

# Value of Kantian Ethics with special reference to Three Maxims

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## Abstract

Value is regarded in common sense a person's or group of person's principles about what is desirable or undesirable to them. Briefly speaking, value is a relationship between a person and an environment situation which evokes an appreciative response in the individual. Kant's ethical theory is known as rationalism. Rationalism emphasises the claim of reason. According to Kant moral is known intuitively and the maxims of morality are deduced from the Moral Law. They are self-evident and the rightness and the wrongness of particular actions is inferred from their agreement or disagreement with the moral law. The moral law is universal and is imposed by practical reason to be obeyed. Because the moral command comes from within and hence it is impossible to disobey it. Kant gives emphasis to the good will and the good will is the only good. Kant introduces the categorical imperative as the principle or moral decision. It states that one should act only according to maxims. That can be universally applied. For Kant duty is essential to morality and we must do our duty for the sake of duty with good will. The doctrine of Bhagavad Gita is also to perform action without any action desire and aversion.

**Key words:** Moral Law, virtue, good will, reason and maxim.

## 1. Introduction

The term value is commonly regarded in the economic sense as the satisfaction of human desire. But it is not the case that value only related with economic conception. According to different opinion of different thinkers value may be conceived from subjective or objective point of views. Briefly speaking, value is a relationship between a person and an environment situation which evokes an appreciative response in the individual. Value is regarded in common sense a person's or group of person's beliefs or principles about what is desirable or undesirable to them. Kant maintains that moral is known intuitively and the maxims of morality are deduced from the Moral Law. The moral law is universal and is imposed by practical reason to be obeyed. Because the moral command comes from within and hence it is impossible to disobey it.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this research work is to discuss the Kant's ethical doctrine of three maxims whether it is applicable in everybody so as to make a good society.

Secondly, it would like to discuss the similarities of the doctrine of Gita's akarma (detachment of action) with Kant's second maxim duty for duty's sake with good will without any consideration of the fruits of action.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Concept of Categorical Imperative and its Essence**

Like the Indian thinkers Gautama Buddha , Vardhamana Mahavira and Guru Nanak , Immanuel Kant also propounded his ethical doctrines which may be applicable by everybody in this life. Kant's ethics is organized around the notion of categorical imperative which is a universal ethical principle stating in others and that one should always respect the humanity in others and that one should only act in accordance with rules that hold forever. According to Kant the moral is universal, impartial and rational, the categorical is a way of formulating the criteria by which any action can test of universality, impartial and rational. There are two important formulas of the categorical imperative i.e. Universal Law and the Humanity. The former emphasizes acting on maxims that can become Universal Law while the later stresses treating humanity as an end in itself. In his book entitled ' Metaphysical of Morals' Kant discusses the three formulas for defining moral actions, such as; universal, impartial and rational. In this book he describes that actions must be based on principle that can be universally applied. It implies that one should act only according to maxim which they can become a universal law. His categorical imperative emphasises that moral actions are not contingent on personal desires or outcomes but are rooted in duty and ethical principles. In essence it encourages individuals to consider the broader implications of their actions, asking them to reflect everyone to act in the same way.

### **Philosophical Aspects of Morality**

Kant describes that from common sense morality to the supreme principle of morality is called categorical imperative. According to him, the uncontroversial premises from our shared common sense morality and analysis of common sense concepts such as ; 'the good will', ' duty', and 'moral worth' yield the supreme principle of morality (i.e. the categorical imperative). The Categorical Imperative is the central concepts in the deontological moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. It is a way of motivation for action. It is best known for his doctrine of three maxims( principles). His Groundwork of Metaphysics splits morality and its thinking. In this book Kant developed his philosophical moral notions, that leans on the philosophical perspectives.

#### **1.The first section based on three propositions:**

- a. Moral is done out of duty.
- b. Moral actions are principle based on the reward of the action.
- c. Moral actions are inspired by respect for the law.

2. In the second section Kant moves from the idea that human beings are governed by instinct to the idea that morality is a metaphysical concept that can be discovered through reason. He claims that decisions must be made solely on reason not on personal satisfaction or fear punishment.

3. The third section discusses the relationship between freedom and morality. Kant argues that acting morality itself is a form of freedom. It shows the ability to act according to moral law, which is grounded in reason. Kant resolves a supposed contradiction between freedom and moral constraints by stating that acting morality is a manifestation of freedom.

### **Value of Three Maxims**

According to Kant actions are right only when they are performed for the sake of rightness or for the sake of duty. To him, duty for the sake of duty is the golden rule of life. We should do our duty for its own sake without caring for the consequences or the end regardless of any feeling or desire. If we are performing any action out of any feeling of love or sympathy then that action is immoral. The practical laws, that are subjective grounds for actions, that is, the subjective principles are called maxims (principles). In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant admits that “The estimation of morality, in regard to its purity and consequences, is effected in accordance with ideas, the observance of its laws in accordance with maxims”. (Norman Smith Kamp: Immanuel Kant’s Critique Of Pure Reason, London, 1929, p.no. 640). The Categorical Imperative is a pure form and the moral law issues the most general and abstract command on the will. The content of the categorical imperative is filled in with the following three maxims:

1. Act ,only on that maxim which thou canst at the same time will to become a universal law.
2. So act to treat humanity whether in thine own person or in that of any other, always as an end and never as a means.
3. Act as a member of a kingdom of ends.

The first maxim Kant refers to the cases of breaking promise. He says that to break a promise is wrong because it cannot be universalized. If everyone breaks promise then no promise will be made. So the actions are to be performed in such a manner as they can be performed as they can be universalized. Kant claims that the first formulation lays out of the objective conditions on the categorical imperative that it be universal in form and thus capable of becoming a law of nature .

The second maxim stresses the nature of humanity. As man is rational being his rational nature should be respected. Further, he admits that a person is an end himself. His rational self is his ideal. He should not use himself as a means to anything nor should to use ,others as means. We should respect our own personality E.G. If we are making a false promise to our friends, it means that we are making him as a means to our own gain and thereby we are not respecting him totally as a person.

The third maxim stated that we should treat ourselves as well as the other human beings as possessing the same intrinsic value . In an ideal society every individual should respect himself and respect others in order to cultivate mutual understanding and good will.

## **The Doctrine of Bhagavad Gita of Akarma and Kant's Doctrine of the Law of Duty**

In the Bhagavad Gita of Chapter (iv ) we find the way of actions. They are non-attachment work with the mind clinging to the objects of sense and the fruit of actions. According to Gita actions are classified into three divisions i.e. karma(action), Vikarma (wrong action) and akarma (inaction). Karma simply means act done by ordering people, Vikarma is the wrong action performed without any following rules of the scriptures and the last one akarma who doing work without attachment of the fruits of actions. In such kind of action the one who performed action for the sake of God the doer is not bound by the merit and the demerit of actions. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, “ O Arjuna surrendering all your works unto Me, with full knowledge of Me, without desire for profit, with no claims to propietership and free from lethargy, fight.”( A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada: Bhagavad Gita, Bhakivedanta Trust, Mumbai, 1986, p.no. 174). This verse indicates that one has to discharge his actions fully with Krishna conscious as if in military discipline. Lord Krishna ordered to Arjuna to fight with his grandfather Visma as a Khetriya when Arjuna denied to fight with the Kauravas. The third kind of akarma action (detachment of action) of Bhagavad Gita has some similarities of Kant's second maxim, that is, the detachment of the fruits of one's action. Both the doctrines indicate to sacrifice everything for the good will without claiming for the fruit of the actions. The former has to sacrifice to Lord Krishna and the later only with good will and the good will is the only virtue. On the other hand, according to Gita, the man who offer the result of action to God automatically becomes sacrifice to mankind. Kant's doctrine of three maxims is also for the mankind. His second and third maxim are deduced from the law of duty .

According to Kant virtue is the supreme good and consists in the good will. Good will is the rational will. By rational will meant the will willing moral law which imposes upon itself. The will is practical reason or reason in action. The moral law is not a general statement left to the whims of individual to be obeyed or disobeyed. It is not influenced by any desire and obeyed from a sense of duty for the sake of duty and not as a means to some end. Duty is always duty and there can be no exception to it. Because the moral command within and hence it is impossible to disobeyed it. According to Kant , freedom of will is the fundamental postulates of morality. The sense of moral obligation or duty implies freedom of will.

According to Gita, the way of knowledge through the way of action (jnana yoga) is the means to attain liberation. So when we do work we should no think for ourselves but for the sake of God, with true spiritual sacrifice.

Kant argued that Supreme Principle of morality is a principle of rationality that we regarded as ‘ Categorical Imperative’. He agreed with many of his predecessors that an analysis of practical reason reveals the requirement that rational agents must conform to instrumental principles. The fundamental principle of morality is the law of an autonomous will.

## **Aims and Method of Moral Philosophy**

The most basic aim of moral Philosophy and the Groundwork in Kant's view is to ‘seek out’ the fundamental principle of a metaphysics of morals, which Kant understands as a system of a priori moral principles that apply the Categorical Imperative to all individuals in all times and cultures. The Ultimate aim to which the Speculation of reason in its transcendental employment is directly concerns in three

objects: freedom of will, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. In respect of all these three aspects the merely speculative interest of reason is very small; and for its sake alone we should hardly labour of transcendental investigation which is a labour of endless challenging with insuperable difficulties. Since whatever discoveries might be made in regard to these matters, we should not be able to use of them in any helpful manner in the study of nature. Kant maintains that since nature gives to us a practical faculty that is to influence the will, then nature use to work purposively in distributing its capacities of reason to produce a will that is good not as a means to other purposes but good in itself for which reason was absolutely necessary. This will need not because of this be the sole and complete good, but it must still be the highest good and the condition of every other even of all demands for happiness.

### **Idea of Moral World**

Kant says that the world is a moral world. The idea of a moral world has therefore objective reality, not as referring to an object of intelligible intuition but as referring to the sensible world, so far as the free will of each being is under moral laws in complete systematic unity itself and with the freedom of every other. Hence everyone regards the moral laws as commands and this moral laws could not be if they did not connect suitable consequences with their rules and thus carry with them premises and treats. It is necessary that the whole course of our life be the subject to moral maxims. It was the moral ideas that gave rise to that concept of the Divine Being which we now hold to be correct because it completely harmonises with the moral principles of reason. But the highest ends are those of morality and these can know only as they given to us by pure reason. The transcendental enlargement of our knowledge as secured through reason, is not to be regarded as the cause but merely as the effect of the practical purposive which pure reason imposes upon us. “Our Present Duty is to obtain insight, its principles and ideas that we may be in a position to determine and estimate its influence and true value”. (H.J.Paton: The Moral Law or Kant’s Groundwork Of Metaphysics Of Morals, Hutchinson University, London, 1958, p.no.314).

### **Main Findings**

- Kantian maxim of action is the basis for actions. This gives a basis for ethics.
- For Kant, there is only one unconditional law i.e. categorical imperative, or moral which is the supreme Good that included the three maxims.
- The moral is universal and is imposed by practical reason and comes from within itself. Everyone should perform any action with good will and this is the virtue. Hence, everyone should obeyed the three maxims.
- The Categorical Imperative is deduced from the moral law and is a way of formulating the criteria by which any action can be test of universally.
- There are three formulas for defining moral actions, such as, universal, impartial and rational.
- Categorical Imperative is a way of motivation of action. There are three maxims for the motivation of actions.

**Conclusion**

When we observe both Gita's moral philosophy with that of Kant's ethics there are some similarities and dissimilarities also. Both the views align in the view of duty's for the sake of duty. Kant gives emphasis to the good will and good will is the only Supreme Good. And Supreme Good is the Virtue. Kant's ethics is legal while Gita's ethic is teleological. If we apply Kant's moral philosophy duty for the sake of duty to our society it may bring a good society without any disturbance but to apply it in this modern age will be a crucial methodology.

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