

## Kantian Ethics and Jain spiritual-ethical conducts

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### Abstract

The name of Kant, a German philosopher (1724-1804) is immortal in the history of modern western Philosophy. Prime reason for this has been his simple life of abstinence and continuous ethical thinking. He lived a much disciplined life. He is believed to have practiced his routine life more strictly than the watch itself. From waking up in the morning to going to the bed at night, every minute of his day and life was fixed for specific jobs which he always did without fail. It is said that people used to set right time on their watches by observing his movements. Due to his simplicity, strict discipline in life and solitude loving nature he was called 'saint of Konigsburg'. He spent his entire life in Konigsburg. There does not appear any philosopher in western thought with a stature comparable with the high stature of Kant. Will Durant, a western scholar, has rightly remarked that to be a philosopher today one must first become a disciple of Kant.

'Critique of Pure Reason', 'Critique of Practical Reason' and 'Critique of Judgement' are immortal works produced by Kant. The first of these works deals with epistemology, second work with Ethics and the third one with aesthetics. First analyzes the 'true' second the 'being' and third the 'good'. There are three fundamental questions in Kant's philosophy: What can we know? What can we do and what can we become? These three works deal respectively with the answers to these three fundamental questions.

**KEYWORDS:** ethical thinking, Critique of pure Reason, Practical reason, Judgement, Goodwill, Categorical imperative.

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### Introduction

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### **Kant's Analysis of Ethics**

The ideal of Kant's ethical thought is to become ethical and to act ethical. The importance ascribed by Kant to sensation and sense perception in his epistemology, has been totally rejected by him in his analysis of morality. Reason alone is important for morality and senses have no place in it. His ethics is thus called Rational ethics, Purism or Regorism. His rationalism is totally opposed to hedonism. For hedonism satisfaction of desire is the highest good, for rationalism self-conquest is the highest good. Hedonism defies the role and claim of reason and considers it to be subservient to desires. Rationalism rejects the claim of desires and advocates the life of pure reason. In rationalism there is no place for emotions, passions, feelings and desires. Rogers has written in his book 'A Short History of Philosophy' that Hume, like hedonists, had considered morality under the law of pleasure and pain; but Kant provided it a rational structure. (p. 192)

According to Kant the essential component of human nature is only reason. Sensations dominate only the animal nature and are inconsistent with human nature. Thus men ought to negate the sensations and live life of reason. The life of reason alone is truly ethical and of good character. Kant unlike hedonists neither considers consequence of action to be the object of moral judgement nor does he consider pleasure to be the aim of life. He rather believed that if we are rational, we also shall have good character and capability, and if we shall be capable or worthy we will naturally gain happiness also. In his 'Practical Reason (P. 227)', he has written—

"Morality is not properly the doctrine how we may make ourselves happy, but how we may  
Make ourselves worthy of happiness."

### **Goodwill**

According to Kant goodwill is the only rational will. It is a will to obey the moral law.

Reason

imposes upon itself the moral law. Will is the practical or the active reason. It legislates for itself. It

imposes moral law on itself. Practical reason is universal and is found in all men. The moral law imposed by it is also universal. It is self-evident. Reason naturally acquires this moral law. For Kant goodwill alone is unconditionally good. He says—

"There is nothing in this world or even out of it that can be called good, except goodwill."

Kant has distinguished between 'good' and 'right' also. He maintains that often the will guided by emotions is also useful and have some worth and thus, such a will is right but still it cannot be good because it is not supported by reason. According to Kant—

"An action is good not because it has good results, or because it is wise, but because it is done in obedience to this inner sense of duty, this moral law that does not come from our personal experience but legislates imperiously and prior for all our behaviour, past, present and future. The only thing unqualified good in this world is goodwill—the will to follow the moral law, regardless of profit or loss for ourselves."

Thus it can be said that Kantian good will is law unto itself, it is a will without purpose. It is neither a legal law nor does it have a purpose of consequence. It is not teleological. The will based on emotions, feelings, passions or desires etc. is not autonomous or free. Wherever there is no freedom, there is immorality. Thus goodwill has been referred to as 'A Copernican revolution' in one of the essays by John R. Sibley. Before Kant it was commonly held that will follows the discipline of feelings and passions, but Kant conceived of will as good, free or autonomous, holy and purposeless which is totally uninfluenced by and independent of feelings or passions. Finally according to Kant goodwill is that which follows the principle of duty for duty's sake. This means that 'goodwill is a will that wills nothing.' Thus it can be said the goodwill, in the philosophy of Kant is a position of purposelessness. There are no external or irrational purposes which the goodwill is supposed to serve. It is an imperative of duty for duty's sake. It is a jewel, which shines by its own light.

### **Duty for Duty's Sake**

The Kantian concept of goodwill makes it quite clear that significance of duty has no reference to consequence; instead duty should be done for duty's sake. If any act (supposed to be a duty) is performed with a purpose of generating desired consequences then failure to obtain the consequences; total or partial, infuses hopelessness in life and hopelessness proves to be a curse of life. Man acts in various ways, but how many of his acts fall into the category of duty for duty's sake? The acts in human life can be categorized into three types—

1. Many acts are performed with a motive provided by feelings and passions. Man often feels compelled to perform such acts. To give something to an incapable, hopeless and destitute beggar while traveling is an act prompted by compassion. Such an act is not prompted by sense of duty. Thus many acts are done due to emotion or overwhelming passions.
2. Many acts are performed to cater to selfish interests. During elections political candidates are financially supported by capitalists. Such capitalists hope to be supported by winning candidates in their corrupt business. Even if the parents foster their children with the idea that children would support the former in their old age, the acts of such parents fall in this category.
3. The third category is the category of duty for duty's sake. Here there is neither the tide of passions nor the purpose of fulfillment of duty is operational in this category of acts. Kant calls it the principle of 'duty for duty's sake'. Here there is

neither a purpose nor any motive. It is akinto *niṣkāmakarma* of Gītā. Lord Kṛṣṇa to Arjunaspake:

*"Karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭemāfaḷeṣukadācana/  
mākarmafalahetubhūrmātesangoastvakarmaṇi||"* (2/47)

i.e. O! Arjuna, you possess only right to act, on the result you have no control. Do your duty passionately and do not also denounce action.

Kṛṣṇa goes to the extent of saying—Arjuna! In all three universes, there is nothing I ought to do. There is nothing to achieve that I already do not have, yet I am engaged in Karma. In the same way Kant holds that one should perform duty irrespective of the consequence, desirelessly and without any motive. Despite this significant similarity between Gītā and Kant there is same important difference also. Gītā preaches the passion or desire free performance of duty. It preaches that the consequence of action should be left to God. God shall take care of the consequence therefore one must devote all acts to God. While Kant holds that the action should be done only with the sense of duty. This duty for duty's sake principle is the categorical imperative in the philosophy of Kant.

### **Categorical Imperative**

According to Kant a moral imperative is a categorical imperative and it is to be obeyed in all

Circumstances i.e. it is unconditional. Explaining the imperative part of the categorical imperative of Kant, Patton says:

"The conception of an objective principle, as far as it is necessitating for a will is called a

Command of reason and the formula or the command is called an imperative."

These imperatives are of two kinds, first the hypothetical imperative and second the categorical imperative. Hypothetical imperative can further be sub-divided into two; first, problematic imperative and second pragmatic imperative.

When any imperative is obeyed for fulfillment of purpose it is called problematic imperative. It is obeyed to achieve an objective. If some desire arises because many or most people so desire then it is called pragmatic imperative. To desire what is desired by maximum and to avert what is averted by maximum is pragmatic imperative. Since both these imperatives involve purpose these are actually speaking hypothetical imperatives.

Categorical imperative is different from above mentioned two kinds of hypothetical imperatives. Unlike hypothetical imperative, the categorical imperative is not subservient to any objective or purpose. It is not of if-then nature. Its principle is a moral principle. It is a law of pure reason and is universal and true. Following are the characteristics of categorical imperatives:

1. Categorical imperative emanates from pure reason. It is not based on feelings or emotions. One has to overcome one's feelings and emotions. One has to overcome one's feelings and emotions to be able to obey the categorical imperative.
2. This imperative upholds the principle of duty for duty's sake and there is no exception or relaxation to it.

3. This imperative is universal. All have to obey it irrespective of place, time or circumstances.
4. Categorical imperative is neither a subjective law nor it is an objective one. It issues from the synthesis of both.
5. Categorical imperative does not consider any external purpose; it only directs the will in the right direction. It is non-hypothetical, objectiveless and purposeless imperative. In his famous 'Fundamental principles of the metaphysics of morals', Kant has explained this categorical imperative with five maxims of morality. These maxims are:
  - (1) Maxim of universal law.
  - (2) Maxim of natural law.
  - (3) Maxim of treating humanity as an end.
  - (4) Maxim of freedom.
  - (5) Maxim of kingdom of ends.

#### **Maxim of universal law**

"Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

By this maxim Kant means that before doing any act one must first judge whether the act can gain universal validity and acceptance. If it is possible to gain this than only the act should be done, if otherwise, the act should not be done. If same one commits himself to theft or murder, by considering this maxim he can save himself from doing these evil acts. Thus this maxim provides us a suitable standard of our daily acts. By judging the merit of act on the basis of this standard, one can obtain true knowledge of the goodness or badness of one's actions.

#### **Maxim of Natural Law**

"Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature." By this maxim Kant means that just as the work of nature is not meant for any specific class, race or community, just as the work of nature, is not prompted by any kind of attachment or aversion, so should our deeds also be done without any discrimination of persons and without any feeling of attachment and aversion. Thus we see that Kant inspires us to act according to nature. This not only increases pure tendencies but also helps us perform our duties in a detached and passionless manner. This is the excellence of the principle of duty for duty's sake.

#### **Maxim of Treating Humanity as an End**

"So act as to treat humanity whether in your own person or in that of any other. Always act as an end and never as a means only." By this maxim Kant means that humanity is in itself an end. It is never to be considered a means. In our daily life we come across many examples where persons are used by some other persons as means to fulfillment of later's interests. Some people exploit and dehumanize some other persons. Kant's maxim tends to check this practice.

### **Maxim of Freedom**

"So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxim."

This maxim means that one is free to act and one ought always to act freely. But any one person's freedom is at par with any other person's freedom. Thus, while acting freely one must see that what one freely does can qualify as a universal law? This maxim inspires us to legislate in accordance with goodwill. This maxim is actually a corollary to the maxim of universal law. Since this emphasizes the free will of man, it has been called the maxim of freedom by Kant.

### **Maxim of Kingdom of ends**

"So act as if you were always through your maxim a law making member in a universal kingdom of ends."

This means that through our acts we legislate not only for ourselves, but for entire humanity. Kant wants to convey that just as legislature legislates only after duly considering all the aspects and impacts of the would be law so should a member of moral kingdom act by considering all the impacts his acts is most likely to generate in society.

Thus we see that these explanatory maxims of the categorical imperative not only have a theoretical value but these are also of high practical significance. These maxims help us take right decision in moral situations of our daily life.

### **Postulates of Morality**

It appears to be important also to describe the postulates of morality as held by Kant. Kant says that these postulates are necessary for actual moral life. According to him there are three postulates of morality—

#### **Freedom of Will**

This is the first and the most important of the postulates of morality. According to Kant will is free in true sense only if it can be autonomous in decision making, if it is determined by nothing other than reason. There is no place for sensations in moral life. Freedom of will is the condition of moral life and for freedom of will pure rational life is necessary. Feelings and emotions deviate men from moral life and obstruct the freedom of will. According to Kant acts performed due to fear, pressure or sympathy are condemnable. Even the compassionate acts of service to critically ill and help to a destitute are not considered by him as moral acts. For him freedom of will is a postulate of morality and it should hold in all conditions and circumstances.

#### **Immortality of Soul**

Kant believes in the immortality of soul. He believes that if the soul is not considered to be immortal the moral order shall break down. People shall not abstain from acting sensuously and immorally with the belief that death shall destroy everything and there will be no pleasures after death. Moreover death being end of life there is no question of the good or bad consequences of acts done in life. This belief shall bring moral responsibility to an end.

Thus Kant firmly believes that it is necessary to believe in the existence of life even after death of body. If soul is believed to be immortal, we can be firm on morality till

the last moment of our lives. Moreover the immortality of soul alone provides the scope of realizing the moral ideals and excellence of moral life, as just one life is not sufficient for achieving moral ideal or excellence.

### **Faith in eye existence of God**

Kant has accepted the existence of God as a necessary postulate of morality. Our general experiences show that people observing moral life suffer more than others. Kant says that such suffering is a test to which moral beings are put by God. Those who pass the test qualify for eternal happiness. By observing grossly immoral beings happy in this world one must not conclude that the moral laws are wrong. The moral order laid by God can never go wrong. If we do not accept the existence of God we shall also lose faith in moral principles and consequently there shall be no morality. Thus faith in the existence of God is a necessary postulate of morality.

### **Jain ethical doctrine**

In Śramaṇ tradition of India, Jainism with its mature concepts of pure conduct, life of abstinence, total asceticism and strict penance; touches the high peak of morality. For Jains, those who have conquered their sensual sensations i.e. those who have full control over their all senses are the ideals. This tells about the principle of purity of conduct as espoused by Jainism. Ācārāṅga is the most important treatise on Jain doctrine of ethics.

In Jain religion good ethico-moral conduct is given high importance and it is considered necessary for mind's purification. Here too, like other Indian wisdoms, mokṣa is considered the supreme objective. In the state of *mokṣa* i.e. liberation, *jīva* becomes absolutely free from all kinds of empirical bondages. This liberation is possible only by cessation of all those *sanskāras* (traces of past traditions and actions), which arise as a result of his karmas and which cause the bondage. That which causes bondage according to Jainism is *āsrava* or influx of the karma *puḍgala*. The processes that help *jīva* attain liberation are called *sanvara* (stoppage of influx) and *nirjarā* (dissociation of bondage). *Sanvara* and *nirjarā* are necessary steps to attain liberation. Precisely *sanvara* and *nirjarā* constitute Jain moral theory. In *sanvara*, the ninth chapter of Tattvārthasūtra lays down five types of conduct (*caritra*), five attitudes of carefulness (*samitis*), three attitudes of restraint (*guptis*), ten religious activities (*dharmas*), twelve contemplations (*anupreksas*) and twenty two endurances of afflictions (*pariśahas*) to be conquered by Jains. In Prśnavyākaraṇa and Sthānangasūtra, the five major vows (*mahāvrtās*) are also included in *sanvara*. In *nirjarā* the karmas are dissociated through twelve kinds of meditative austerities (*tapa*) and as a result of this *nirjarā* the pure nature of *ātmā* which is infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite bliss and infinite power, becomes manifest. Regarding the influx stopping process of *sanvaras* Tattvārthasūtra says—"saguptisamiti, dharmānupreksāpariśahajayacāritrayaiḥ(9/2)" i.e. three *guptis*, five *samitis*, ten *dharmas*, twelve *anupreksas* and twenty two *pariśahjaya* are the five kinds of conduct.

### **Comparison**

The great German philosopher is a rigorist due to belief in categorical moral imperatives and his name is immortal in the realm of philosophy due to his moral principle of duty for duty's sake. Jain moral theory enjoys a place of pride in ethical

discourse due to its unique *sramanācara* and *śravakācara*. *Tapa, upavāsa, vrata, sanyāsa* and *vairāgya* have made Jain morality very special. The way Kantian ethics is a famous western thought so is Jain moral thought is well known amongst Indian philosophies. If we compare the two moral theories we discover many points similar in both of these.

### Similarity

1. In western ethical thinking consequence appears to be the criterion of judging the goodness or badness of action. According to Aristepus and Apiculus and utilitarian like Bentham and Mill; Kant, however, has not considered consequence to be important. He does not judge an act on the criterion of consequence it produces. Unlike hedonists, he does not believe that acts producing pleasure are good and acts producing pain are evil. For Kant it is the will in accordance of which any act is held to be good or evil. If the will is good, the act also is, if the will is not good, the act also is not good, irrespective of the consequences they produce. Kant has himself said—

"A goodwill is good not because of the consequences. A goodwill is good in itself and like a jewel shines by its own light."

According to Jain moral thought also the act is evaluated not on the basis of consequence but on the basis of intention of the performer. A fisherman trying to catch fish may not succeed in catching even a single fish yet he is more evil than a farmer who unintentionally kills many a jiva while ploughing the field. Thus in both the philosophies, it is the intention or the will and not the consequence of act which serves as criterion of evaluation.

2. Both philosophies are similar with reference to purity of means. Both reject the idea that ends justify the means. Jainism prescribes unconditional non-violence of means. Ācārya Bhikṣu goes to the extent of not admitting any exception to the rule of non-violent means. He believes that a blood stained cloth can never be washed clean by blood. According to him, "*Lohikharadyojopitāmbara, lohī sukemdhovyore*" Thus ācārya Bhikṣu recommends samyama and change of attitude as purer means.

Kant also rejects impure means. He holds that lie, dishonesty and violent means are condemnable. No one can become perfect by employing impure means and Kant prescribes perfection of everyone. Thus purity of means is ideal of both the philosophies.

3. Both moral philosophies consider faith to be important. Kant has gone to the extent of accepting—I have sacrificed knowledge in favour of faith. Thus unlike other western philosophers, for Kant belief in God is a matter of faith and not of argument. In Jainism also faith is prior to knowledge and conduct. It is well known Jain dictum that '*Samyaktarśana jñānacaritrānimokṣamārgaḥ.*' Ācārya Kundakunda has also emphasized faith in Darśana Pāhuda.
4. Jainism emphasizes observance of vows. Both *śrāvaka* and *śramaṇa* have their respective vows to be adhered to. Though Kant has made no such distinction but his principle of duty is comparable to that of vow.
5. In both the philosophies any moral law has to be obeyed unconditionally. Jain *vrata* are to be observed under all circumstances. The Jain vows are not relative to

time and space. Kant also says that any principle that cannot be universalized cannot become a moral law.

6. Goodwill is the lifeblood of Jain morality. In the philosophy of Kant also goodwill is accepted as a basic principle. Thus, two philosophies are similar.
7. Another similarity between the two philosophies is that both demand strict adherence to morality. Both lay down unconditional ethical conduct and both are rigorist.

### Differences

There are certain very clear differences between the two ethics:

1. Kant advocates purely rational ethics. He rejects role of emotions. But psychology admits emotions also and Kant's rejection of role of emotions in ethics has made his ethics psychologically unrealistic. On the other hand Jain ethics admits the role of emotions and is thus supported by psychology. Jain concept of non-violence is impracticable in absence of emotion. Kant by rejecting role of sensation and emotion has induced many contradictions in his moral theory, which however do not find place in Jain ethics. Kant's ethical principles are incomplete as they do not admit of any role of feelings whereas Jain ethics offers a complete practicable theory.
2. Both the moral theories lay more emphasis on individualistic values than they do on social values. Yet Jainism recognizes and admits of the role of emotions and thus gives them due place whereas Kant emphasizes only on reason and categorical imperative. The lack of social touch in the philosophy of Kant has been stated by James Leith as "Kill your sensibility and you separate yourself from your fellows."
3. Kant has emphasized only the principle of duty for duty's sake which is not at all concerned with the consequence of performance of duty or action. For Jainism the supreme end is *Moksha* or liberation and for the attainment of this liberation *Samvara* and *nirjarā* are prescribed under *śramaṇācāra* and 'life of pure morality' is stated as an ideal of *śravakācāra*.
4. Though both the philosophies consider moral law to be absolute and unconditional yet Jainism provides for the absolution from sin by practicing penance, but there is no such provision in Kantian ethics. Due to this Mackenzie had to say 'Law is made for the sake of man not man for the sake of law.'
5. Goodwill has a place of importance in both the philosophies. In Jain thought goodwill is an honest and true will whereas for Kant 'A good will is a will which wills nothing'. Thus Kant's view of goodwill is not as sound as it is in Jain thought.

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