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Kantian Ethics and Jain Spiritual-Ethical Conducts

Prof. Pratibha J. Mishra

Dean and Head Dept. Of Social Work School of Social Sciences, GuruGhasidas Vishwavidayalaya, Koni Bilaspur (CG)

KEYWORDS :

Introduction

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. Helived a much disciplined life. He is believed to have practiced his routine life more strictly than the watchitself. From waking up in the morning to going to the bed at night, every minute of his day and life wasfixed for specific jobs which he always did without fail. It is said that people used to set right time on theirwatches by observing his movements. Due to his simplicity, stricit discipline in life and solitude lovingnature he was called 'saint of Konigsburg'. He spent his entire life in Konigsburg. There does not appearany philosopher in western thought with a stature comparable with the high stature of Kant. Will Durant, awestern scholar, has rightly remarked that to be a philosopher today one must first become a disciple ofKant.

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

Kant's Analysis of Ethics

The ideal of Kant's ethical thought is to become ethical and to act ethical. The importance ascribedby Kant to sensation and sense perception in his epistemology, has been totally rejected by him in hisanalysis of morality. Reason alone is important for morality and senses have no place in it. His ethics isthus called Rational ethics, Puriom or Regorism. His rationalism is totally opposed to hedonism. Forhedonism 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. Rationalismrejects the claim of desires and advocates the life of pure reason. In rationalism there is no place foremotions, passions, feelings and desires. Rojers has written in his book 'A Short History of Philosophy' thatHume, like hedonists, had considered morality under the law of pleasure and pain; but Kant provided it arational structure. (p. 192)

According to Kant the essential component of human nature is only reason. Sensations dominateonly the animal nature and are inconsistent with human nature. Thus men ought to negate the sensationsand live life of reason. The life of reason alone is truly ethical and of good character. Kant unlikehedonists neither considers consequence of action to be the object of moral judgement nor does heconsider pleasure to be the aim of life. He rather believed that if we are rational, we also shall have goodcharacter 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 imposedby it is also universal. It is self-evident. Reason naturally acquires this moral law. For Kant goodwill aloneis 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 byemotions is also useful and have some worth and thus, such a will is right but still it cannot be goodbecause 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 donein obedience to this inner sense of duty, this moral law that does not came from our personalexperience 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 neithera 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 innomorality. Thus goodwill has been referred to as 'A Copernican revolution' in one of the essays by John R.Sibler. Before Kant it was commonly held that will follows the discipline of feelings and passions, butKant conceived of will as good, free or autonomous, holy and purposeless which is totally uninfluenced byand independent of feelings or passions. Finally according to Kant goodwill is that which follows theprinciple of duty for duty's sake. This means that 'goodwill is a will that wills nothing." Thus it can be saidthe goodwill, in the philosophy of Kant is a position of purposeelssness. There are no external or irrationalpurposes which the goodwill is supposed to serve. It is an imperitive 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 toconsequence; instead duty should be done for duty's sake. If any act (supposed to be a duty) is performedwith 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, buthow many of his acts fall into the category of duty for duty's sake? The acts in human life can becategorized into three types—

1. Many acts are performed with a motive provided by feelings and passions. Man often feelscompelled to perform such acts. To give something to a incapable, hopeless and destitutebegger while traveling is an act prompted by compassion. Such an act is not prompted by senseof 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 arefinancially supported by capitalists. Such capitalists hope to be supported by winningcandidates in their corrupt business. Even if the parents foster their children with the idea thatchildren 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 ofpassions nor the purpose of fulfillment of duty is operational in this category of acts. Kant callsit 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:

"Karmaṇyevādhikārastemāfaleṣukadācana| mākarmafalahetubhūrmātesangoastvakarmaṇi||" (2/47)

i.e. O! Arjuna, you posses only right to act, on the result you have no control. Do your dutyinpassionately 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 Kantholds 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. Gītāpreaches the passion or desire free performance of duty. It preaches that the consequence of action shouldbe left to God. God shall take care of the consequence therefore one must devote all acts to God. WhileKant holds that the action should be done only with the sense of duty. This duty for duty's sake principle isthe 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 categoricalimperative. Hypothetical imperative can further be sub-divided into two; first, problematic imperative andsecond pragmatic imperative.

When any imperative is obeyed for fulfillment of purpose it is called problematic imperative. It isobeyed to achieve an objective. If some desire arises because many or most people so desire then it iscalled pragmatic imperative. To desire what is desired by maximum and to avert what is averted bymaximum is pragmatic imperative. Since both these imperatives involve purpose these are actuallyspeaking 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. Itis 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. Categoral imperative emanates from pure reason. It is not based on feelings or emotions. One has toovercome ones feelings and emotions. One has to overcome ones feelings and emotions to be able toobey the categorical imperative.
2. This imperative upholds the principle of duty for duty's sake and there is no exception or relaxation toit.
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 synthesisof both.
5. Categorical imperative does not consider any external purpose; it only directs the will in the rightdirection. It is non-hypothetical, objectiveless and purposeless imperative. In his famous 'Fundamentalprinciples of the metaphysics of morals', Kant has explained this categorical imperative with fivemaxims 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 universallaw."

By this maxim Kant means that before doing any act one must first judge whether the act can gainuniversal 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 thismaxim he can save himself from doing these evil acts. Thus this maxim provides us a suitable standard ofour daily acts. By judging the merit of act on the basis of this standard, one can obtain true knowledge ofthe goodness or badness of ones 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 orcommunity, just as the work of nature, is not prompted by any kind of attachment or aversion, so shouldour deeds also be done without any discrimination of persons and without any feeling of attachment andaversion. Thus we see that Kant inspires us to act according to nature. This not only increases puretendencies but also helps us perform our duties in a detached and passionless manner. This is theexcellence 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 anend and never as a means only." By this maxim Kant means that humanity is in itself an end. It is never tobe considered a means. In our daily life we come across many examples where persons are used by someother persons as means to fulfillment of later's interests. Some people exploit and dehumanize some otherpersons. 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 itsmaxim."

This maxim means that one is free to act and one ought always to act freely. But any one person'sfreedom is at par with any other person's freedom. Thus, while acting freely one must see that what onefreely 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 willof 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 ofends."

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

Thus we see that these explanatory maxims of the categorical imperative not only have a theoreticalvalue but these are also of high practical significance. These maxims help us take right decision in moralsituations 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 thatthese postulates are necessary for actual moral life. According to him there are three postulates ofmorality—

Freedom of Will

This is the first and the most important of the postulates of morality. According to Kant will is freein true sense only if it can be autonomous in decision making, if it is determined by nothing other thanreason. There is no place for sensations in moral life. Freedom of will is the condition of moral life and forfreedom of will pure rational life is necessary. Feelings and emotions deviate men from moral life andobstruct the freedom of will. According to Kant acts performed due to fear, pressure or sympathy arecondemnable. Even the compassionate

acts of service to critically ill and help to a destitute are notconsidered by him as moral acts. For him freedom of will is a postulate of morality and it should hold in allconditions and circumstances.

Immortality of Soul

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

Thus Kant firmly believes that it is necessary to believe in the existence of life even after death ofbody. 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 ofmoral 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 generalexperiences show that people observing moral life suffer more than others. Kant says that such suffering isa test to which moral beings are put by God. Those who pass the test qualify for eternal happiness. Byobserving grossly immoral beings happy in this world one must not conclude that the moral laws arewrong. The moral order laid by God can never go wrong. If we do not accept the existence of God we shallalso loose faith in moral principles and consequently there shall be no morality. Thus faith in the existenceof 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 asscetism and strict penance; touches the high peak of morality. For Jains, those who have conqueredtheir sensual sensations i.e. those who have full control over their all senses are the ideals. This tells aboutthe principle of purity of conduct as espoused by Jainism. Ācārānga is the most important treatise on Jaindoctrine of ethics.

In Jain religion good ethico-moral conduct is given high importance and it is considered necessaryfor mind's purification. Here too, like other Indian wisdoms, mokṣa is considered the supreme objective. Inthe state of mokṣai.e. liberation, jīvabecomes absolutely free from all kinds of empirical bondages. Thisliberation is possible only by cessation of all those sanskāras(traces of past traditions and actions), whicharise as a result of his karmas and which cause the bondage. That which causes bondage according toJainism is āsravaor influx of the karma pudgala. The processes that help jivaattain liberation are calledsanvara(stoppage of influx) and nirjarā(dissociation of bondage). Sanvaraand nirjarāare necessarysteps to attain liberation. Precisely sanvaraand nirjarāconstitute Jain moral theory. In sanvara, the ninthchapter 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 (parişahas) to be conquered by Jains. In Prśnavyākaraṇa andSthānangasūtra, the five majo vows (mahavrtās) are also incldued in sanvara. In nirjarāthe karmas aredissociated through twelve kinds of meditative austerities (tapa) and as a result of this nirjarāthe purenature of ātmāwhich is infinite knowledge, infinite perception, infinite bliss and infinite power, becomesmanifest. Regarding the influx stopping process of sanvarasTattvārthsūtra says—"saguptisamiti,dharmānuprekşaparişahajayacāritrayaiĥ(9/2)' i.e. three guptis, five samitis, ten dharmas, twelveanuprekşasand twenty two parişahjayaare the five kinds of conduct.

Comparison

The great German philosopher is a rigorist due to belief in categorical moral imperatives and hisname is immortal in the realm of philosophy due to his moral principle of duty for duly's sake. Jain moraltheory enjoys a place of pride in ethical discourse due to its unique sramanācaraand śravakācara. Tapa,upavāsa, vrata, sanyāsaand vairāgyahave made Jain morality very special. The way Kantian ethics is afamous western thought so is Jain moral thought is well known amongst Indian philosophies. If wecompare 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 badnessof action. According to Aristepus and Apiculus and utilitarian like Benthum and Mill; Kant, however,has not considered consequence to be important. He does not judge an act on the criterion ofconsequence it produces. Unlike hedonists, he does not believe that acts producing pleasure are goodand acts producing pain are evil. For Kant it is the will in accordance of which any act is held to begood 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 ajewel shines by its own light."

   According to Jain moral thought also the act is evaluated not on the basis of consequence but on thebasis of intention of the performer A fisherman trying to catch fish may not succeed in catching even asingle fish yet he is more evilsome than a farmer who unintentionally kills many a jiva while ploughingthe field. Thus in both the philosophies, it is the intention or the will and not the consequence of actwhich serves as criterion of evaluation.
2. Both philosophies are similar with reference to purity of means. Both reject the idea that ends justify themeans. Jainism prescribes unconditional non-violence of means. ĀcāryaBhikşu goes to the extent ofnot admitting any exception to the rule of non-violent means. He believes that a blood stained cloth cannever be washed clean by blood. According to him, "Lohīkharadyojopitāmbara, lohīsukemdhovyore|" Thus ācāryaBhikşu recommends samyama and change of attitude as purer means.

   Kant also rejects impure means. He holds that lie, dishonesty and violent means are condemnable. Noone can become perfect by employing impure means and Kant prescribes perfection of everyone. Thuspurity 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 havesacrificed knowledge in favour of faith. Thus unlike other western philosophers, for Kant belief in Godis a matter of faith and not of argument. In Jainism also faith is prior to knowledge and conduct. It iswell known Jain dictum that 'Samyakdarśanajñanacaritrānimokşamārgaĥ.' Ācārya Kunda kunda has also emphasized faith in DarśanaPāhuda.
4. Jainism emphasizes observance of vows. Both śrāvakasand śramaṇashave their respective vows to beadhered to. Though Kant has made no such distinction but his principle of duty is comparable to that ofvow.
5. In both the philosophies any moral law has to be obeyed unconditionally. Jain vratasare to be observedunder all circumstances. The Jain vows are not relative to time and space. Kant also says that anyprinciple 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 basicprinciple. Thus, two philosophies are similar.
7. Another similarity between the two philosophies is that both demand strict adherence to morality. Bothlay 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 alsoand Kant's rejection of role of emotions in ethics has made his ethics psychologically unrealistic. Onthe other hand Jain ethics admits the role of emotions and is thus supported by psychology. Jainconcept of non-violence is impracticable in absence of emotion. Kant by rejecting role of sensation andemotion has induced many contradictions in his moral theory, which however do not find place in Jainethics Kant's ethical principles are incomplete as they do not admit of any role of feelings whereas Jainethics offers a complete practicable theory.
2. Both the moral theories lay more emphasis on individualistic

values than they do on social values. YetJainism recognizes and admits of the role of emotions and thus gives them due place whereas Kantemphasizes only on reason and categorical imperative. The lack of social touch in the philosophy ofKant has been stated by Jamesleth as "Kill your sensibility and you separate yourself from yourfollows."

3. Kant has emphasized only the principle of duty for duty's sake which is not at all concerned with theconsequence of performance of duty or action. For Jainism the supreme end is Moksaor liberation andfor the attainment of this liberation samvara and nirjarāare prescribed under śramaṇācaraand 'life ofpure morality' is stated as an ideal of śravakācara.
4. Though both the philosophies consider moral law to be absoltue and unconditional yet Jainism providesfor the absolution from sin by practicing penance, but there is no such provision in Kartian ethics. Dueto 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 andtrue will whereas for Kant 'A good will is a will which wills nothing'. Thus Kant's view of goodwill isnot as sound as it is in Jain thought.

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