

KANTIAN ETHICS

Summary of the Topic

- Kantian Ethics is a set of principles that the German philosopher Immanuel Kant created. The theory offers a systematic framework for making ethical decisions and judgments.
- The theory entails the prime concept of categorical imperatives at its core. It provides a universal structure for assessing the morality of actions. This theory is based on the principle of universality.
- Despite its many advantages, critics argue that this theory has several flaws. It lacks flexibility and disregards human emotions and complexities. Moreover, it fails to provide clear guidance on circumstances with moral conflicts.

Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant, (born April 22, 1724) was German philosopher whose comprehensive and systematic work in epistemology (the theory of knowledge), ethics, and aesthetics greatly influenced all subsequent philosophy, especially the various schools of Kantianism and idealism.

Kant was one of the foremost thinkers of the Enlightenment and arguably one of the greatest philosophers of all time. In him were new trends that had begun with the rationalism (stressing reason) of René Descartes and the empiricism (stressing experience) of Francis Bacon. He thus inaugurated a new era in the development of philosophical thought.

Kantian Ethics:

Kantian ethics, created by the renowned German philosopher Immanuel Kant, is a moral philosophy that provides a framework for understanding and evaluating moral actions. This theory suggests that morality is based on rationality and the inherent worth of individuals. Kant asserts that moral actions are guided by reason rather than emotions or desires. He stresses the importance of acting out of a sense of duty rather than pursuing personal interests or passions.

According to Kant, an action's moral worth lies in its intention instead of its consequences. This is known as the principle of deontological ethics. The concept of the categorical imperative forms the theory's base. The categorical imperative is a universal principle that serves as a guide for moral decision-making. These ethics prioritizes rationality, autonomy, and moral duty. Moreover, it offers a systematic approach to moral decision-making and encourages individuals to act out of a sense of responsibility rather than personal desires or consequences.

Categorical Imperatives

The categorical imperative is a prime concept in Kantian ethics introduced by Immanuel Kant. It is a moral principle that serves as a guide for ethical decision-making. It offers a universal framework for evaluating the morality of actions. Kant provided several approaches for the categorical imperative, highlighting a different aspect of moral reasoning. However, the core idea behind all the methods is the principle of universality. According to Kant, moral actions can be universally applied without contradiction.

One of the famous categorical imperative formulations is:

- The “Formula of Universal Law.” It states that individuals should act only according to the maxims they want to make a universal law applicable to all human beings. It implies that before taking action, one must consider whether it would be desirable if everyone acted in the same way in similar circumstances.
- Another formulation is the “Formula of Humanity” or the “End in Itself” principle. It asserts that individuals should always act in a way that respects all human beings’ inherent dignity and worth. They must be treated as ends in themselves and not merely as a means to an end.

The categorical imperative provides a way to evaluate the moral worth of actions based on their underlying principles and intentions instead of focusing solely on consequences. Additionally, it underscores the idea of moral duty and the importance of acting out of a sense of obligation rather than personal desires or interests.

Example:

Suppose John, an employee of Apex Ltd., was angry at his boss David for speaking to him rudely. John considers stealing from the company. Stealing from the firm’s employees, managers, and customers is a significant problem that companies face. Since goods and services have limited supply and universal collective ownership is practically impossible, the concept of private property has been developed.

If a maxim that allowed stealing were universalized, there would be no **personal property**. If everyone were free to take from everyone else, there would be no concept of individual ownership. However, there is the practical necessity for some

form of private ownership. Thus, the theft is considered morally wrong if John steals from David. This is an example of Kantian ethics.