

## IMANUEL KANTS'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this research paper is to provide an analysis of the Categorical Imperative given by Immanuel Kant. Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher of the period between 1724-1804. We will research about Kantian Ethics, the concept of good will, duty and the moral worth of an act, two of the formulations of categorical imperative which are “principle of universalization” and “principle of humanity”. Kant argued that about how we decide right and wrong and also many philosophers have debated on this topic. Many people have tried to answer the question that whether morality exists or not and Kant gave a considerable answer of this question. The issue of morality and ethical decision making does not depend of religion, it depends on human conduct i.e., on an individual.

**KEYWORDS:** Immanuel Kant, morality, ethics, good will, categorical imperative, “principle of universalization”, “principle of humanity”, human conduct, religion.

### **INDEX OF AUTHORITIES**

#### **Reports and Webpages**

- Jstor
- Academia.in
- Meta-ethics is that branch of philosophical reasoning that determines whether or not ethical values are real. See Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (New York: Cambridge University of Press, 1996)

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper we will study about the categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant. According to Immanuel Kant the categorical imperative is the supreme principle of morality. In the word categorical imperative, Imperative means command and there are two types of command hypothetical and categorical. A hypothetical imperative is one which express conditional

command for e.g., "if you to be successful then you have to work really hard" whereas on the other hand categorical Imperative are absolute command for e.g. "Do not cheat". In this we will also see the formulations of categorical imperative which are 'Principle of Universalization' and 'Principle of Humanity'. Categorical Imperative are the command which you must follow, regardless of your desires, moral obligations are derived from pure reason. Immanuel Kant said that you don't need religion to determine what the law is, because what's right and what's wrong is totally knowable just by using your intellect. Kant says that we should not use someone as a mere means and as we know everyone uses each other for living and that is justiciable but using someone as a mere means which means taking undue advantage of someone is not justiciable at all. Kant defines categorical imperatives as commands or moral laws all persons must follow, regardless of their desires or extenuating circumstances. As morals, these imperatives are binding on everyone.

### **IMMANUEL KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE**

Immanuel Kant argues that religion has no connection with morality and the right and wrong is totally dependent on an individual. According to Kant Morality means acting in accordance with the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is the supreme principle of morality. In the word categorical imperative, the word imperative means command like for e.g., do not cheat. There are two types of Imperatives which are hypothetical imperative and categorical imperative. Hypothetical imperative is the one that expresses conditional command like for e.g., "if you want to become successful, then you have to work very hard", this example possess a condition i.e., you only have to work very hard if you want to be successful and if not then you can sit and relax. On the other hand, categorical imperative is absolute command like for e.g., Do not cheat, this command does not pose any condition, it does not contain any if then clause, even if one wants to cheat, he/she cannot cheat because the command is absolute.

### **CORE CONCEPTS OF KANTIAN ETHICS**

- THE IDEA OF GOOD WILL
- DUTY AND THE MORAL WORTH OF AN ACT
- FORMULATIONS OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

**THE GOOD WILL**

According to Kant the good will is the one that facilitates human act. What makes a good really good well, for Kant a goodwill is good not because it produces good results as in a case of pragmatic ethics or greatest happiness to the greatest number of people as in the case of utilitarian ethics but it is good by virtue of its intrinsic value, the Goodwill therefore is good without qualifications, good without any condition.

Now the question is how is the Goodwill manifested?

According to Kant a goodwill is manifested when it is done for the sake of duty hence in order for a goodwill to be called good without qualifications, it must be done for the sake of duty, for e.g., the will to help a friend, Kant would have us believe that if one expects something in return when someone helps a friend then the will is not good without qualifications because it is not done for the sake of duty but if someone helps because she believes that it is her duty to do so, then, for Kant, the will here is good without qualifications because it is done for the sake of duty. Furthermore, Kant says that the will is autonomous if it is self-legislating thus the concept of autonomy of the will means that it is not influenced by any outside factors in other words when a moral agent performs a particular act her will is considered autonomous if she is not forced to do it.

**DUTY AND MORAL WORTH OF AN ACT**

Kant argued that duty should be the motive of any moral act. Inclination or self-interest can never be the motive of any moral act, this means for e.g., that if a physician treats her patient her motive should be duty that is the physician is moved to the patient because it is her obligation as a healthcare provider to treat the patient and not the interest of profiting from the patient herself. For Kant and has a moral worth if it done for the sake of duty, if an act is done out of self-inclination, then it has no moral worth that is immoral, it is interesting to note that for Kant sometimes an action that accord with duty and for Kant this act has no moral worth though not necessarily immoral because the act simply accords through the duty indeed it is not done for the sake of duty as we can see for Kant there is a difference between actions that accord with duty that is actions that are done in accordance with duty and actions are done for the sake of duty and again for only those actions that are done for the sake of duty have moral worth.

**FORMULATIONS OF CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE**

- 1. PRINCIPLE OF UNIVERSALIZATION:** “Act only on that maxim whereby you can, at the same time will, that it should become a universal law” but differently the principle of universality commands that every maxim someone acts on must be such that others are willing to make it the case that everyone always acts on that maxim when in a similar situation. The idea is here that if the maxim that is the principle in which the moral agent act cannot be universalized then the action has no moral worth. For e.g., The act of stealing the properties of the rich and distribute them to the poor so we can see the maxim which is stealing or steal in this case cannot be universalized of course if someone is trying to steal, reason tells us that we cannot force all people to will the same, hence stealing is always impermissible according to the categorical imperative. Let us take one more example act of helping a friend in times of need the maxim which is to help is obviously universal eyes about we can expect others to will the same hence the act of helping a friend in times of need is morally right according to the categorical imperative.
- 2. PRINCIPLE OF HUMANITY:** This is also known as the formula of the end, and the principle of humanity was formulated as a response to its critics who lamented that the principle of universalization is too strict and so the second formulation of the categorical imperative which us based on the principle of humanity is read as “So act as to treat humanity whether in your own person or in that of another never at means but always as the end.” It is important to note that Kant believes that human beings have inherent value and should be never treated as means to a particular end, this is because for Kant if humans are treated as means then they are reduced into things or on the level of animals. Thus, for any act of the treats humanity as a means is not morally right let us consider the example of cheating someone is absolutely immoral because this act treats others as means of own selfish end, this says that in this world everyone uses each other for means but we should not use someone as a mere means.

**CONCLUSION**

To conclude we can say that as we know that according to Immanuel Kant there are two types of imperatives which are categorical imperative and hypothetical imperative, where hypothetical are conditional command and categorical imperative are absolute command where you don't have an option to do immoral things. In this paper we have seen the concept of good will, duty and moral worth of an act and two formulations of categorical imperative which are principle of universalization and principle of humanity. We have learnt from the paper that morality and religion should be kept apart according to Kant. To do the right thing is dependent on an individual and is not related to religion.

**BRILLOPEDIA**