

CHAPTER - III
Synthetic *a Priori*
in
the Second *Critique*

The *Critique of Pure Reason* has two primary segmentations: Transcendental Doctrine of Elements and Transcendental Doctrine of Method. The latter section is comparatively smaller and in Norman Kemp Smith's translation it comes to some 96 pages¹. This segment is divided into four chapters. Out of these four chapters first and second chapters have four and three sections respectively. The last two chapters, i. e. third and fourth, do not have sub-divisions. In the second chapter (entitled 'The Canon of Pure Reason'), Section 2 (under the rubric 'The Ideal of the Highest Good, as a Determining Ground of the Ultimate End of Pure Reason'), Kant sums up his interest in reason in three brief questions:

1. What can I know?
2. What I ought to do?
3. What may I hope?²

Out of these three questions, the second one introduces his task in the field of moral philosophy. The first question, as Kant himself said, is purely speculative, the second one is purely practical and the third one is a combination of speculative and practical. Though the second question falls within the purview of pure reason still it is not a transcendental question, rather a moral issue.³ In view of this Kant did not discuss the issue in the 1st *Critique* and which in turn implied that he had in mind another *Critique* to deal with this issue. In the 1st *Critique* he was certain that there were 'pure moral laws which determine completely *a priori*...what is and is not to be done.'⁴ In saying this Kant talked about laws and not about our empirical motives which usually desire to achieve happiness. As moral laws 'command

in an absolute manner' they are 'therefore in every respect necessary.'⁵ After that Kant justifies his assumption in various ways.

Building the foundation of *a priori* moral law

From the preceding paragraph it becomes evident that Kant did not have iota of doubt about the existence of *a priori* moral laws which contains necessity and other characteristics of this sort of knowledge within its womb. In the trilogy of Kant's ethical philosophy he demonstrated this. *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) constituted the triad. The agenda for his enquiry in this trinity have been formulated in the 1st *Critique* in section 2 under the heading 'The Canon of Pure Reason'. A study of this section makes us feel that Kant is deriving his conclusion from the mere assumption that as a rational being his/her moral behaviour must conform to these *a priori* moral laws. The concept of reason which is at the core has been set vis-à-vis the Humean view of moral philosophy as 'slave of passion'.

Before Kant and also at the time of Kant (i. e. when he was philosophizing) European philosophy had predominance of utilitarianism. It began with Greek philosopher Epicurus and gained maximum prominence in the hand of Jeremy Bentham who was Kant's contemporaneous. Epicurus though emphasized on happiness he was cautious about the nature of happiness and it seems that he advocated qualitative pleasure when he talked about happiness⁶. He defines pleasure very succinctly by saying that it is 'the absence of pain in body and of trouble in the soul.' Explaining it further he says that for leading a life of pleasure we need to lead a life of prudence, honour and justice. From this definition and subsequent explanation given by him it becomes evident that Epicurus denigrates gross hedonism and espouses a refined hedonism. It is not the physical pleasure rather a philosophical pursuit of wisdom which brings meaning to life. Bentham, on the other hand, took a turnaround and advocated quantitative pleasure. In order to quantify pleasure he gave certain criteria. John Stuart Mill, who was

born some two years later of passing away of Kant, took utilitarianism to its pinnacle though of course with a moderation in the sense that he unequivocally championed qualitative pleasure. Whether it is qualitative or quantitative pleasure, the fact is that all of these philosophers before Kant, during Kant and even after Kant remained steadfast to consequentialism. Even in such a time of heyday of consequentialism Kant recorded his discordant note. The foundation that he laid in his 1st *Critique* impelled him to deviate from this line of thinking and advocate a deontological theory. Actually only pursuit of pleasure, consideration of utility, question of prudence do not fit with his scheme. Let us see why it is so.

Heinrich Heine, a German-Jewish poet, found in Kant the shadow of Robespierre, a key figure for bringing down the French Monarchy. Like Robespierre he razed to the ground the then prevalent European philosophy. In this battle the *Critique of Pure Reason* acted like a sword. But the philosophy that he advocated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* seemed to have separated “self from world, freedom from nature, and acting from knowing.”⁷ But human being as free agents not only a piece of the natural phenomenal universe but also of a noumenal world. In the 1st *Critique* he showed that this world is not accessible to theoretical reason, that reigned supreme there. But his theoretical standpoint which treats human life under complete control of natural law and causal enquiry cannot satisfy human being. He relentlessly searches for some other thing and one such aspect is addressed by the Königsberg philosopher in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. He finds in this arena (i. e. practical standpoint) the scope for human freedom. For having this freedom he can act as an intermediary though of course in a limited way in the natural order. This standpoint is as indispensable as the standpoint of theoretical reason. If human being is not free, we cannot make sense of our activities like judging and understanding. In other words our lives become impossible.

Rationality is the turf of a *a priori* moral principle

Right from the time of *Groundwork* Kant's main aim was to find out the foundational principles of morality. He was not interested in determining rightness or wrongness of a particular action or what might be called commonsense ideas concerning morality. Rather he eyed for finding out inevitable demand of a rational being and thought that only *a priori* principles can fulfill that demand. He calls these principles 'pure'⁸ and hence his moral philosophy is therefore known as pure ethics. Pure philosophy, when it is purely formal becomes logic but 'when limited to determinate objects of the understanding'⁹ is metaphysics. Metaphysics, again, has two divisions: metaphysics of nature (e. g. physics, which has a rational aspect in addition to its empirical aspect) and metaphysics of morals. Ethics also has empirical as well as rational strands. The empirical ingredient has been called by Kant 'practical anthropology', while the rational part he termed morals.¹⁰ Unlike science, which usually refrain from separating empirical part from rational part, Kant insists that they be separated as it will facilitate us to know 'how much pure reason can accomplish in each case and from what sources it draws its *a priori* teaching, whether such teaching be conducted by all moralists...or only by some who feel a calling thereto.'¹¹ He painstakingly tried to show us that such a metaphysic of moral is indispensably necessary.

When Kant speaks of *a priori* principles in the present case he actually has in mind reason's capacity to legislate for desires. These *a priori* principles are different from the *a priori* judgements of the 1st *Critique*. The latter sort of *a priori* knowledge makes our knowledge of object possible or they furnish us conditions of the possibility of knowledge. Kant calls them constitutive whereas the former sort of *a priori* principles (i. e. given in the 2nd *Critique*) are 'regulative'. These *a priori* principles do not indicate conditions of the possibility of experience rather they represent those judgements which provide us conditions of the determination what should not be done. Kant calls this 'regulative' use of reason. He writes: "When...the conditions of exercises of our free will are empirical, reason can

have no other than a regulative employment in regard to it, and can serve only to effect unity in empirical laws.”¹² Thus it becomes clear that these principles are determinant.

Another important point we need to note is that both the 1st and 2nd *Critiques* contain one common expression in their title. It is ‘reason’. In spite of this resemblance we find that Kant actually critiques two different sides of the same faculty—reason. The 1st *Critique* excavates theoretical function of reason whereas the 2nd *Critique* explicates practical function of reason. In theoretical function of reason, it organizes the objects given in intuition. Copleston in his *A History of Philosophy* writes: “It applied itself...to a datum given from another source than reason itself. In its practical function, however, reason is the source of its object; it is concerned with moral choice, not with applying categories to the data of sense intuition.”¹³

By now it has become clear that Kant is in search of an *a priori* principle in the realm of ethics. However, one question that strikes us is that how this *a priori* principle becomes synthetic. Kant’s objective is to demonstrate this. Synthetic judgements are of a specific character that we saw in second chapter. Here also in affirming the presence of synthetic *a priori* character of moral principles Kant broke the tradition of thinking that our knowledge will always fit into scheme that his predecessors set, i. e. knowledge will always be either ‘analytic *a priori*’ or ‘synthetic *a posteriori*’ in nature. He shows the synthetic *a priori* character of moral judgement. From this it will be wrong to infer that, for Kant, every single moral judgement is synthetic and *a priori*. Rather, Kant’s claim is that only principles in accordance with which we make moral judgements are synthetic as well as *a priori*. However, the moot question is that whether with the change of context the term ‘synthetic’ changes its meaning while qualifying judgements. To put it in a different way: Do we have synthetic *a priori* judgement in moral experience in the same sense that we have in the context of theoretical experience?

In the 1st *Critique* Kant considered a judgement to be ‘synthetic’ if its negation does not involve a contradiction. It is ‘*a priori*’ if it is not

dependent of sense-experience in any way. Now it is plausible to think that a rational agent's will, what Kant calls categorical imperative, can be denied without involving contradiction. Moreover, such imperative/imperatives is not in any way logically dependent on sense-experience. If this explication of moral principle is accepted, we may presume that we have synthetic *a priori* judgements in both the *Critiques*, by and large, in the same sense.

But there are writers who consider this sort of construal as too simplistic. The meaning of an expression made out of combining some words may not always be logical product of the meanings of words so combined. It may mean something more. The combination 'synthetic *a priori*' exemplifies this. We have seen previously that by this combination in the 1st *Critique* Kant meant principles which form the conditions of the possibility of our knowledge—theoretical knowledge. It is not in this sense that Kant admits synthetic *a priori* knowledge in the 2nd *Critique*.

Let us consider the issue from a different angle. We have seen that one of the characteristics of *a priori* judgement is necessity. We have also seen that the notion of 'necessity' is susceptible to various interpretations. For example, in one sense a proposition is considered to be necessary if denial of it is embroiled in self-contradiction. Analytical propositions are considered to be necessary in this sense. A little ponderance over the issue makes it clear that this sort of necessity is actually a logical necessity. Kantian discovery of synthetic *a priori* judgement in theoretical framework, i. e. of the 1st *Critique*, is not necessary in the aforesaid sense. There necessity consists in being conditions of our experience. Its conditionality is like hypothetical imperative—if something is to be known, then they be known in accordance with some forms of intuition and categories of understanding. This sort of necessity has been designated as 'transcendental necessity.' The general truth 'Every event has a cause' is synthetic *a priori* and hence contains necessity within it only if human being is there, it wants to come into contact with events and also reason has its 'logical use.' William Henry Walsh, a British Philosopher of later half of the last century, thinks that Kant discerned a distinction between a 'logical use' and 'real use'

of reason. He writes in his *Reason and Experience*: “In its ‘logical’ use the function of the intellect is to intellectualize the data of sense.... It is not...a source of knowledge on its own account.... By contrast the ‘real’ use of the intellect is one in which that faculty acts independently of any other. The function of the intellect in this aspect is not the mere conceptualization of the given, but the production of knowledge on its own account’¹⁴ Logical use has a number of steps that Walsh recounts and consider them to be indispensable. Not only Kant claims that intellect has a real use, many other theorists of intellectual intuition talks about this use, according to Walsh.

Kant’s discovery of foundational principle of morality, what he called ‘categorical imperative’, is not necessary in this sense. There is no compelling reason to presume the necessity of moral principle for thinking about matters of fact. Our acquaintance with the world of objects is not affected by our endorsing or championing any particular moral principle rather than another one. This clarification, however, may give rise to interpretation that foundational principle of morality is subjective. Kant definitely did not mean this rather he remained steadfast to the view that Categorical imperative is objective. Though objective, by and large, there is an agreement among scholars that the ‘objectivity’ of moral principles is different from the nature of synthetic *a priori* knowledge of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Stephan Korner who authored an introductory book on Kant, entitled *Kant*, also holds this and says ‘categorical imperative does not, whatever else its function may be, confer objectivity on perceptual judgements. The apprehension of it and the ‘feeling’ of respect for the law which accompanies it may conflict with desires which can be described by perceptual judgements. But it modifies neither these desires nor their description.’¹⁵

By now two things have become clear: One, foundational laws of morality are synthetic and *a priori* and Kant is firm on this point; second, these *a priori* principles (categorical imperative) cannot be subjective. As it is not subjective, it will be objective though the objectivity here is different from objectivity of the 1st *Critique*. These principles furnishes necessary

precondition for the determination of our obligation or duty. It is this principle that gave turn to Kant's ethics to deontological ethics. Actually it provides a rule or standard for judging moral actions. Moral judgements are distinct from theoretical judgements in that it (i. e. latter one) only declares what is the case whereas the former judgments' province is what ought to be done (in other words, it is not occupied with dealing how do men actually behave).

In spite of above difference there are similarities too in moral and theoretical judgements. None of them is a matter of our whims. In both the cases whether we declare something to be the case or determine whether an action to be moral or not we come to the conclusion on the premise of some specific objective laws or principles. It is at this point that Kant's view is at variance with empiricist philosophers. Disagreeing with them Kant says that we cannot consider theoretical judgments merely as association of ideas. This sort of subjective explanation failed to account for much knowledge of ours. Hence knowledge-process needs to follow certain specific objective criterion. Similarly, in the domain of morality our judgement cannot be regarded as mere voicing of our subjective feeling. Morality of action rests on maxims. It is the maxim that determines our action's moral value. Kant deliberately used the words 'command', 'imperative' etc. in order to drive this point home that we are under obligation to act according to the supreme principle of morality. As James W. Ellington writes in his Introduction to Kant's *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*¹⁶: "An imperative is...a directive to act in a certain way—it is not a statement of fact." This obligation or necessitation compels us to do actions for its own sake or merely as a duty. This maxim is necessary for all rational being. The question of achieving end or scope of prudence is irrelevant here. They might have relevance in hypothetical imperatives which are conditional and for Kant they are not appropriate maxims for any rational agent. From this and the formulations of categorical imperative that Kant gave, it becomes clear that there is an element of universality in this law. Writes Kant: "Pure

reason is practical of itself alone and gives (to the human being) a universal law which we call *moral law*.”¹⁷

Besides the above point we also need to bear in mind that ordinary moral judgments made by us in our day to day life have not been considered by Kant as synthetic and *a priori*. An action is endowed with moral worth when as a free being we choose our action and that choice is done on the basis of a maxim. All beings are not capable of following these steps. Only rational beings can do this as it can discover and follow the maxim. Thus we find in Kant’s philosophy the ultimate principle of morality is linked to rationality. It is an important point as it is a sharp deviation from empiricist point of view. It is indeed interesting to find that like German idealist Hegel, for whom all real is rational, our German philosopher, i. e. Kant, almost after five decades, appears to be propagating the view that to be moral is to be rational.

Implications of Kant’s view

Kant’s view as we stated above (i.e. to be moral is to be rational) has a number of implications and Kant also mentioned some of these. His formulation of the maxim or different formulations of the maxim (the categorical imperative) hinted at these associations and we intend to discuss briefly some of these below.

Kant affirms a relation between moral behaviour and rational being. This is a landmark view in the history of philosophy. By holding this view Kant advances the argument that moral worth could not be contingent on any chance factor or could not be determined by any contingent fact of individual human being. The essence of rationality demands some universalizable formulae. This demand of free being is bound to be characteristically absolute and unconditional. It is this compulsion that made Kant to hold a relation between moral behaviour and rationality. Morality must spring from reason and not from any other source like sentiment, passion, feeling and so on.

Kant's hint about the relation between rationality and moral behaviour is vivid in his 2nd *Critique*. There he shows how supreme principle of morality contains universality and necessity in its womb. It is sometimes said that his moral law is a negative test though Kant stated it in positive manner (His formulation is: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"). A negative interpretation of his maxim also contains within it universality.

In order to discover foundational principle of morality Kant proceeds by analysing and explaining commonsense ideas about morality. He, as we have seen in preceding paragraphs, is actually hunting for principle/principles on which our ordinary moral perception is founded. A study of his moral philosophy as a whole gives us the impression that it is not the moral sceptics who were his *purbapaksa*. Principles he is searching for will be acceptable to all normal adult human being. Such principle is the demand of rational agents' rational will. This in turn hinges on a claim that rational agent possess autonomy of will. In the *Groundwork* explaining the autonomy of will he writes: "Autonomy of the will is the property that the will has of being a law to itself..."¹⁸ This shows how the autonomy of the will is inextricably related with the supreme principle of morality. Soon after that he defines the autonomy of will and distinguishes it from the heteronomy of the will.

In the beginning of this chapter we stated three questions that he attempted to answer in his philosophy in general. There we saw that his second question was: What I ought to do? To give a complete answer to this question Kant could not rest on discovering only fundamental or foundational principle of morality. He also had to provide us an account of the nature and scope of our ethical obligations. He did this and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* categorized our elementary moral obligations to ourselves as well as to others.¹⁹ We can trace the effort to answer the above question in the *Metaphysics of Morals* also.

He also delineates the ultimate end of human striving. For example, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he talks about the Highest Good²⁰ and

how is it related to our moral life. He argues there that highest good is complete moral virtue coupled with complete happiness. He also shows that they are not incompatible, rather complete virtue is the condition for deserving complete happiness. Going further he says that virtuous acts do not guarantee wellbeing of the agent and for explanation of moral perfection we need to admit afterlife. This also accounts for his admittance of immortality of soul.

A reading of the *Groundwork* makes it evident that Kant was not interested in popular morality. His title of the chapters of this book also significantly conveys this message. For example, his nomenclatures such as “Transition from the Ordinary Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical”, “Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to a Metaphysics of Morals” make it evident that he shifted his attention from observation of human behaviour and than making generalization from this to an ethical theory which will provide us fundamental principle of morality. This principle will be *a priori* as a non-*a priori* principle will fall short of need. We shall see in the next passage why Kant considered that it must be *a priori*.

Once this fundamental or what Kant called ‘Supreme Principle’ is established then we can judge any particular act drawn from experience and determine whether it conforms to the supreme principle or not.

Rationale for considering the supreme principle of morality as *a priori*

Now let us see why Kant considers the aforesaid principle must be *a priori*. As we have seen in a preceding passage that the title of a section of the *Groundwork* is “Transition from Popular Moral Philosophy to a Metaphysics of Morals”²¹. Now a ‘metaphysics of morals’ that Kant intends to decipher is expected to give an account of the nature and structure of moral reality. This master plan also requires addressing some other basic questions out of which some outstanding questions are: What is duty? What sorts of duties are there? What is the good? What types of goods are there?, and so on. These kinds of questions seem to be metaphysical questions. Now any principle that we employ to produce answers of this type of questions

look to be a principle of metaphysics. And any principle of metaphysics is discovered through *a priori* methods.

Kant like some of his predecessors analysed some of the basic moral concepts. Even in doing so he significantly departed from ordinary line of thinking and talked about some cardinal concepts which were either hitherto unknown and in some cases even if known he interpreted them in such a way that were unknown before. For example, his introduction and interpretation of the concept of 'good will', 'duty', 'obligation' etc. are noteworthy. His interpretation of concept of 'good will', 'duty' etc. shows that only *a priori* method can be useful for digging out these principles. Apprehension of these concepts in Kantian stipulated sense justifies our use of these concepts.

Furthermore, Kant considered human beings as rational agents. This element of rationality calls for conformity to some moral requirements. This demand we do not get from observable world, rather they are command of our rationality. This conformity with the categorical imperative is synthetic and *a priori*. Talking about the autonomy of will (how are they synthetic) Kant says in the *Groundwork*: "That this practical rule is an imperative...cannot be proved by merely analyzing the concepts contained in it, since it is a synthetic proposition. For proof one would have to go beyond cognition of objects to a critical examination of the subject, i. e. go to a critique of pure practical reason...."²² Kant underscores time and again that rational beings' moral requirements demand that fundamental principles of moral philosophy be discovered *a priori*. As these principles are absolutely necessary they cannot be uncovered empirically. In the Preface of the *Groundwork* Kant says "...if a law is to be morally valid, i. e. is to be valid as a ground of obligation, then it must carry with it absolute necessity."²³ He also shows why empirical method is ill-suited for deciphering what we *must* do (not what we actually do). He shows how is empirical method can only tell us about the relative benefit of a moral act in a particular circumstance. However, compliance of this requirement is not absolutely necessary in Kantian sense of duty of abidance. It might be a matter of prudence if additional considerations find it fitting for achieving a particular purpose.

Thus Kant defends his view that if moral philosophy is determined to protect its absolute necessity, and he considered it *sine qua non*, its principles must be tracked down entirely *a priori*. In a sense Kant's claim is not merely 'how rational beings must think, but rather...how rational beings must (ex hypothesi, in virtue of their stipulated rationality) be thought to think.'²⁴ No other means is available to it.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant discovered the jurisdiction of reason. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant seems to remain satisfied with a minimalist interpretation of reason. Onora O'Neill is of the opinion that nonderivative and lawlikeness, which she considers as characteristics of reason, have "considerable implications for the organization of thought and action: in the domain of theory it amounts to the demand that reasons be intelligible to others; in the domain of action it amounts to the requirement that reasons for action be ones that others too could follow."²⁵ Without accepting the minimalist interpretation of reason, it is difficult to make room for many requirements of morality. O'Neill clearly expounding the chief features of reason (which, for her are at least three—negative, nonderivative and lawlike) shows how it is linked to Kant's highest principle of morality, i. e. Categorical Imperative—which calls for action only on dictum 'that can at the same time be willed as universal laws. Here, writes O'Neill, "the supreme principle of practical reason is presented as a *negative* (formal) requirement that is *underivative* because it appeals to no other spurious "authorities" (that would be heteronomy) and demands adherence to *lawlike* maxims (i. e. to maxims that could be adopted by all).²⁶ 'By all' means all rational beings and this lawlikeness imparts it a necessity and universality which makes Kant's principal principle *a priori*. There is a very little chance that this minimalist conception of reason will provide proofs of human freedom, immortality of soul or God's existence. But it will not be a very challenge for Kant. It is so as our interest in soul and God are basically practical²⁷ and "reason may not supply us from the standpoint of its practical interest what it altogether refuses to supply in respect of its speculative interest."²⁸

In spite of vast difference between speculative and moral orders, it is held by scholars that some sort of coordination between these two orders is advocated by Kant. On account of the possibility of this coordination moral intention can fit into the natural world. Kant in the 2nd *Critique* holds that free agents need to work for complete coordination of ‘natural and moral good, of happiness and virtue.’ We can do so if we admit “*endless progress toward the complete conformity*”, conformity between aforesaid two orders. Principles of pure practical reason demand us to assume ‘such a practical progress as the real object of our will.’²⁹ This endless progress is possible, for Kant, only on supposition of our continuance of existence, i. e. immortality of soul.

The division of *Critique of Practical Reason* seems to have been done closely following the division of *Critique of Pure Reason*. It becomes evident from the titles of chapters and divisions of chapter. For example, ‘Doctrine of the elements of pure practical reason’ and ‘Doctrine of the method of pure practical reason’ these very titles are reminiscent of divisions of *Critique of Pure Reason*. In spite of a lot of similarities there we find a difference in two *Critiques*. The 1st *Critique* is discourse and anatomization which pinpoint that many pompous claims of theoretical reasons are really spurious whereas in the 2nd *Critique* we observe Kant’s effort to defend pure practical reason. Here his criticism is directed towards revealing fictitiousness of applied practical reason and showing the capability of a rational being which forms the bedrock of our behaviour which is in higher-level than desire-based practical reasoning. He firmly affirms there that we must cultivate, instead of restraining (and what he thought needed of theoretical reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*), pure practical reason.

Kant informs us that while the first *Critique* suggested that God, freedom, and immortality are unknowable, the second *Critique* will mitigate this claim. Freedom is indeed knowable because it is revealed by God. God and immortality are also knowable, but practical reason now requires belief in these postulates of reason.

Though *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *Critique of Practical Reason* were written within almost three years span of time, Kant considered *Critique* as independent treaties. Here we find an attempt of him to respond to some of the criticisms made against the *Groundwork*. Part I of the *Critique* like previous *Critique* is split into two sections under the caption ‘Analytic’ (the full title being ‘The analytic of pure practical reason’) and ‘Dialectic’ (the full title being ‘Dialectic of pure practical reason’). In the former segment he explores the operations of the faculty of practical reason and in the latter he shows how the faculty may falls into error.

Previously we saw Kant’s view about the supreme principle of morality. He now tries to show that how his predecessors, and mainly those who espoused moral empiricism or those who advocated moral mysticism, were mistaken in their moral epistemology. They went off the right track as they attempted to define morality or define moral terms of the good and on account of this they confounded pleasure or happiness with morality. However, for Kant, the right approach is just exactly the reverse and having identified this he accomplished this task. Anything that is agent-based, that is bound to be contingent and can never be necessary. Hence, this agent/interest-based approach cannot be the foundation of a universal moral law that Kant was searching for. Teleological ethics decided law on the basis of greatest good, greatest number and so on. But as Kant was decoding a nomological law, he was least interested with this approach. He directed his effort to decipher the format of the universal moral law which he called categorical imperative. It is a will (practical will) which acts on the idea of the form of law. It has nothing to do with the sensual world or agent’s contingent desires and hence is entirely derived from the idea of reason. Categorical imperative’s form is important, not its content. Kant also sometimes claims that in this case content is identical to its form.

About the following of this law Kant says that the agent is autonomous whereas about following hypothetical imperatives, which are of course conditional, Kant says that it is up to the agent’s desire or what he calls ‘heteronomus’. In saying the former as autonomous Kant wants to say

that the diktat of reason asks us to follow this. Moral goodness, which for him means to tread on the heels of rules of categorical imperative, is more important than good consequences. Thus he shows that it is our obligation to duty that be given primacy. He also argues that a rational being is aware about the operation of this universal moral law on him and it is this awareness that make us mindful of our freedom of will. This awareness about the moral principle is *a priori*.

In the 1st *Critique* Kant shows the quandaries of pure reason which ultimately creates antinomies. In the Dialectic portion of 2nd *Critique* he again exposed the pitfalls of practical reason. In the realm of experience, i. e. in phenomenal domain, things usually are conditional though the demand of reason is otherwise. This demand can be met only in the noumenal realm. The irony, however, is that when pure reason attempts to step outside its limit, i. e. in the realm of unconditional (or noumenal), it ultimately ends in creation of antinomies of reason. In the Dialectic's sub-division Kant explores such an antinomy of pure practical reason.

Pure reason, in both its theoretical and practical forms, faces a fundamental problem. Most things in the phenomenal realm of experience are conditional (i.e. they depend on something else) but pure reason always seeks for the unconditional. The problem is that the unconditional, according to Kant, is only to be found in the noumenal world. Pure reason, when it attempts to reach beyond its limits into the unconditional realm of the noumenon is bound to fail and the result is the creation of antinomies of reason. Antinomy of pure practical reason has been outlined by Kant in the following way.

The object of pure practical reason is the 'highest good' which, Kant says, "is *a priori* (morally) necessary to produce the highest good through the freedom of the will...."³⁰ Moreover, virtue and happiness belong inextricably in this highest good. "Now this combination" i. e. highest good, virtue and happiness, "is either *analytic* or *synthetic*."³¹ Herein lies the antinomy. For Kant this combination cannot be analytic as happiness and morality are two altogether distinct elements of the highest good. On account

of this it cannot be cognized analytically. Now the only opening before us is to cognize it synthetically. But this option is not also workable. As Kant writes: it “is also impossible because any practical connection of causes and effects in the world, as a result of the determination of the will, does not depend upon the moral dispositions of the will but upon knowledge of the laws of nature and the physical ability to use them for one’s purpose; consequently, no necessary connection of happiness with virtue in the world, adequate to the highest good, can be expected from the most meticulous observance of moral laws.”³² For Kant, the promotion of the highest good is an *a priori* necessary object of our will and is inextricably related with the moral law. Now, if “the highest good is impossible in accordance with practical rules, then the moral law, which commands us to promote it, must be fantastic and directed to empty imaginary ends...”³³ Thus Kant shows that expectation of existence of a highest good open a route to paradox and denying the existence of highest good also leads to conflict.

In the 1st *Critique* Kant resolved the antinomies of pure speculative reason by showing that events and the world where they seem to happen are merely world of appearances. He offers a solution of the antinomy of the pure practical reason. Kant shows that the claim that our attempt for happiness generates a ground for a virtuous disposition is absolutely false whereas the remaining alternative that a virtuous dispositions necessarily engender happiness is though false but not absolutely false. It is conditionally false “only if I assume existence in the sensible world to be the only kind of existence of a rational being”³⁴, writes Kant. Kant’s point is that virtuous dispositions does not necessarily escort us to happiness in this world. He seems to dissociate happiness and this world as we not only exist phenomenally, but we also exist noumenally. If this is admitted, then even if we are not recompensed with happiness for our virtuous act in this world, we will be rewarded in an afterlife. In saying this Kant seems to hypothesize our existence in the noumenal world. Pure practical reason (which is distinct from desire-based practical reason) calls for existence of such postulates as afterlife (i. e. immortality of souls), unification with God, etc. These

affirmations must be necessary not contingent, as not derived from sense-experience. For Kant, the only way to a fallible human will to approximate holy will is to posit a perpetuity or life after death to attain perfection. If we are not ready to assent to this command of pure practical reason we will be forced to dilute the demands of morality. In the 2nd *Critique* he writes “despite the seeming conflict of a practical reason with itself, the highest good is the necessary highest end of a morally determined will and is a true object of that will; for it is practically possible, and the maxims of such a will, which refer to it as regards their matter, have objective reality, which ... threatened by that antinomy in the combination of morality with happiness in accordance with a universal law, but only from a misinterpretation, because the relation between appearances was held to be a relation of things in themselves to those appearances.”³⁵

In the section titled “The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason” Kant says that highest good, objective of moral law, warrants for the highest level of happiness as a reward commensurate with its highest level of virtue. Hence, like immortality of soul we need to posit the existence of God who can organize the cosmos justly by dispensing reward for our virtue. As he says “it must lead to the supposition of the existence of a cause adequate to this effect...”³⁶ In the same section Kant asserts that it is the duty of a rational agent like us to promote the highest good. He shows the moral necessity of presuming the existence of God. The logic for this presumption is this: as it is duty to further the highest good, then there “is in us not merely the warrant but also the necessity, as need is connected with duty, to presuppose the possibility of the highest good, which, since it is possible only under the condition of the existence of God inseparably with duty...”³⁷ Thus Kant finds a moral necessity to presume the existence of God. He further clarifies that this necessity is subjective (a need), not objective (not a duty). For Kant, there cannot be any duty to presume the existence of anything which task is performed by theoretical use of reason.

Having said the above Kant goes to the next part of his 2nd *Critique* which is about nine pages. In this section Kant's discussion centers around to show how the principles of pure practical reason can have bearing on our real lives. This in a sense is moral education which can edify us the ways of acting and living morally. It also is a response to cynics who doubt possibility of this sort of moral life, i. e. acting merely out of an obligation to duty.

A comparison with Indian philosophy

Kant's emphasis on duty-based ethics prompts many contemporary writers to compare his view with the ethics found in the ancient Indian scripture, the *Gīta*. Usually the similarity aspects of these two views, i. e. of our Konigsberg philosopher and of the ethics of the Indian scripture, are often cited. We do not know whether Kant was aware of the duty-rest ancient Indian ethics, though we find him making sporadic references of Hinduism in some of his writings. A reading of both these philosophies makes us feel that similarities between them are overemphasized and difference in them is often overlooked. The term 'duty' of course hold sway in these two works, but overlooking important differences between them might take away the spirit of these two philosophies. We find support of our view in the writings of a number of Indian philosophers. One such stalwart is Dr. S. Radhakrishnan³⁸. However, our above view does not intend to show that there are no similarities at all in these two ethical systems. Some such agreements are in holding the view that desires of senses should not be regarded as supreme and has little value in judging ethicality of actions. The *Katha Upaniṣada* teaches us that we should not draw a parallel between the good or the ethical ideal with pleasure. Similarly, Kant also broke the chain of pleasure-seeking ideal and forcefully advocated duty-based ethics. They are also at one in holding that moral law calls for duty which ultimately is derived from something higher and termed reason. It is this thing what is popularly called in philosophy 'duty for duty's sake'. The Indian system Nyāya also tells us not to remain under the control of *pravrittis* or

tendencies. There is a proneness to, or to use a Kantian term, temptation, act in harmony with this tendency. We need to bring these tendencies under our control and not to submit ourselves to the senses.

Moreover, both the systems admit that to one sphere and seen from one perspective man has freedom and seen from another perspective he is under determinism. Radhakrishnan is of the view Kant's freedom is only a pretence, not real. He says: "Moral relations exist in the phenomenal realm; and there, according to Kant, it is a necessity that rules....Kant's solution seems only another form of determinism. If the empirical chain of antecedents and consequents is but the phenomenon of the noumenal self, it is plain that it cannot be other than it is. On such a theory, moral regeneration and moral progress seem out of place....The freedom which Kant offers us is thus empty and unreal. The solution offered by the Vedanta theory gives us real freedom, freedom even in the phenomenal realm, where we are powerful enough to check our impulses, to resist our passions, and lead a life of satisfied selfhood in which the lower passions are regulated by reason."³⁹

Again both the systems agree that the question of morality arises when there is clash between reason and sense, between duty and inclination. In such a struggle we need to subdue our sense and inclination and educate ourselves the truth that 'morality consists in doing one's duty.' In spite of this commonness, points out Dr. Radhakrishnan, "Kant excludes from moral actions, actions which are consistent with duty, but yet are done from inclination."⁴⁰ Such actions, for Kant, has no intrinsic moral worth and therefore it amounts to disregarding human impulses, inclinations etc. The *Gīta*, on the other hand is not so rigid. It does not tell us to crush our impulses rather it urges us to control them, "to keep them in their proper order, to see that they are always subordinated to and regulated by reason. By a life of reason the *Gīta* ethics does not mean a passionless life, but one in which passion is transcended."⁴¹ Thus we find a fundamental difference between the two systems.

Another point of distinction seems to be that the Indian scripture may not agree with Kant about the demand of human reason. For Kant, morality,

as stipulated by him, is an essential condition for all rational beings. It is an inherent demand of rationality. However, it is doubtful whether the *Gīta* holds such a view. Prima facie ethics of the *Gīta* is for him who aspires to lead an ethical life or rather a spiritual life with a spiritual aim. If this aim is obliterated, is there any compulsion to follow the ethics espoused in the *Gīta* is a moot point.

¹ Kant, I.: *Critique of Pure Reason* (Norman Kemp Smith's translation), Palgrave macmillan, 2007.

² Ibid, p 635.

³ Ibid, p. 636.

⁴ Ibid. p. 636

⁵ Ibid. pp. 636-37.

⁶ Epicurus: 'In Waking or in Dream' (available in *Journey into Philosophy: An Introduction with Classic and Contemporary Readings*; (pp. 645-647), Routledge, pp. 645-647.

⁷ O'Neill, Onora: 'Kant on Reason and Religion' (The Tanner Lecture on Human Values, delivered at Harvard University in 1996) (available in <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/-documents/a-to-z/0/oneill97.pdf>, accessed on 02-02-2019)

⁸ Kant, Immanuel: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. by James W. Ellington), Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, Indianapolis, 1996, p.1.

⁹ Ibid. p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹ Loc cit.

¹² *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 632.

¹³ Copleston, F.: *A History of Philosophy*, Vol.VI, York, 1994, p.308.

¹⁴ Walsh, W. H.: *Reason and Experience*, Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 35.

¹⁵ Korner, Stephen: *Kant*. Penguin Books, 1967, pp. 142-43.

¹⁶ Kant, Immanuel: *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (translated with an Introduction by James W. Ellington), Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, Indianapolis, 1996, p. viii.

¹⁷ *Critique of Practical Reason*,(translated and edited by Mary Gregor), Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.29.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.44.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

²¹ Ibid., second section, p. 19.

²² Ibid., pp. 44-45.

²³ Ibid., p.2.

- ²⁴ Rescher, N.: *Kant and the Reach of Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 191.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 276.
- ²⁶ Ibid, p. 277.
- ²⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 634.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 635.
- ²⁹ *Critique of Practical Reason*, (translated and edited by Mary Gregor), Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 102.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 95.
- ³¹ Ibid., 95.
- ³² Ibid., 95.
- ³³ Ibid, p. 95.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 96.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 96.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 104.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 105.
- ³⁸ Radhakrishnan, S.: ‘The Ethics of the *Bhagavadgīta* and Kant’ published in *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (July, 1911), pp. 465-475. (accessed through <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2376569>).
- ³⁹ Ibid., pp. 469-470.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 474.
- ⁴¹ Loc. cit.
