

## A Critical Study on Good Will of Immanuel Kant from Ethical Standpoint

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### Abstract

This paper is an attempt to investigate why Immanuel Kant's good will in deontological view of ethics is not enough in solving social problems.<sup>1</sup> In this paper the descriptive method and the evaluative method will be used.<sup>2</sup> The research finding is that in laying down criteria for instilling morality emphasis on Kant's good will in deontological ethics is not only sufficient but also good consequence in teleological ethics which is needed.<sup>3</sup> The principle from the standpoint of Buddhist ethics, wisdom (*paññā*) is a primary factor and as the moral criterion used in inferring and evaluating the conclusion.<sup>4</sup> This research finding contributes to the realization that to depend on one criterion alone is too one-side and not adequate to solve the social problems in daily life. In such circumstances and conditions, one must distinguish right from wrong; good from bad by taking into account both good will and good consequences in doing an act with wisdom for the stability, peace and harmony of human society.<sup>5</sup>

Key words: (1) Good will (2) Deontology (3) Teleology and (4) Wisdom (*paññā*)

### Introduction

Each person or individual is a member of a social group or society, so it is necessary that each person conducts himself morally for the good of society. Similarly, a society made up of individuals is therefore required to adhere to certain moral principles and maintain laws and rules of conduct based on these principles for the good of each member of society. Human beings are always doing and choosing to seek the good rather than the bad.

Ethics is the fields of philosophy or one of the areas of the philosophy. The English word "Ethics" comes from the Greek word "*ethos*" or "*ta-ethica*" meaning "character". Ethics is systematic study of morals. The term "moral" is derived from the Latin word "*moralis*" which means "customs" or "mores". Ethics and morals are very closely related.

The aim of ethics is to determine the moral conduct of a human being and to find out what is worth striving for, what behavior is good, what gives meaning to life. Ethical judgments involve values and value judgments, as well as the sense of ought and sense of should for the good of humanity.

Ethics also defines ethical terms such as good, evil, justice, right, wrong, duty and responsibility and also lays down rules as to how man ought to behave to live a good life. Morality means principles or standard of behavior based on "right" and "wrong" and that which "ought" to be done or "ought not" to be done and is related to moral obligation, etc. For moral and ethical views tend to develop and expand with changes in culture and society for as long as possible. In Western philosophy, deontology and teleology are concerned with moral concepts that are important in the history of Western ethics and which have led to two basic approaches to morality. They are the consequentialist and non-consequentialist theories. Consequentialist theories are based on consequences and non-consequentialist theories are

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<sup>1</sup> Research problem

<sup>2</sup> Research Methods

<sup>3</sup> Research Finding

<sup>4</sup> Research Principle

<sup>5</sup> Contribution

not based on consequences. Traditionally they have been called the teleological and deontological theories.

Deontological theory is the nature of actions as well as the consequences determines moral worth; must have rules to judge nature of actions. Teleological theory is the only consequence determine moral worth. In order to clarify, it is needed to answer the question; “What is deontology?” “What is teleology?”

This research paper will attempt to solve the problem why Immanuel Kant’s good will in deontological view of ethics is not enough in solving social problems. First of all, it will propound in western philosophy, although a number of philosophers, the most outstanding of whom is German philosophers Immanuel Kant, have propound the view that moral conduct is determined by good will or motive or intent of a certain act and Kant’s good will in deontological ethics is not sufficient in solving moral problems in daily life, need good consequences in teleological ethics must also take into account. To solve this problem the deontological views of ethics by means of descriptive method. And then the resulting principles will be evaluated from the philosophical point of view. The significance of this research is that it makes a careful study of the notion of knowledge (or) wisdom (*Paññā*) as the primary factor in *Theravāda* Buddhism. The contribution of this research paper is to show that, depending on situations and conditions we must distinguish right from wrong, good from bad by taking into account both the good will and the consequences and intention doing an act with wisdom for the stability, peace and harmony of human society.

### **Deontology versus Teleology**

In western philosophy, there have been different theories as to the basic principles that determine ethical conduct. Among them, Deontology and Teleology are concerned with moral concepts that are important in the history of Western ethics. The term ‘deontology’ is from the Greek word ‘deon’ which means duty. So these theories of morality are based on the principle of obligation. Deontological theories maintain that whether an action is right or wrong is for the most part independent of whether its consequences are good or bad. They are sometimes called non-consequentialist theories because they do not take into account the consequences that might follow from actions. Actions are to be judged solely on whether they are right and people solely on whether they are good, based on some other standard or standards of morality. That is, acts or people are to be judged as moral or immoral regardless of the consequences of actions. Kant also accepted the deontological ethics.

On the other hand, the term ‘teleology’ comes from the Greek word ‘telos’ which means end. According to this the end result of the action is the sole determining factor of its morality. Therefore teleological theories are sometime called consequentialist ethical theories. These ethical theories maintain that whether an action is right or wrong is determined by whether its consequences are good or bad. It means that correct moral conduct is determined solely by the beneficial results of an action.

The main theme of this paper is concerned with whether Myanmar ethical conception accepted to deontological view of ethics or teleological view of ethics. So by mixing these moral questions will be arising as the four kinds of moral conduct in Myanmar way of thinking. A human being is both a mental being and physical being; he or she has mind as well as a physical body. The mental state is concerned with good will and evil will whereas the physical state is concerned with good results and evil results in human actions. If these are combined, it will be possible to determine four kinds of moral action.

- (1) An act must be done of out good will, and may result in good consequences.
- (2) Although an act may be done out of good will, it may result in evil consequences.

(3) Although an act is done out of evil will, it may lead to good consequences.

(4) An act is done out of evil will, and the action results in evil consequences.

In the above four, the first and the fourth kinds raise no ethical doubts but the second kind and the third kind can be debated and has been argued about in Western philosophy. Thus the teleological view of ethics emerged for it is chiefly concerned with the consequences of any action. The deontological view of ethics is chiefly concerned with the non-consequences or motives of any action and concerns the second kind of action. They are the great challenge to humanity and have a global problem.

Myanmar ethical views tend to be synthetic rather than analytic. In fact both good will or motive and the good consequences or results, are necessary criteria for morality. They are different aspects of morality that can be synthesized through knowledge and wisdom. So, these two extremes (teleology & deontology) must be unified to solve moral conflicts in daily life.

### **The Formalism in Western Ethics**

In the history of Western philosophy, Kant is one of the most influential German philosophers. He was the chief advocate of formalism in Western ethics. Kant holds that Good will is the only good ‘without qualification’, meaning it is good in itself. For centuries, it has been believed that some actions are right or wrong in themselves; apart from circumstances and that some things are good or bad in themselves. Among primitive peoples the tribal way, or “customary morality”, was absolute and unquestioned.

Later, when codes of law were formed, the same conviction of inherent right or wrong attached itself to the law. Still later, when morality became more inward and reflective it was perhaps reasonable for men to think that right and wrong were parts of the very constitution of certain types of acts or that there was a special moral faculty within man by means of which the moral quality of acts was clearly and immediately recognized. This theory of morality which views some acts as intrinsically right or wrong is called formalism.

For the formalists, the standard of conduct is found in moral rules which are inherently right or wrong quite apart from any particular results which flow from them. Moral values inhere in certain types of acts which follow fixed principles. There are formulas in mathematics: “If equals are added to equals, the results are equal”. There are formal truths in logic: “Of two contradictory propositions, both cannot be true”. The formalist asserts that there are similar formulas in the field of ethics.<sup>6</sup>

Formalists argue that morality is mostly rule oriented in their approach to morality and tend to feel that what is right or wrong, good or bad is absolute and not dependent on the desires or interests of anyone. They seem to feel that morality is based either on some sort of higher reasoning and logic that is incontrovertible and unchanging in nature. As said in the above statement, there are formulas in Mathematic such as “If equal are added to equals, the results are equal”, and indisputable truths in mathematic such as “ $1+1=2$ ”, “No circles and triangles”. Moreover, contradictory propositions such as P and  $\sim P$  cannot be true at the same time. So similarly, in the field of ethics, good results follows from good actions and evil results follow from evil actions. But formalism holds firmly that the rightness or wrongness of an action do not depend on the consequences.

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<sup>6</sup> Harold H. Titus. (1966). *Ethics For Today*. New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing House (PVT) LTD.p.123.

### **Kant's Deontological Ethics**

In Western philosophy, Kant proposed the deontological view of ethics. The word 'deontology' comes from the Greek word "deon" which means duty or obligation. Deontology is the ethical theory which takes duty as the basis of morality; the view that some acts are morally obligatory regardless of their consequences.

So deontology is the study of duty. On Kant's view the sole feature that gives an action moral value is not the outcome that is achieved by the action, but the motive that is behind the action. The formulation of Kant's moral law, the Categorical Imperative is Kant's famous statement of this duty, the Categorical Imperative which can be stated as follows:

A Categorical imperative is a direct command to act. A hypothetical imperative or command depends upon an if and is conditional. The latter is not an expression of the moral law. The categorical imperative is the voice of duty, the sense of 'ought', or the positive command which arises within the morally sensitive person. It is a priori, or derived from the reason itself, and it is applicable to experience everywhere. This voice of duty has reference not to what is but to what ought to be.<sup>7</sup>

Kant attempts to discover the rational principle that would stand as a categorical imperative that is the foundation of all other judgments. The imperative would have to be categorical rather than hypothetical or conditional since true morality should not depend on our individual likes or dislikes or on our abilities and opportunities. For Kant, this kind of command is the categorical Imperative. It is a direct command to act. It is unconditional and Kant considers Categorical imperative alone as truly moral.

Kant's theory is an example of deontological or duty based-ethics. According to Kant it is the will of agents rather than goals achieved that should be taken as the criterion of morality. Human are praised or blamed for actions one reason given as to why duty is regarded as the moral criterion rather than consequences, is that humans cannot control the future and most of the time the results of actions are beyond their control, whereas as good will remains good in itself. This is to say that Kant did not care about the outcomes of action.

### **The Concept of Good Will in Kant's Ethics**

According to Kant, the will is the faculty of action according to a conception of law. When a person act, whether or not achieve what a person intend with his action is often beyond his control, so the morality of actions does not depend upon their outcome. However, what one can control is the will behind the action. That is, a person can will to act according to one law rather than another. Titus explains Kant's concept of motive thus;

For Kant, a good motive or a good will is central. While there are many things which men call will, a good motive is the only thing that has intrinsic value. "Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a Good Will". Other things, like intelligence, courage, and happiness, are usually good, but they may be used so as to promote evil. Intelligence or courage, when used to carry out an evil purpose, may increase the evil.<sup>8</sup>

Goodness is to be found in an inner quality of will, motive, or attitude and not in an outward performance or the consequences of one's act. The true object of reason is to produce a will which is good in itself, since nothing else is always and necessarily good. For example two men may contribute money to some good cause. One man may give the money because he wants some publicity, or because he lacks the courage to say "No" when the appeal is made, or because he does not know what else to do with his money. In the case of the other

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,p.126

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,p.127

man, these considerations do not enter. He is genuinely devoted to the cause of humanity, and ulterior considerations play no part in his generosity. The second man is the generous man, whom we admire and approve. Virtue and vice thus go deeper than the act itself. Disinterested loyalty to the moral demand is the essence of goodness. If a man acts from a good motive or out of loyalty to a sense of duty, then the act is good, even though the intended consequences do not follow.

In another of Kant's carefully studied examples, if a man seeks to aid a sick friend but, because of some unforeseen factor, leaves him in a worse condition, the act is nevertheless praise worthy. On the other hand, if he seeks to injure the sick man but inadvertently helps him, the act is still a vicious act. Kant does not say that results are not to be considered or that they are unimportant. He says that the moral quality of the act is not determined by its results. A good will or good motive is therefore the indispensable condition of the moral life. In order for the motive to be good, a man must act from a sense of duty. If a man performs an act from inclination or desire alone, the act has no intrinsic value. According to Kant, the only thing that is good without qualification is the good will. Courage, health and wealth are good but not intrinsically good such as good will.

A good will or good motive is therefore the indispensable condition of the moral life. In order for the motive to be good, a man must act from a sense of duty. If a man performs an act from inclination or desire alone, the act has no intrinsic value.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, courage and wealth for example can be used for ill purposes. Happiness is not intrinsically good because even being worthy of happiness, Kant said one requires good will. All these therefore are only instrumentally good. Goodness cannot arise from acting on impulse or natural inclination, even if impulse coincides with duty. It can only arise from conceiving of one's actions in a certain way, and acting with purely good intentions.

Good will is used to help focus on right action duties that an individual possesses and applies to that action. It is correlated with respecting the moral law and choosing an action or duty that individuals would also act on. Moreover, it needs to be universally understood and accepted. Good will is a basic motive to do the right thing or to do "one's duty". Kant does not say that results are not to be considered or that they are not important. He says that the moral quality of the act is not determined by its results. A good will, good motive, is therefore the indispensable condition of the moral life.

### **The Virtue of Perfection of Wisdom (*paññā*)**

An analytical study of the ten *pāramis* and the ten great birth stories will be undertaken to demonstrate this point. The purpose of this paper is to show that in Myanmar ethical views based on *Theravāda* Buddhist philosophy as propounded in the ten *pāramis*, knowledge or wisdom is the primary factor in ethics, and that misdeeds are due to delusion and ignorance.

Gotama Buddha was born at Nepal in India six hundred and twenty-three years before Christ (BC-6 century). Gotama was the founder of Buddhism. The word "Buddha" means the "awakened" or "enlightened one" who tried to clarify the various sources of knowledge. So, knowledge is the prime factor in Buddhist thought whether to lead a life of morality in the mundane world or to achieve liberation.

***Essential Themes of Buddhist lectures*** the Venerable Ashin Thittila stated;

The name of the founder of what is known in the West as Buddhism, was Gotama, this being

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,p.128

the name of the clan or family to which he belonged. The word 'Buddha' means 'awakened', or 'enlightened one', and is not a name but a title of honour bestowed upon the sage Gotama who attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree at Buddhagayā in India.<sup>10</sup>

Mingun Sayadaw Vicittasārābhivamsa stated in *The Great Chronicles of Buddha*.

The noble qualities such as generosity, morality, etc., not spoiled by craving, pride or wrong view, but founded on great compassion and wisdom which is skill in seeking merit, are to be named *pārami*<sup>11</sup>

While he was a Bodhisatta, He practiced to attain the highest in ethical, intellectual and spiritual excellence. And then, He strove to gain the ten perfections (ten *pāramis*) required of a Buddha. The ten *pāramis* are perfections namely in charity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, tolerance, truthfulness, resolution, loving kindness and equanimity. *Pārami* is derived from the Pāli word which is a combination of *Parama* and *i*. *Parama* means 'supreme'.

Wisdom and knowledge eliminate ignorance and delusion, for the latter lead living beings to unwholesome behavior. It is the fourth *pārami*.

*Essential Themes of Buddhist lectures* the Venerable Ashin Thittila stated;

The fourth *pārami* is wisdom. It means right understanding of the real nature of the world, seeing things as they are in reality. The Bodhisatta strives to acquire knowledge from every possible source, although never at any time does he show any desire to display his knowledge, nor is he ever ashamed to plead his ignorance.<sup>12</sup>

From among of the ten perfections (ten *pāramis*), the Perfection of Wisdom or *Paññā Pārami* or is also aspired to by ordinary human beings in the mundane world, which is why in today's world knowledge has increased a thousand fold compared to the past. Science and technology has produced many wonders, but humans have not yet been able to achieve wisdom for they have not been able to eliminate greed, hatred and delusions. So there is a difference between having a vast store of knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom unlike knowledge is more profound with greater depth and breadth – it is knowledge with great insight. There have been and there are wise human beings but none who has reached the perfection of a Bodhisatta who aspires to enlightenment as a Buddha.

Thus knowledge is not for advancing worldly progress; it is the very essence of moral conduct in thought, word and deed. The ten perfections can be considered as norms of morality for *Theravāda* Buddhists. Ordinary people cannot be completely perfect, but they must strive to be virtuous to a certain extent for their own good and for the good of others.

### Conclusion and Discussion

In Myanmar way of thinking both criteria are necessary for proper moral conduct whether individual or social. Each person or individual is a member of a social group or society, so it is necessary that each person conducts himself morally for the good of society. Similarly, a society made up of individuals is therefore required to adhere to certain moral principles and maintain laws and rules of conduct based on these principles for the good of each member of society. And that is why moral conduct according to Myanmar thought is

<sup>10</sup> Ashin, Thittila. (1992). *Essential Themes of Buddhist Lecturers*. Yangon: Department of Religious affairs. P.21

<sup>11</sup> Mingun Sayadaw, Vicittasārābhivamsa. (1992). *The Great Chronicles of Buddhas. Part Two*. U Ko Lay. U Tin Lwin (trans.), Yangon: Ti=Ni Press by U Maung Maung Gyi. p.2.

<sup>12</sup> Ashin, Thittila. (1992). Op. Cit., p.69

based on both good will and good results. In our Myanmar Society there is a concept namely “*cetanā*” or “will” or “motive”.

Since all Myanmar believe in the Law of *Kamma*, they accept that the good results come from good motive and bad consequences arise from bad motive. So we should act with good will and principles as well as good consequences. The idea of “good will” in Kantian ethics is closely related with good motive. In Kantian ethics, another notable fact is that the moral principle is not based on results. Kant emphasizes the non-consequential fact. Kant believed that the good will, reason and a sense of duty are important in moral life. We also agree with Kant’s attitude. We accept that the moral man must be non-consequentialist.

There are some weaknesses in Kantian ethics. In Kant’s ethics, the rightness and wrongness of an action does not depend on the consequences of an action because consequentialists are not in the hands of a doer. In spite of the fact that a man aims to obtain good consequences who may fail to obtain them. On the other hand a man will can be controlled by himself. Kant chiefly propounded the principles and means in an act. Moreover, he said that “good will alone is good”. This can be called a strong or exclusive deontological theory.

Nevertheless, it is extreme to say that an act is moral and good only if the intention is good, even though it may lead to evil consequences. The above study of deontological ethics shows that its criterion of duty and obligation is important and necessary, but that, it alone is not enough. Moreover having good will alone is not enough. This good will needs to be applied in practice; one needs to act in accordance with good *cetanā* to benefit oneself as well as other beings in the world.

Myanmar accepts the *Theravāda* Buddhist thought. In Buddhist thought, there are basic moral rules, for example, the five precepts, eight precepts etc. They are meant to improve individual life and the whole world. The distinction between ends and means is very important in the understanding of ethics in Buddhist thought. For the ordinary person ethical conduct may appear to be an end in itself, but for the adept it is a means to the realization of the greater end. So one should always act with good will and principle. Actually human society needs not only good will or motive but also good consequences. These two extremes (deontology & teleology) must be unified to solve moral conflicts in daily life.

Moreover it is only through wisdom and knowledge that one comes to understand the nature of moral criteria and moral conduct itself. For Buddhism stress that it is not enough merely to know but to put into practice the knowledge that ones. It is only through the practice of moral rules that one can lead a life of morality. This can be inferred that one must first know what moral values and criteria are to be able to nature good intentions or good *cetana*, and only when our actions are motivated with such good intentions will the consequences of our actions be fruitful and good. It can be said that knowledge and wisdom are at the core of Buddhist ethics and they determine moral conduct. According to Buddha’s teaching: it is ignorance that motives greed, hatred, anger, jealousy, and other unwholesome, mental, verbal and physical acts. It is said in *The Great Chronicle of Buddha*.

The Bodhisatta should admonish himself thus: ‘Without wisdom, there can be no perfect and pure view; without perfect and pure view, there can be no perfect and pure morality; without perfect and pure morality, there can be no perfect and pure concentration. Without concentration one cannot work out one’s benefit, much less others’.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Mingun Sayadaw, Vicittasārābhivamsa. (1992). *The Great Chronicles of Buddhas. Part Two*. U Ko Lay. U Tin Lwin (trans.), Yangon: Ti=Ni Press by U Maung Maung Gyi. p.2.

In Buddhist thought, there is the Eightfold Noble Path which contains the essence of Buddhist morality. The concept of morality is concerned with right speech, right conduct and right livelihood. The concept of concentration is concerned with right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. And then the concept of wisdom (*Paññā*) is concerned with right view and right resolve. Therefore the unity of these concepts can be found in the basic tenets of Buddhist thought.

So the purpose of this paper is to show that depending on situations and conditions we must distinguish right from wrong, good from bad by taking into account both the consequences and the will and intention in doing an act with knowledge and wisdom. Moral conduct is necessary for the stability, peace and harmony in society.

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