Human Rights, Human Moral Obligations and Moral Cosmopolitanism

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Introduction:

A lot has been thought, spoken and written about the Western liberal conception of human rights, so much so that, it has become almost inalienably entrenched in our conceptual scheme explaining much of human social behaviour. However, many thinkers have also criticized and reviewed the relevance of such a conception particularly as a means of achieving global social justice and cosmopolitanism. One of the concerns has been the question whether such a conception can justify a set of human rights code universally agreed upon by the International community which is diverse in its social, political, religious and cultural set up. What is being sought is a concept which can be the "norm" guiding an International moral code of human conduct and the question is whether the Western liberal conception of human rights where they are understood as universal *moral claims that an individual can make against other individuals or the State* (simply by virtue of the fact that he/she is human) fit this role?

In his chapter "Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights" Charles Taylor (Taylor 2011) candidly states that, 'we can't assume without further examination that a future unforced world consensus could be formulated to the satisfaction of everyone in the language of rights'. (Taylor 2011, 106) The main aim of my paper is to review the claim of the traditional conception in forging an unforced consensus to arrive at a universal norm of human rights. I also aim to develop the concept of 'human moral obligation' as a candidate that would fit the role of the 'norm' that Taylor is seeking, in a more promising way. My claim is that the concept of human moral obligation (which I develop along the lines of the concept of dharma as it is found in the ancient Hindu philosophy and religion) is more suitable for the role than the concept of human rights because a broad notion of moral obligation is to be found in major ethical and religious systems of the world and this fact makes it a more *basic* concept than the concept of human rights which clearly has had its roots in the narrow western liberal democratic form of political set up having its own share of conceptual problems.[1] Despite the many differences that

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the major world ethical and religious systems have, a minimalistic notion of obligation in some form is admitted and this could serve as the core element justifying a uniform system of moral code defining and determining an international code of conduct. At the same time the same concept of human moral obligation derived from the vast and variegated foundational background of different metaphysical, ethical and religious systems of thought would be expressed in diverse cultural practices making room for the diversity of multi-dimensional belief systems to be found in the world community. Such a notion therefore, is more likely to succeed in building the international consensus that we are trying to seek without undermining the cultural diversity supporting it. If we can admit of such a concept of human moral obligation, the concept of human rights may no longer be relevant or only relevant in so far as it would stand for the legal rights afforded by a legal system needed to enforce the system of human moral obligations. Of course, it goes without saying that the ideal legal system (the legal system as it ought to be, i.e., a just and fair legal system) would need to be in conformity with the accepted notion of human moral obligation.

Section 1: The Traditional Western Notion of Human Rights and the its Cultural Relativistic Critique

It is widely held that social justice can be achieved when people in society actually enjoy human rights, i.e., can actually make claims that are moral and may be legal claims against other individuals/institutions for what morally belongs to them by virtue of being human. This "individualistic" conception of human rights with its roots in the largely western political system of liberal democracy has come in for criticism from various quarters, amongst which the cultural relativist critique is perhaps the strongest. The main contention of the cultural relativist is that such a conception of a human right is not universally present in all cultures e.g., some pre-modern Western cultures and Non-Western cultures do not subscribe to it. Speaking of ancient and medieval societies the question has often been raised whether the traditional Western conception of a human right is to be found in the Hindu society of ancient India.

Raimundo Panikkar (Panikkar, 1982), while considering this question, has expressed scepticism towards the efficacy of human rights in bringing about social agreement amongst culturally different societies. He examines some of the basic assumptions underlying the traditional Western conception

of human rights and shows their weak points. According to him, the Western discourse on human rights assumes the following propositions that are incorrect or at best dubious.

1. There is a universal human nature different from the rest of reality and that this is known by reason.

2. The concept of human rights also implies dignity of the individual which in turn implies
    a. A distinction and separation between individual and society
    b. Autonomy of human kind vis-à-vis and often vs. the Cosmos.
    c. Resonances of the idea of Man as micro-cosmos and reverberations of the conviction that Man is *imago dei* [image of God], and at the same time the relative independence of this conviction from ontological and theological formulations.

3. The underlying assumption of a democratic society which implies
    a. That each individual is seen as equally important and thus equally responsible for the welfare of society. Each has a right to stand by his or her convictions.
    b. That the society is the sum total of individuals whose will is sovereign and ultimately decisive and there is no instance that is superior to society.
    c. That rights and freedom of the individual can be limited only when they impinge upon the rights and freedom of other individuals and therefore majority rule is traditionally justified.

Panikkar closely examines these assumptions and rejects them as highly implausible. According to Pannikar, there is no universal concept of human rights because humankind presents a 'plurality of universes of discourse' and that if we want to extend the validity of a concept 'beyond its own context we shall have to justify the extrapolation'. This he thinks is a difficult and complex matter.

Panikkar agrees that there certainly is a universal human nature but this nature is not 'segregated and fundamentally distinct from the nature of all living beings and/or the entire reality'. Also, any one interpretation of this 'universal human nature' may not apply entirely of human nature. He also accepts that human dignity is important and cannot be undermined in any way.

However, he is of the opinion that the 'person' must be distinguished from the 'individual'. Explaining this distinction he says,

The individual is just an abstraction, i.e., a selection of a few aspects of the person for practical purposes. My *person,* on the other hand, is also in "my" parents, children, friends, foes, ancestors and successors. "My" person is also in "my" ideas and feelings and in "my" belongings. (Panikkar, 1982, 90)

Such an idea of a person has its repercussions on the idea of rights and there Panikkar has to say the following:

.... Rights cannot be individualized in this way. ... Rights cannot be abstracted from duties; the two are correlated. The dignity of the human person may equally be violated by your language, or by your desecrating a place I consider holy, even though it does not 'belong'' to me in the sense of individualized property. ... An individual is an isolated knot; a person is the entire fabric around that knot, woven from the total fabric for the real ... Certainly without the knots the net would collapse; but without the net, the knots would not even exist. To aggressively defend my individual rights, for instance, may have negative, i.e. unjust, repercussions on others and perhaps even on myself. The need for consensus in many traditions – instead of majority opinion – is based precisely on the corporate nature of human rights (Panikkar, 1982, 90 - 91)

About the last assumption of democracy Panikkar says that human rights afford the means of protecting the dignity of individuals in such a set up but in a hierarchical set up, which need not necessarily be oppressive, the particular human being cannot defend his or her rights by demanding or exacting them independently of the whole. And, when considered in the context of the whole, the right may not even sustain. (Panikkar, 1982, 91)

It is my conviction that none of the aspects of human nature which provide the philosophical justification for the concept of human rights e.g. human dignity, human rationality, autonomy, basic sense of equality etc. can be denied and neither are they in conflict with each other. The problem lies not with identifying some human trait which is universally and essentially present in all human beings but in treating this trait as *a justification for an individual claim that I can make on others* which is what the language of rights amounts to. What is problematic, in my opinion, is the notion of a human right as being *a moral claim that one individual has over others in society in abstraction from the 'person' that she or he is*. In my view, as humans we do share a

common trait or common nature and that is our individual and collective sense of moral responsibility or moral obligation to our self as a person and to every other being human or non-human. The notion of human moral obligation that I am trying to develop is normative and is construed along lines of the notion of dharma as is delineated in classical and modern Hindu religion and ethics. But, unlike the concept of dharma, the concept of human moral obligation is devoid of much of the metaphysical baggage associated with the notion of dharma while at the same time is powerful enough to form the norm defining an international moral code of conduct.

Section 3: Human Moral Obligations in the light of Dharma

The classical view about human rights takes them to be moral claim rights expressing a three term relation between a claimant (human in this case), a good or value and a duty bearer (natural or a non-natural person like a state or a state agency). (Hinsch and Stepanians 2006, 119) This understanding of human rights is problematic to the extent that it shows the concept itself to be otiose. It is an indubitable fact that there are certain values, i.e., basic values, for example, life itself. Being a value, it is inherently prescriptive imposing a certain obligation on everything which is capable of upholding it (i.e., preserving it). Thus it is a moral obligation on every being which is capable of preserving life that that being does preserve life and not do anything which violates it in any form except under exceptional circumstances. Thus, the relation is a two-termed relation between a value and those that are morally obliged to uphold that value. It goes without saying that there is a plurality of such values and we have different obligations (perfect and imperfect obligations) to uphold these values. Also, human moral obligations are moral obligations that humans have towards other humans in their individual capacities as well as members belonging to groups. In other words there is also a collective sense of human moral obligation which enjoins us as members of groups to look after the welfare of the group.[2] The underlying idea is that, that is the way the world order under the Cosmic Order is supposed to be or rather ought to be though that is not how it actually is.[3] Human moral obligations are not upheld due to many reasons.[4] If everyone acted according to the dictates of human moral obligations then we would have an ideal world order - the perfect world, the utopian order that is sought after. Since, that is not so, there is a need for a distributive and retributive system to take care of the benefits and burdens of the co-operative as well as the non-cooperative efforts of people in society. Such a system is afforded by the law of the land which gives its people the right to make claims against others who have defaulted in making good their obligations towards

them. The claim-rights system which expresses a three-term relation between a claimant, a good and a duty bearer is thus the relation expressed by the system of positive/legal rights and duties. In fact, human moral obligations act as guidelines to build such a legal system while at the same time providing moral justification to it. Any legal system would be morally justified if it had the backing of moral obligations otherwise it would itself be morally wrong. It is in this sense that there are 'bad laws' which need to be reviewed and changed. It is to be noted that it is in this sense that both humans and non-humans including natural and non-natural things can fall within the purview of the law of the land implying that normally animals and historical monuments, cultural arte facts, etc. also have the legal right to be preserved or not to be desecrated. It follows that if at the moral plane there are no claim – rights as human rights are envisaged to be and if such claim – rights are only rights afforded by a legal system in place then human rights as moral claim rights become redundant. The so called human rights are only legal rights or positive rights albeit to be supported by a sense of moral obligation which forms the under grid supporting different legal systems. Our common sense of moral obligation may be derived from different religious, philosophical, socio-political and cultural belief systems but as moral obligations towards oneself and everything else in the cosmos, they would have a minimalist common meaning. Such a sense of moral obligation is admitted by most, if not all belief systems of the world.

Every human being thus, has a human moral obligation to himself/herself, as well as to other beings (both human and sub-human) to treat each with dignity and respect, as every being is an integral part of the cosmic whole. This is his basic moral obligation or what is termed as *sadharan dharma* in the Hindu context. These basic human moral obligations are present in every human being from birth and ought to be fulfilled, although the fact is that because a human being is a slave of his passions and because he is free, at times he is misled and does what he ought not to do and/or fails to do what he ought to do. This results in what are called 'human rights violations' in the language of human rights.

Like dharma basic human moral obligations have a constitutive as well as a regulative aspect in our lives. In their constitutive aspect they make us what we are as a species and regulate our life as it ought to be *vis-à-vis* the other elements in the entire cosmos. If, and when these basic moral obligations are fulfilled by all towards all, there would be no need for individuals to make claims against one another, e.g., to be treated with respect and dignity.[5] It must also be kept in mind

that besides human beings no other being (e.g. a non-human animal) is capable of actually making such claims, and yet in a sense, it too has a place in the cosmos. Therefore, what is construed as a 'right' i.e., a claim of a sort would unfairly exclude non-human animals unless one can argue for the rights of animals in the same sense, which is difficult, I think, to say the least. On the other hand to say that as humans we have moral obligations even towards non-human beings would spell out a more cordial relationship between humans and the non-human world. This relationship between human and everything non-human is a pervading theme in traditional Indian philosophy expressed in the idea of the relationship between the *pinda* (part or element) and the *brahmanda* (the Cosmos or the Whole). Thus, the so called 'basic right to life' as an individual moral claim is better understood as a moral obligation where each being's existence is assured because of moral obligations that all humans must fulfill and not merely because it can make a claim for itself. Moreover, a claim right is always a right against someone/something who/which has a duty to respect and fulfill that right. But, so far as basic rights are concerned, the rights holder also has a similar duty towards others who have similar rights. We would need to say that each person has both a right against another and a duty towards him too. It is surely less complicated and parsimonious to think that everyone has an obligation towards all others to treat each other with dignity and respect, not to unnecessarily harm one another, etc. etc. Thus, in their regulative aspect human moral obligations serve as the foundation of morality since they are instrumental in regulating the action of human beings.

Besides the basic human moral obligations which all human beings have *qua* human being and which afford life and dignified existence to all beings, there are other moral obligations that one has by virtue of the personal and social roles that one enters into throughout one's life.[6] For example, as a parent, I have the moral obligations associated with being a good parent and my child must eventually learn about his obligations towards me, as a parent. When we each fulfill these obligations, there is no need for rights. Obligations determined by social roles are affected by cultural determinants and since cultures differ in different societies, the social role determined human moral obligations would be different in different cultures. For example, most societies would want to grant that elders of the society must be respected by the younger. But the expression of respect for elders is culturally determined. In some cultures, e.g., in the Hindu culture, we touch the feet of our elders but this is not a practice in non-Hindu cultures. Again on the same score, there may be practices in the latter that are alien to the former. It would be wrong to believe that in the non-Hindu cultures, where the young do not touch the feet of their

elders, the right of the elders to be respected is being violated by the younger generation. The so called right to be respected or rather the respect that they deserve is, by and large, given to them in both cultures but expressed in different ways. In fact, it would be odd to say that elders in a society can *claim* respect. Respect is earned by doing respectful deeds where the other person feels obliged to treat you with respect. It is human moral obligation of the young to respect the elderly and for them to reciprocate by love and affection. Equally odd would it be to say that the young have a right to be loved. Such sentiments between generations are better understood along lines of human moral obligations otherwise construing them as rights will lead to an unnecessary proliferation of rights.

Human moral obligations do not depend on any empirical order which accounts for their authoritative and obligatory character. In that sense they are different from legal rights and duties that are enforced by some existing empirical order. Like dharma human moral obligations are dependent on the Cosmic Order for their normative power. Deriving their obligatory nature from the Cosmic Order, guarantees their unconditional, universal and infallible character.[7] But, this does not mean that human moral obligations are absolute and admit of no exceptions. Like dharma, they admit of 'wise relativity' or exceptions. Our human moral obligations are *prima facie* duties which can be overridden by other duties depending on the nature of the exceptional circumstance.

Thus, human moral obligations are fixed and yet evolving with the evolution of moral consciousness in human society. Along the lines of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, one can believe that this evolution continues till the time perfection is reached. The idea is that we can perpetually try to make ourselves into morally better beings. As human moral obligations are not static, they are different for different individuals and also for the same individuals in different situations. Depending on where one is, 'one's station in life' including one's personal, professional, social and political roles, one's human moral obligations will be determined.[8]

To the question - how are human moral obligations known – the answer is that the basic obligations (which may be positive or negative) like not to unnecessarily harm others, to have respect and dignity for the inherent worth of every being, not to intentionally deceive others, etc. are inherent in human nature and common to all human beings. To say this is to say that a human being is essentially a morally good being. The evil in him has external causes that he cannot overcome because of weakness of will. This sentiment is echoed in the writings of many

modern Indian philosophers like Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and others. Regarding social role related obligations, these are acquired by sources in society, like parents, teachers, elders, friends etc. and are deeply influenced by culture and are expressed differently in different cultures.

Our human moral obligations, like the notion of dharma, form the backbone of our social moral existence. They are the indices that tell us how we should live our lives by regulating our actions and desires. If actions are not regulated by an understanding of our human moral obligations, then they cannot be virtuous. For example, material wealth is an economic value, the equitable distribution of which is made possible by the regulatory force of human moral obligations. Wealth not acquired in this way and/or desires not fulfilled in accordance with the regulatory authority of our human moral obligations will result in what are called 'violations of human rights' in the rights discourse.

So far in developing the concept of human moral obligations I have tried to show some affinities of this concept with the notion of dharma in traditional Indian philosophies. But there are some important distinctions too. Firstly, it is to be noted that human moral obligations (both basic and role determined obligations) do not presuppose a hierarchical social structure with links to a theory of karma, rebirth and the notion of retributive justice. The model that I am proposing is not committed to a hierarchical social structure in terms of caste or race distinctions although distinctions of gender and class cannot be so easily offloaded. In any case, admitting gender and class distinctions need not necessarily result in discriminatory practices in any derogatory sense. In that sense the model that I am suggesting offloads some of the metaphysical and sotereological commitments of Hindu philosophy without giving up on its basic metaphysical assumption of the nature of the self (the Atman and Brahman and the relation between them). The 'metaphysical baggage' which can be offloaded from the concept of human moral obligation was an integral part of the belief system of people of ancient India of Hindu faith since it was related to the concept of dharma itself. Similar metaphysical commitments may be part of the belief systems of people of other religious faiths or again the same metaphysical commitments may persist in the belief systems of present day followers of the Hindu faith. But, so long as these different people can agree on the common norm of human moral obligations we would have an 'unforced consensus' in Taylor's terms or a Rawlsian 'overlapping consensus'. I am thus led to believe that people having different religious faiths with conflicting and opposing

metaphysical commitments may be convinced about a minimalistic concept of human moral obligation and that about such a concept there would be an international 'overlapping consensus' and that such a concept would help us outline a universally acceptable moral code of human conduct. The moral code of conduct would be universally acceptable since that would be defined and determined by the 'overlapping consensus' on the concept of human moral obligation.

But, what is most important here is to understand how the concept of human moral obligation would actually encounter and explain cultural plurality and diversity while retaining the inter-cultural common grounding I seek for it. How do the cultural and moral differences of diverse cultural communities get expressed to give room for cultural identities to stay intact or at least discernibly different? Here, I would like draw upon some ideas found in Charles Beitz's recent work *The Idea of Human Rights* (2009). What Beitz wants to say in the context of human rights, I wish to employ and exploit in the context of human moral obligations.

Explaining 'inter cultural agreement' in the context of theories of natural rights and agreement theories Beitz states that the concept consists of the following three elements.[9] (Beitz 2009, 74 - 75)

1. A "common core" which is the minimum to which all members of a cultural community would agree.
2. An "overlapping consensus" amongst people belonging to diverse cultures and
3. "Progressive Convergence".

There are many culturally different human communities with different sometimes even conflicting and opposing belief systems. But, in each community there is a sense of moral obligation present which forms the common minimum core to which all members of the community agree. Different communities through a process of "overlapping consensus" and "progressive convergence" are able to arrive at a norm which I claim is not that of a universal notion of human rights but a universal sense of human moral obligation understood as the sense of moral obligation that humans owe not only to other humans but to the entire Cosmos. "Progressive convergence" I would understand in the same sense as Beitz as 'inter cultural agreement that arises not from the actual contents of existing moral cultures, but instead from the contents of these cultures as they might develop or evolve under pressures for adaptive reinterpretation'. He talks of 'the best available elaboration of the basic normative materials of

these cultures for the circumstances of modern life'. (Beitz 2009, 88) Thus, it is the practical constraints of global modern living which drive us to the unforced consensus that Taylor talks about. This also leads us to the tripartite levels that Taylor thinks is what we should distinguish in our conceptual model. At one level is the 'norm' which defines and determines the International code of morally acceptable conduct and this norm is provided by the concept of human moral obligation and not by the traditional notion of rights. This norm itself is derived from or is the outcome of an "overlapping consensus" at the basis of which is the vast and variegated system of different and sometimes conflicting belief systems[10]. This forms a second level in the model and yet at another level, the third level, the norm itself gets expressed in the form of legal systems which state laws which enforce the code of conduct on individuals by ascribing to them legal rights and legal duties. The legal system of one State can differ from the legal system of another State in the specific laws that it enacts but it would count as a 'just and fair' legal system only if it is in consonance with the norm arrived at by the processes of "overlapping consensus' as well as "progressive convergence". Thus, there is the norm at one level, its philosophical justification at another level and its legal expression at a third level. None of this overrules the fact that the norm itself gets expressed in culturally different behaviour which can be morally evaluated in terms of the internationally agreed upon norm.

In another respect also, the idea of human moral obligations is important in that it links closely with the idea of human agency. After all, duties are to be done and obligations must ensue in actions. They are what one *must do*. Rights are claims. They are not things we do, rather in making a claim we are waiting for something to be done to us or for us either by other individual(s) or some institution even if it is only a negative duty they may be performing. But, it might be asked – in fulfilling my human moral obligations I am doing something for others, how am I doing something for myself –which is what rights guarantee us? It must be remembered that we have a moral obligation towards ourselves too – to protect and promote our well-being – which makes killing in self-defence also morally correct. In fact, my moral obligation to protect myself is a stronger motive for action than my right to do the same. Also, it is because I have this moral obligation towards myself that there is the law to safeguard this obligation providing me the legal right to protect myself. Therefore, in doing our duties, we do things for ourselves in the long run. It is true that when others (i.e., other than myself) fulfil their human moral obligations my interests will be taken care of, but what if they fail to do so? In

other words, how do we ensure a universal fulfilment of human moral obligations? Is it to be legislated from above or do we rely on the moral compass of members of society? The approach needs to be two-pronged. One, to generate the sense of human moral obligations in people (both in the individual and collective sense) and the moral motivation to fulfil them and second, to have a legal system based on a strong moral foundation to take care of cases where these obligations are not fulfilled. In that sense human rights as legal rights act as fall back mechanisms when we fail to fulfil our moral obligations. I do not have a detailed road map to suggest at this point but I firmly believe that it would need to come from within the moral conscience. There are practical considerations to be taken into account but on the theoretical point I think that in fulfilling our human moral obligations, we are making conceptual space for social justice because to understand and act on our human moral obligations is nothing but treating people as they deserve to be treated, giving them what is due to them and this I take to be the core of social and also global justice.

Section 3: Human Moral Obligations and Moral Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is the ideology that all human ethnic groups belong to a single community based on a shared morality. The idea is like that expressed in the idea of '*Vasudaiva kutumbakam*' (the whole world is a single family). Cosmopolitanism may entail some sort of world government or it may simply refer to more inclusive moral, economic, and/or political relationships between nations or individuals of different nations. Moral Cosmopolitanism is the view which affirms the equal moral worth of each individual person regardless of differences of sex, race, caste, religion, nationality or any other form of group membership below the class of all human beings. The form of Moral Cosmopolitanism which my view leads to is termed Moderate Moral Cosmopolitanism and is defined as the view which asserts *both* that there are basic obligations that each of us must recognize toward all other human beings, *and* that particular affiliations – to family, nation, state, and so on – give rise to special duties whose justification, if plausible, is explicated independently of any supposed instrumental value for promoting the good of humanity. The legitimacy of associative duties, on this view, is derived not from our universal duties to human beings in general but from some other feature of the particular association itself. The concept of human moral obligation which in some form cuts across different traditions, cultures and in general belief systems may perhaps be the first step towards a moderate form of cosmopolitanism aiming at resolving problems of global justice in

its different aspects. Thus, in my opinion the concept of human moral obligation shows great promise in achieving this goal within a framework of multiple and diverse cultures and belief systems.

Conclusion

In my opinion, if human moral obligations are admitted as binding on every human being then we can dispense with the language of human rights although legal rights would have to be admitted. One of the reasons why the concept of human rights was admitted was because it was thought that the law of the land itself could be unfair (e.g., the laws that allowed apartheid) calling for basic moral rights which every human being had by virtue of being human. In my opinion if the law of the land is in conformity with our human moral obligations it would not be unfair. Where individuals fail to abide by their human moral obligations, legal rights could be appealed to, to rectify the wrong done. Cultures which justify so called human rights violations on grounds of cultural and moral diversity and on grounds that there is no universal and uniform notion of human right, have laws which at best need to be reinterpreted or at worst discarded. They are morally wrong in the first place because they are not in conformity with the basic human moral obligations which in essence transcend all cultural differences. The violations in question are violations of laws which themselves are violations of basic human moral obligations.

Thus, I believe we can do without the notion of human rights since it carries with it the baggage of individualism and is feasible only on the ability to make claims for one self in abstraction from the human relations in which we are intrinsically entrenched and the roles that we are inextricably tied up in. The language of human rights has no advantage over the language of human moral obligation. On the contrary the latter helps us to keep out of problems that the former implies. To know and fulfil our human moral obligations is the need of the global human community and that is the point of an "unforced consensus".

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[1] Such philosophies, i.e., the various ancient Indian philosophical systems, are diverse in many aspects of their philosophies but they (barring the materialists) broadly share the principles defining and delineating the concept of dharma.

[2] At the outset I would like to state that human moral obligations include both perfect and imperfect obligations, as these are standardly understood in the literature. I also believe that these moral obligations would be determined by one's circumstances , abilities and to whom these obligations are due In this sense both individuals and collectives like the state and state agencies can be said to have moral obligations.

[3] It is true that materialists would not believe in a Cosmic order and the subjectivists and emotivists would be disinclined to believe in any objectively real order in the world but I think that there is enough evidence of some sort of order expressed in the natural world as expressed in the dharma (natural dispositions) of things, perhaps more order than there is disorder and this prompts me to believe that there is real objective order in things and this is one facet of the Cosmic Order which is constitutive as well as normative in nature.

[4] The reasons may be both internal as well as external to the person. If one fails in one's obligations due to reasons outside one's control then the individual cannot be held morally responsible for his action/inaction and may be acquitted.

[5] Since one has a basic human moral obligation to oneself too, e.g., to preserve one's existence, self - respect, dignity, etc., when these are threatened one can indeed take action in self- defence. This would mean that I ought not to harm animals except in self -defence. In such a circumstance, the moral obligation not to harm another would not be a *prima facie* obligation overridden by another; there would be no such obligation because he who wilfully harms deserves no protection.

[6] I think the idea of 'role determined human moral obligations' is very important but largely unexplored in the context. Throughout our lives we are playing different roles and related to these are different responsibilities which must be fulfilled. These would create different obligations which would be morally binding on us.

[7] I admit that there could be other causes of convergence among moralities like enough commonalities in our moral psychology, or the fact of the presence of human reason but that there is a transcendental source like the Cosmic Order needs to be admitted too so that the convergence rests not merely on contingent matters of fact.

[8] A role, it is to be noted, is different from social categories like caste, class, gender, race, etc. One can do without the latter although to some extent it would be difficult to off load gender and class differences. But, one cannot ignore in any way the roles that we are in or choose to be in during different stages of our lives.

[9] Beitz himself is critical of this attempt on the part of the naturalists and the agreement theorists and thinks that the problem of human rights needs a "fresh start". I, however, think that there is a lot that makes sense in the three elements and can be effectively used to understand "inter cultural agreement".

[10] The belief systems would comprise of different beliefs including metaphysical beliefs about human nature, religious and ethical beliefs, socio-political and cultural beliefs, etc.