

I. KANT'S CONCEPTION OF MORAL DUTY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF VIETNAMESE YOUNG ADULTS

Nguyen T.T.H.¹, Nguyen T.K.T.²

¹Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen - Lecturer, Associate Professor, candidate of philosophical sciences;

²Nguyen Thi Kim Thanh - Lecturer, PhD student,
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY,

UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES,
VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI,
HANOI, VIETNAM

Abstract: immanuel Kant's critical philosophy aspires to build new fundamental principles for philosophy. He realized that philosophy could not be based on old empiricism or rationalism. It was vital to find a factor capable of determining and guiding people in all activities (scientific cognitive activities and practical ones). Kant called it pure reason. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), he established a supreme place for pure practical reason in the field of ethics, especially moral duty. Accordingly, the moral duty of each subject originated from a priori pure practical reason. The subjective motive was a feeling of reverence for the universal and necessary moral law. Kant's concept of moral obligation provides valuable insights into promoting social responsibility among Vietnamese youth.

Keywords: moral duty, critical philosophy, empiricism, rationalism, Vietnam.

II. КАНТОВСКАЯ КОНЦЕПЦИЯ МОРАЛЬНОГО ДОЛГА И ЕЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ ОТВЕТСТВЕННОСТИ ВЬЕТНАМСКОЙ МОЛОДЕЖИ ВЗРОСЛЫХ

Нгуен Т.Т.Х.¹, Нгуен Т.К.Т.²

¹Нгуен Тхи Тхань Хуен - преподаватель, доцент, кандидат философских наук,

²Нгуен Тхи Ким Тхань - преподаватель, аспирант,
философский факультет,

Университет социальных и гуманитарных наук,
Вьетнамский национальный университет Ханой,
г. Ханой, Вьетнам

Аннотация: критическая философия Иммануила Канта стремится построить новые фундаментальные принципы философии. Он понял, что философия не может основываться на старом эмпиризме или рационализме. Необходимо было найти фактор, способный определять и направлять людей во всех видах деятельности (научно-познавательной и практической). Кант называл это чистым разумом. В «*Основах метафизики морали*» (1785 г.) и «*Критике практического разума*» (1788 г.) он установил высшее место чистого практического разума в области этики, особенно морального долга. Соответственно моральный долг каждого субъекта исходил из априорного чистого практического разума. Субъективным мотивом было чувство благоговения перед всеобщим и необходимым нравственным законом. Концепция морального долга Канта дает ценную информацию о продвижении социальной ответственности среди вьетнамской молодежи.

Ключевые слова: моральный долг, критическая философия, эмпиризм, рационализм, Вьетнам.

Introduction

Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804) is a famous German philosopher. Kant's ethics plays a significant role in the history of Western philosophy. It has both theoretical influence and practical significance for pressing issues in society. Accordingly, it is necessary to build a sense of morality and personal conscience so that people do not dare, cannot, and do not want to do bad deeds. Kant's ethics is duty-based. Duty-based ethics differs from purposive ethics holding that the moral quality of an action is determined by the value of the results associated with it. For Kantian ethics, the moral quality of action must derive from the duty, not the ends pursued or the result achieved of the act. At the same time, morality is built on reason. Many researchers believe that Kant's duty-based ethics is subjective, one-sided, and absolutizes the role of reason, although it always contains profound human values. The research will clarify the above issues and point out the implications of Kant's concept in boosting the social responsibility of Vietnamese youth.

1. Moral duty

First of all, Kant's analysis showed that he did not intend to separate duty from moral duty. Duty and moral duty have in common that they both have a mandatory attribute in practice. The obligation is inevitable and must not be based on routine regulations.

According to Kant, ethics belongs to the rational domain of the metaphysics of morals. Kantian ethics focuses on what "ought to" be done. Therefore, Kantian ethics is duty-based ethics. Morality is not a matter of "should or should not" but "must be like this or that." Ethics is the realm of self-discipline and decision-making according to necessity. Kantian ethics is based on two closely related facts: moral duty and freedom. Besides, Kant began to establish laws valid for all rational beings: A categorical imperative that was absolute and unconditional.

As such, duty is a central concept in Kant's moral philosophy. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant started from the concept of "good will" in itself to introduce the concept of "duty." He began with the question: "What makes the will good?" The answer was obtained from the analysis of moral consciousness in general. He believed that nothing was unconditionally good, except a good will. Human qualities such as intelligence, alertness, judgment, courage, determination, etc. were certainly good and desirable, but they could also turn out to be extremely bad and wicked if a person had a bad will. Power, wealth, fame, health, or happiness often evoked arrogance. Therefore, it was vital to have a good will to shape the principle of human action. The good will was an indispensable condition of morals. "Without the principles of the good will, temperance, self-control, and sobriety can turn out to be exceedingly evil" [2, p. 67].

A good will is good when it does not depend on what it does or brings about but only through its will, that is, good in itself. According to Kant, no matter the circumstances, "good will is like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself. Success or failure does not raise or decrease this value" [2, p. 67].

The concept of duty was developed by Kant from the concept of good will: "The concept [of obligation] implies the notion of good will despite having certain subjective limitations and obstacles" [2, p. 71].

Hence, the concept of duty is a general practice principle because it is a combination of good will in general and practical human conditions. Human here is considered imperfect being, possessing no perfect good will like God or deity. In fact, man is not a perfect being but always has "inclinations" and "desires," so the duty is required to lead man's will to the supreme good via action from duty.

In short, good will is an indispensable factor in building an ethical life. However, mankind does not possess perfect good will. Hence, they need to fulfill their duties to get an honest life like their own moral dignity.

So, what is duty according to Kant's point of view?

To make it clear, in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant offered three theses on duty: Ethical action was an action that came from duty. An action that came from duty had to adhere to the maxims prescribed by the moral law. Duty was the necessity of an action coming from respect for the moral law.

In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant further elaborated on the concept of duty. Accordingly, "an act that is practically and objectively conforming to the law and the exclusion of all prescriptive bases of the trend, is a **duty** (Pflicht) [1, p. 151].

Thus, according to Kant, human action has true moral value only when it is an action made from duty. The act from duty is different from the act suitable for duty. The act from duty is not based on the result of an action. At the same time, it must not be based on preferences or trends. It is based solely on the practical moral law and pure respect for the moral law. This is "the basis for distinguishing the sense of action *suitable for duty* from the sense of action *from duty*, that is, from reverence for the law. The former (validity or legitimacy) is possible even if the tendencies are already the bases for the will. The latter (morals or moral value) is possible only if the action is done based on duty, that is, because of the law" [1, p. 152].

Action from duty are acts of doing what has to be done without taking happiness, pleasure, or satisfaction as motivation or purpose. In other words, ethical behavior is behavior from duty. Behavior from duty is behavior done just because it is the right thing to do. However, the ethical duty, the must-do, is a model of a priori duty. That is, these must-dos are pre-existing, inherent, and created by the practical reason. That is the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is stated as follows: "So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxims" [1, p. 56]. Therefore, a breach of duty due to dissatisfaction with circumstances, the pressure of concerns, and unfulfilled needs is not a breach of duty because it is not a true duty. For Kant, "the objective necessity of an action from a duty is called DUTY" [2, p. 160], and that is the a priori duty that people need to practice.

In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant did not set out to study and systematically present the specific obligations of humans. He argued that duty was a human prerogative. Only when people existed as rational beings subject to universal law in the form of a categorical imperative were they aware of their duty. Thus, a duty is for people, but it is not anthropologically conditioned (like their living conditions, consciousness, and emotions). Kant hoped that duty was a great and sublime title that threw away all attachment to trends because trends often did not have a stable and solid base. They were emotional, changeable, and atypical in creating moral value.

2. The source of moral duty

Kant's commentaries show that moral duty does not come from an objective, mystical force outside. It is rooted in man's purely practical reason and reverence for the moral law based on free will.

For Kant, all moral concepts have a priori origin in reason. So is a moral obligation. It precedes all experience and is "in the idea of a reason that determines the will through a priori causes" [2, p. 106]. The basis of moral duty is universal and necessary moral laws. It cannot be derived from empiricism but must originate from purely practical reason in an a priori way. "It is not permissible to seek the basis of duty in human nature or in the worldly circumstances in which man is placed. On the contrary, it is established only in a priori way in the concepts of pure reason" [2, p. 37]. Hence, in the end, moral duty has an objective basis, that is, practical reason. Reason is the highest intellectual ability and perceives everything to its fullest extent. Human reason is expressed in purely speculative and purely practical reasons. In natural cognition, the speculative reason is hindered by the "thing in itself." In the field of practice, practical reason has supreme power, and it is the sole basis for the promulgation of moral principles, including moral duty: "Pure reason is the practice of itself and gives (to man) a universal law called the moral law" [1, p. 58]. The role of the moral law is that "The maxim of self-love (wisdom) is to advise us, and the law of morality gives us orders. Here, we see a big difference between things we are advised to do and things we are obligated to do" [1, p. 65].

From this point of view, many argued that Kant followed rationalism in ethics. In fact, he attached great importance to reason but did not completely exclude the perception of humans.

Kant's reflections and analyses on moral duty are all within the necessary, universal, and a priori stipulation of purely practical reason. Practical reason is the supreme source of duty and fulfillment of obligations of human beings. Because "practical reason is the ability to choose actions independently of the bases that regulate feelings, instincts, needs, passions, feelings of pleasant and unpleasant" (Immanuel Kant 2007, XVIII), duty-based action should be independent of experience. The duty is not related to any normative basis of the empirical world. Duties are those that conform to universal, necessary, and a priori moral laws. Accordingly, the obligation requires a submission, but not submission to what the behavior will produce but to the moral law.

Kant asserted: "The majesty of duty has nothing to do with the enjoyment of life. It has its own rules and courts" [1, p. 161]. Happiness or precious material possessions were not worthy rewards for effort in performing duty.

He thought there should be an objective principle that was mandatory for the will, called the commandment of reason. The form of commandments was imperatives. Imperatives were just formulas describing the relationship between objective law and human imperfection. They were either hypothetical or categorical (absolute). The hypothetical imperative considered the necessity of taking action as a means to another end. The categorical imperative was not based on any purpose. It concerned only the form and the principle from which it arose. Kant said: "This imperative may be called a moral imperative" [2, p. 121].

The categorical imperative (the absolute imperative) must exist in the form of "forms," i.e., maxims. A maxim is a subjective principle for action and is distinguished from an objective principle, i.e., a law of practice. Only in the form of a maxim can the moral imperative ensure its universality and necessity because it prevents all troubles, feelings, and experiences.

For Kant, ethical behavior must be an act motivated by duty, that is, it is done because it is the right thing to do and told by a priori conscience, not because of inclinations, desires, or interests. His philosophy gives absolute priority to human existence. He upholds the human being as a subject of active action. The mission and task of philosophy are to find a thorough answer to the last important question: What are human beings? According to Kant, human is rational, but he does not dismiss the sensible man. Humans always have reason and emotion. However, emotion cannot control people absolutely but reason. Kant saw human perfection and firmly pursued the idea of imperfection. His ethics did not promote emotionless people who only knew how to practice moral imperatives like a soulless machine.

Firstly, the universal, necessary, and a priori reason cannot be separated from freedom if we consider it a source of moral duty. Moral duty is the active choice of people associated with their inner freedom. According to Kant, the primary meaning of freedom is freedom of the will, freedom from within (not freedom from outside). A duty-based action is an action from a duty. It excludes all compulsions from external conditions (society), even the natural physiological laws of the body (the genome). Action from duty comes from inner will, i.e., the subject itself. The moral law is the law of what to do, but it does not create fear or disgust, but it makes people understand and voluntarily act for their a priori duty. Thus, duty is always associated with freedom. Only when a person acts freely does he have obligations and take responsibility for his actions. Thus, duty must comply with the moral law and contain the free choice of the will. Kant thought that if people had moral capacity, they would have dignity. And "autonomy is the basis of the dignity of human nature" [2, p. 153]. When considering autonomy of the will the supreme principle of morality, as distinguished from externality (heterarchy), Kant stated that people's obedience to moral duty did not come from outside and was coercive but from their will. Seeing autonomy as the basis of human dignity has helped Kant preserve freedom and duty as facts of morality. If human beings do not make their laws, they will become a slave of matter in the sensible world or to God's arbitrary and capricious will.

Secondly, duty-based action is formed from respect for the moral law. Action from duty is the one from respect for the law: "Reverence for the moral law is the sole and unquestionable moral motive, and this sentiment is directed at no other object than this base" [2, p. 148].

According to Kant, respect is admiration and has no transcendental origin. Reverence for moral law is a sentiment created by freedom. It is "a self-acting sentiment that reflects an objective value"[2, p. 98]. Respect for the law is an emotion created from human reason, so action from duty is not an emotion but satisfaction. Kant supposed that the appearance of respect was the effect of the moral law on the subject. These laws are man-made, so this respect results from moral laws. As noted above, pure practical reason produces this special feeling. The objects of respect are the moral laws and the autonomy of reason. This autonomy is the basis of human dignity. We could see that Kant paid homage to the dignity of human beings, rational beings, or personalities.

However, Kant also found that the motive of the human will, as well as that of other created rational beings (free will), could not be anything other than the moral law. Therefore, the objective regulatory basis is always the subjective regulation basis for the behavior; otherwise, the behavior is merely fulfilling the obligation in terms of "words," not "spirit." Thus, the objective basis and the subjective motive of the duty-based action are closely related in terms of moral law. Reason determines the will objectively. However, human beings are sentient beings, so reason must become the subjective motive of the will. The determination of reason to the will is, of course, a priori. Reason is both an objective rule and a subjective one.

In general, Kantian ethics emphasizes the subjective motives of duty-based action of the subject. That motive is free will and a feeling of respect and admiration for the a priori and universal moral law that is "built-in" in human reason. Without moral sentiment, humans are just ethical zombies.

With duty-based ethics, Kant answered the question “What should I do?” while living in a phenomenal world and having to follow deterministic laws and still achieve freedom. Accordingly, I must fulfill my moral duty. A person’s duties are not determined by his life or outside society but by universal reason. Duty is all that conforms to a priori moral law, is dictated by pure reason, and is performed by human beings with unconditional reverence.

3. Some suggestions from Kant’s concept of moral duty to promote social responsibility of Vietnamese youth

In all countries, young people are the force that plays a significant role in constructing and developing the economy and society. Countries have different regulations on youth age, depending on socio-economic and cultural conditions. In Vietnam, Article 1 of the Law on Youths in 2020 stipulates: “Youth are Vietnamese citizens from 16 to 30 years old.” According to the latest data of the National Committee on Youth of Vietnam, currently, our country has more than 22.1 million people of young age, accounting for about 22.5% of the country’s population and nearly 36% of the labor force. Almost 60% of the young live in rural areas, and 98.7% of the working age have a job. It can be said that young people are a prominent force in society, a qualified and healthy force, and the future owners of the country.

In the process of defense and construction of the country, Vietnamese youth are the vanguard force. In the resistance wars against invasion, they are the core force and ready to sacrifice to protect the nation’s independence. They are also the leading force in socio-economic development activities in peacetime, making the country develop more and more, especially in the current international integration context. Most of them have a strong desire to start a business. They actively learn knowledge and skills to improve themselves and contribute the most to the community. It can be affirmed that Vietnamese youth have been performing well in their social responsibilities.

The social responsibility of young people is understood as their duties to society in all aspects and performed on a voluntary and self-conscious basis. It also has a moral meaning, i.e., willingness and self-discipline when performing civic duties. Social responsibility is the responsibility of each individual to the Fatherland, the people, the family, and the community. It is expressed in learning, research, working, law observance, economic development, and environmental protection. If each person is aware and does those things well, he is considered socially responsible and vice versa.

Implementing social responsibility depends on the sense of responsibility of each individual, the mechanisms and policies of the State, and the management agencies of youth. Currently, several young people live with a lack of ideals, reduced confidence, little interest in the country’s situation, and a lack of law observance. They are pragmatic, indifferent, insensitive, and go against national cultural traditions. The education of some young people, especially in rural and ethnic minority areas, is low. Many people lack knowledge and skills in the integration period. The autonomy, creativity, and post-training practice capacity of the young are still weak and have not yet met the requirements of industrialization and modernization. Crime and social evils are increasing and complicated among the young. In this context, it is principal to continue encouraging the social responsibility of Vietnamese youth. The political report at the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam emphasized strengthening education for revolutionary ideals, morality, lifestyle, and culture, raising patriotism and national pride, nurturing ambitions and aspirations, upholding the sense of responsibility towards the country and society, building environment, conditions for learning, working, and entertainment, training for the comprehensive development of intellect, body, and aesthetic values for the young generation.

From Kant’s concept of moral duty, we give some suggestions for promoting social responsibility of Vietnamese young people in the current context as follows:

Firstly, despite emphasizing the a priori of moral laws from the a priori idealist standpoint, Kant did not deny the role of moral education. He pointed out that the task of moral education was not to teach people what to do but to help universal moral imperatives enter the human consciousness. This concept shows us the importance of moral education in promoting the social responsibility of Vietnamese youth. It is necessary to make young people understand that implementing social responsibility is not only the performance of duties but also the expression of moral sense.

Secondly, promoting the young’s social responsibility must be done on an ethical basis, and this affection must be educated and cultivated from an early age. Therefore, it is vital to strengthen the family’s role in educating morals to the young. Family plays a crucial part in nurturing love and a sense of responsibility among members, forming and fostering their sense of responsibility to the community and society. Parents are the first teachers to help their children understand that taking social responsibility is to respect social values and norms. This helps young people avoid formalism in taking social responsibility in the future.

Thirdly, to have respect for the performance of social duty, young people must see freedom in their activities. According to Kant, fulfilling moral duty is closely related to freedom. Freedom is associated with people’s ability to self-mastery and “self-enact moral laws,” that is, with responsibility for themselves and the community. Hence, youth management agencies such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, Viet Nam Youth Federation, Vietnamese Students’ Association, etc., need to change how they operate so that the young can participate in activities voluntarily. Freedom will help them have faith in moral standards, the provisions of the law, as well as the general standards of the community. As a result, they will enhance their social responsibility.

Finally, Kant’s absolute imperative in ethics helps us learn how to behave towards young people, that is, giving them what we want for them. To boost the social responsibility of youth, the State should have policies so that young people can exercise their rights, duties, and capacities. When formulating and implementing policies, the young must be involved, and State agencies shall respect and listen to their aspirations.

These are some suggestions drawn from Kant’s concept of the moral duty to promote Vietnamese youth’s social responsibility in the current market economic development and international integration context.

Conclusion

Kant formulated his philosophy in the context of the inequalities of eighteenth-century Prussian society between the rich and the poor, the privileged and those without the most basic rights. The measures of human value at this time were money, power, social position, etc. Therefore, Kant would build an ethics of the universal, derived from a priori reason, beyond desires, inclinations, and experiences to enable people to live real lives.

The a priori moral law is the objective basis of duty-based action. It instructs people how to act correctly, but it has not created a duty-based action. Kant always upheld the feeling of reverence for the moral law as the subjective motive of each person when choosing to implement the objective moral imperative. Building a perfect, immutable, and absolute moral model of what to do, not denying moral sentiments, and promoting free will, is a valuable ethical gift that Kant prepares for the next generation. Although Kant's duty-based ethics still contain limitations arising from its subjective a priori idealism, Will Durant says: "We must live by the principle of perfection, and we must apply the law of perfection in an imperfect situation. "Never mind your happiness; do your duty" is a difficult ethic to follow, but only in that way can we stop being animals and be gods" [3, p. 264]. Thus, these limitations do not prevent us from getting suggestions to promote the social responsibility of Vietnamese youth.

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