

Introduction

This essay paper entails the perspectives of the great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant on moral ethics, especially about his categorical imperative. In addition, the paper further considers the distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives (183). Categorical imperatives consider ethicality of actions based on the ethical considerations of the intent of the actions. However, hypothetical imperatives consider ethicality on the ethical considerations of the results of actions, rather than the intent of actions themselves. Thus, categorical imperatives are ends in themselves while hypothetical imperatives are a means to the end.

Categorical Imperative Process

When restricted by the universalizability principle, the empirical argument for any rational being about categorical imperative would be that it is solely an act of the maxim that can simultaneously find itself becoming the universal law (Kant 194). In other words, every individual claims that he is the reason behind his actions and that his future actions will be on the same particular general rule. Kant maintained that the expression as mentioned earlier of the moral law has the potential of providing a tangible and empirical approach to specific actions of human beings whose origins have distinct varieties.

It is worth noting that the standpoint of Immanuel Kant on philosophical ethics is the exact opposite to the utilitarianism perspectives of Jeremy Bentham. Kant's categorical imperative borrows from the deontological ethical theory that bases on the idea that there exist certain objective ethical rules in the world, and, therefore, every being has the moral duty to act in ways that comply with the prescribed universal moral laws and principles (Kant 203). The ethical, moral version of Kant pegs on the ideology that all human beings have the fundamental capability to that could see them the reason in a similar manner and at the par. Here, the categorical imperative is more concerned about the intention of every action and on the action itself, than the consequentialist concentration on the utilitarianism perspective.

According to Kant's core critical thinking, it is illogical ever to handle any human being as a means to an end, implying that when dealing with human beings, one should control them as an end. He believed that there is no moral value in an action, not unless, the person with the intention of making such a move is not only free in the mind, but also is also willing to make a choice, what he termed as heteronomy (Kant 207). The question that arises at this point is that how did Kant move from heteronomy to the concept of universalism, an objective moral law that no humanity had the right to break. He thought that every man, if applies reasoning while considering ethical dilemmas, would automatically submit to the categorical imperative. So then, does categorical imperative show us how we should act. How then does it work? It is simple, and one can intuitively master its operations in logic. In order to actualize its operations, one ought to ask the following questions: What would happen if this action were a universal law? Is this universalization possible?

Let us look at these examples: (1) when life sucks, I will commit suicide; whenever someone's life sucks, they will commit suicide. (2) If it is a hassle, I will not develop my talent; whenever it is a hassle, they will not develop their skills, and (3) when someone needs help that I can provide, I will not help the person; whenever someone needs help that they can provide, they will not help the person. In these examples, the decision maker first forms a maxim, he then universalizes the maxim, and when universalization does not contradict the conception of the maxim but contradicts its will, the duty to execute such decisions possesses an imperfect duty (Kant 213). Whenever a person experiences a contradiction of will in his arguments, then, it becomes morally upright to acknowledge that such actions are morally unethical.

For instance, in the case of committing suicide, if all people in the same situation could commit suicide, it means that after sometimes, all people will be dead and no more people will commit suicide anymore (Kant 217). It, therefore, implies that that is not the right decision when life sucks. If it is not logical that when life is a hassle, then nobody will develop their talents, then with time there will be no talented people on earth, and any decision that could lead to the depletion of skills is rather a poor decision that ought to be avoided at all cost. Similarly, regarding giving to charity, one must realize that giving to charity is not a moral necessity, but when one acts in the positive direction, he will receive appreciations.

According to Kant, what determines whether one has acted morally or immorally, are the intent of the act rather than the outcome of his actions (Kant 221). Let consider a murderer is walking in the dark and meets a helpless man walking down the street. The murderer having a knife in his pockets fails to kill the man, not because he considers morally unethical doing so, but because he fears that the man can make noise that would alert the people around and the police, he then leaves him alive. In this case, Kant would consider the intention of the murderer and conclude that that the murderer had acted immorally.

Distinction between Categorical Imperatives and Hypothetical Imperatives

An action is categorical because it is universal and binding for all rational beings, and imperative because we have a duty, moral in that matter to perform it. The formulation of categorical formulations rests on the universalization formulation (Kant 232). Therefore, an action is morally ethical if and only if upon translating into a universal law, it will be possible to derive all imperatives of duty from the same single imperative. In other words, any action whose application do not contradict its conception and contradicts its will cannot become a universal law from which all moral duties can be derived.

While the voice of reason plays a key role in the paradigms of categorical imperatives, the key drivers of hypothetical imperatives are the desires. It is worth to either note that all imperatives command hypothetically or categorically (Kant 234). An imperative is hypothetical if it represents the practical necessity of some possible actions as the means of attaining something that a person needs or may want, while, on the other hand, an imperative is categorical it represents an action that is objectively necessary for itself without considering any other end. The implication is, therefore, that categorical imperatives are themselves an end while hypothetical imperatives are a means to the end. In hypothetical imperatives, one can say that the murderer acted morally by not killing, based on the argument that the end result is that he did not kill the helpless man.

It, therefore, follows that categorical imperatives borrow concepts from the deontological moral theory whose perspectives are derivatives of prescriptive standpoints. It argues that regardless of the nature of outcome of an action, the determination as to whether or not the outcome is morally ethical is a matter of the “integrity” of the process that produced the results, and not on the results themselves (Kant 231). On the other hand, hypothetical imperatives borrow from consequentialist theory of ethical behavior where whether an action was moral or not, is a matter of judgment on the nature of outcome, and not on the integrity of the process, from which the results were obtained.

Conclusion

Categorical imperatives form the basis of determining ethical morality because it is very rigid in its application, thereby considering ethical elements in both intent and the outcome of every action. In addition, it carefully monitors every action and choices that rational agents do make. On the other hand, hypothetical imperatives have potential ethical-moral errors in its application in determining ethicality of various actions taken by rational beings (Kant 234). The reason as to this is that it ignores the crucial ethical components of the intent and the entire process of decision-making and finally makes a moral judgment on the outcomes whose nature of purpose are unknown. Thus, the difference between categorical imperatives and hypothetical imperatives is that the former is deontological while the latter is consequential in nature.

Work Cited

Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Eds. Mary J. Gregor, and Jens Timmermann. Cambridge University Press, 2012.