize” the internal effects of, and practically preempt, human choices.

Liberating, as the idea might first sound, the Kantian *international mind* may thus turn out serving an imperialistic and enslaving purpose. As pointed out in the fourth chapter, the assimilation of African tribes into “civilized Europe” was a cardinal principle of French colonialism. While the colonial policy actually failed to stop

the African independence train or “assimilate” even the most modernized of the modernizing elite, its ghost was resurrected by President Nicolas Sarkozy to justify the French government’s clampdown on modes of dressing considered “Islamic.” According to the president, the burqa had no place in France. Besides endorsing the Swiss minaret ban, he gave the French Muslims an ultimatum to accept “our social and civic pact” or face dire consequences. With regard to his largely anti-immigrant “national identity” campaign, the president of France let it be known that the land of liberty, equality, and fraternity (*liberte, egalite et fraternite*) had no room for diversity. He viewed Islamic identity as a threat, and warned that:

Moderate Islam would fail if Muslims tried to challenge ... (France’s) republican value-system or Christian heritage.¹²

It did not occur to the proponents of forceful assimilation that if “moderate Islam” fails, the extremists would rise to fill the vacuum. Instead of undermining the efforts of the law-abiding majority (moderate Islam), attention ought to focus on safeguarding individual rights that are not in conflict with equivalent rights. The only limit on individual liberty is equivalent liberty for other individuals. Article 4 of Declaration of Rights, approved by the French National Assembly on August 26, 1789, sums it up admirably as follows:

Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else; hence the exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which assure to the other members of the society the enjoyment of the same rights.

For instance, laws banning “indecent exposure” may be justified where such manifestations of bodily assets “disturb the public order established by law”.¹³ Still, laws banning indecent exposure must not only clarify what is meant by “indecent,” but also demonstrate the link between that definition and the disturbance of “public order.” By contrast, laws banning the burqa or *hijab* are invasive, arbitrary, and regressive, besides clearly targeting a particular section of the public, that is, the Islamic community. The laws also violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Proceeding from acts similar to the French’s—that is, acts that have implications for individual and group rights—the next chapter focuses on the sovereign state and its relations with its people.

Notes

1. Adam’s knowledge of the “names of all things” is the origin of human consciousness of moral and spiritual values, and of modern era’s scientific and technological breakthroughs, artistic contributions, and, regrettably, destructive tendencies. The Qur’an also notes that in addition to the basic senses, God endows man with the capacities to articulate his/her thoughts, communicate with others, and choose between right and wrong. See Surah Balad (Ayats 5, and 7–10).
2. See Kant, I., *Prolegomena to any future metaphysics* (1783), and *Critique of pure thought* (1787).
3. The idols are not to be confused with the images and icons worshipped by pagans of old. Bacon used the term figuratively to show how values to which an individual is attached become an object of worship rather than of dispassionate study. Contemporary examples of

- “idols” include “nationalism,” “feminism,” “narcissism,” hedonism, consumerism, neoliberalism, communism, capitalism, religious fanaticism, endorsement of Aryan race doctrines, and other emotion-laden ideas—doctrines and ideas that hold the mind captive, and prevent it from entertaining and objectively examining contrary worldviews.
4. Basden, G.T., 1966, *Niger Ibos*. (London: Frank Cass)
 5. See, for instance, Wight, M., 1966, “Western values in international relations”, in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds), *Diplomatic investigations: essays in the theory of international politics*. (London: Allen and Unwin), pp. 89–131.
 6. These are a few of the 99 Names or Attributes of Allah. The Muslims believe that to Him belong the most beautiful Names, and to Shaytan (the Devil) belong the worst and most despicable appellations. Neo-Cartesian scholars like Arnold Geulinx (1625–1669) and Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715) also attribute mind–body interactions to a First Cause—that is, God. Muslims also hold that as the Master of the Universe (to Whom all created objects owes its existence), He has no need for a parent or an offspring.
 7. See Surah 7 (A’araf), Ayat 28 on the frequent tendency to pass off human desires as God’s will.
 8. By the same token, it could be argued that adherents of the various belief systems ought to know Who God truly is before proceeding to slaughter one another in His Name.
 9. Although the demand accords with the Mosaic law of an eye-for-an-eye (or *qisas* in Arabic), the Qur’an urges the victim or his family to be lenient, and to be content with payment of reparations in material, rather than arm-and-limb terms. It was the Qur’anic injunction on leniency that led the Saudi court to persuade the family of the paralyzed man to accept monetary compensation for the harm caused by the attacker. According to Reuters news dated August 23, 2010, the Governor of Tabuk, Prince Fahad Bin Sultan, also ordered mediation between the two families.
 10. Coulter, A., 2001, “This is war”, *National Review*, September 13.
 11. Horowitz, D., 2003, “The trouble with ‘Treason’”, *FrontPage Magazine*, July 8.
 12. President Nicolas Sarkozy’s article in *Le Monde*, December 8, 2009, reproduced in part in *Crescent International*, Vol 38, No. 11, January 2010, p. 16. The Muslims realize that others had tried in the past but failed to shake their faith. See the history of prophet Shuaib as narrated in Surah A’araf, Ayat 88. Shuaib and his followers were given an ultimatum to repudiate God or face instant banishment. The believers remained steadfast and ultimately prevailed over their adversaries.
 13. Article 10 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen categorically states that “No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law.” The onus on the French government is demonstrating how the burqa “disturbs” public order, and that this “public order,” which is about to be disturbed, is clearly established and defined by law. (Except otherwise stated, quotations from the French Declaration of Rights based on the translated version prepared by Gerald Murphy, the Cleveland Free-Net, Cybercasting Services of the Division of the National Public Tele-computing Network, NPTN).

Hegemony and Sovereign Equality

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