

ETHICAL ISSUES OF GLOBALIZATION: A KANTIAN SOLUTION

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Abstract

The outline of “Ethical Issues of Globalization: A Kantian Solution” is grounded on the idea that in the contemporary world, the wave of globalization comes with so many benefits. However, its adverse effects cannot be disregarded, especially when it comes to different ethical issues. In the era of globalization, everything is global in character, whether it is culture, religion, ethics, ideology, etc. However, in the case of globalization, the problem is that it is challenging to set an exact ethical or legal framework through which we can reduce its negative impacts. So, an ethical framework is needed for the process of globalization. In the present venture, I intend to give a Kantian solution to some global ethical problems by putting to use Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy. To my mind, Kant’s idea of morality can be effectively utilized to find answers to contemporary ethical issues engendered by the process of globalization.

Keywords: *Globalization, Ethical Problems, Morality, Environmental Issues, Culture, Identity Crisis, Ethical Community*

I. Prelude

In the contemporary world, i.e., the era of globalization, everything is global in character, whether it is religion, ethics, economy, politics, society, or culture. Globalization is the procedure that promotes interaction, integration, interdependence, and interconnectedness among people of different regions, religions, and values worldwide. This process mainly gives prominence to the field of business and technology that connects other regions globally. However, the impacts of this new wave are not only confined to the socio-economical aspect but to the moral, religious and cultural aspects as well. As this era is bringing the entire world to the peak of progress, it also has introduced a new set of problems that mainly threaten the environmental resources and the existence of the human race. Due to this globalization paradigm, the human race is confronted with new problems. Among various issues, the most significant ethical issue is that different values and beliefs observed by human beings are immensely affected by the wave of globalization. People who belong to civil societies struggle to solve these issues set by the world community. Because, unlike other communities, the world community cannot be governed by a single set of policies or rules. Hence, the formation of the global community was not guided by any exact

“policy statement” or ethical code of conduct. This is because the idea of world community and globalization is an abstract method. The process of globalization is working to bring all 195 countries under a single umbrella of globalization. Nevertheless, it is very challenging to establish an ethical foundation for this abstract society. Setting moral or legal guidelines for this worldwide community is difficult because of the diversity of places, cultures, and religions, despite their efforts to strengthen their ties and gain exposure to other countries via trade, tourism and other activities. For instance, we can see that different countries maintain different constitutional rules, and different communities observe different moral or spiritual values. This causes a crisis or contradiction in the beliefs and values of the individuals of the global community.¹ However, if the world community can set a common goal, they can overcome these issues of the contemporary world. In this context, we can use the phrase of *Mahā Upaniṣad*, i.e., *Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam* (वसुधैवकुटुम्बकम्)², which means that “one world, one family” and it mainly emphasizes the collective well-being of the world community, instead of individual interest. This common goal can be achieved through the joint effort of each individual in the cross-border community to promote the idea that they are responsible and obliged to think about common ethical, religious and cultural values for the collective well-being. So, to overcome the issues set by the global community, we need to reflect on shared values or common faith that also help us to understand contemporary society’s ethical, religious and cultural dimensions. By reflecting on this idea, people can set the foundation of their beliefs and values for the emerging internationalised community. Hence, now the question is: How can we execute this plan of forming a common ethical framework to mitigate the negative impacts or ethical problems raised by the method of globalization? However, before delving into the solution to this question, we should first know what ethical issues we face in the contemporary world. For this, in the next section, I will discuss some significant ethical issues created due to globalization.

II. Major ethical concerns generated by globalization

In the 21st century, global proliferation has allowed people to connect with everyone. People can participate and represent themselves in front of the world community through different means such as trading, travelling, and sharing different cultures, ideas, lifestyles, etc. In this era, increased access to technology also helps people to connect with the world by breaking the barrier of space and time. Moreover, there are two benefits of globalization, i.e., free trading policies and easily accessible

¹ The Division of Human Sciences, Philosophy and the Ethics of Science and Technology. (2001). *Ethics for the 21st Century*. Paris: UNESCO Headquarters.

² Moses, J. (2002). *Oneness: Great Principles Shared by All Religions*. New York: Ballantine Books, p. 12.

transportation systems, which ensure the economic advancement of the countries, which is immensely required for maintaining international relationships among developed countries. From the very start of the 21st century, it is evident that this century brings a profound social, cultural, and ideological transformation in the name of globalization. In this era, due to the benison of the internet and social media, people can know and access everything, whether it is about the culture, religion, or ethics of different communities. This easy access to everything fosters cultural diversity, religious tolerance, access to diverse perspectives, and increased ideological and cultural exchange, but these benedictions come with many negative impacts. That means these social, cultural, and ideological changes cause instability in the modern world community.³ Even behind these worldwide progressions, many ethical issues need to be addressed. Now, the question is: What ethical issues is the world confronting due to the wave of globalization? In the following sub-sections, I will discuss some ethical issues engendered by globalization.

1. Value Crisis

In our society, morality and religion are essential factors for the person of the respective community to preserve their values and maintain their status in the global community. Maintaining moral, religious and cultural values is immensely important for a stable modern community. This is because moral and religious principles give people an understanding of society and customs and enable them to navigate different social and cultural phenomena, which is required for the positive development of the modern community. It is also evident that ethics and religion continually shape a person's values and behaviour in the respective community.⁴ When ethical and religious dimensions are affected by different external incentives, they also affect different values observed by the people of the respective community. Similarly, in one vain, in the era of worldwide progress, each society or community observes different cultural, ethical, and religious values, i.e., they possess a separate understanding to assess and monitor their values and customs. However, they have to account for their views to the international community because of their exposure to the world. So, the most problematic issue raised by globalization is the contradiction between local values and global accountability. Conversely, due to modernization and technological advancements, humans are becoming machines, examining and evaluating everything in their lives mechanically. This mechanical thinking of

³ Chernikova, V. (2019). "Interaction Of Religion and Morality in Global World." In D. Karim Sultanovich Bataev, S. Aidievich Gapurov, et al. (Eds.), *Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism*. Vol. 76, European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences, pp. 597-606.

⁴ Ibid., p. 598.

themselves leads them toward the loss of moral values. That means it leads to the loss of humanity.

2. Identity Crisis

In this globalized world, technological advancements allow people to access everything easily. This easy access to everything leads to the possibility of an identity crisis among them. When the members of a specific community are acquainted with other communities' culture, ethics, and religion, they start to compare their culture, ethical and religious practices with other communities. Accordingly, they find contradictions between their and others' cultural, moral and religious conceptions. It is apparent that in many minor or tribal cultures, their moral and spiritual values come under the threat of modernization while they try to adapt themselves to the modern world.⁵ As a result, they strive to uphold their moral, religious, and cultural identities.

3. Erosion of Environmental Values

Undoubtedly, in the 21st century, globalization brings many positive impacts to the socio-economic sphere. However, to survive in the competition for mondial proliferation, the excessive amount of industrial development and transportation causes different environmental issues, such as climate change, deforestation, increased greenhouse gas emissions, and habitat destruction, which are immensely harmful to the environment. These negative impacts on our environment result in nothing but a short-lived and unstable ecosystem.⁶

Hence, this erosion of environmental and human values caused by globalization demands an ethical framework that can provide the solution to reduce these negative impacts. Now, having explained some crucial concerns, in the next section, I propose a solution to implementing the plan of establishing a common ethical framework for collective well-being in the age of globalization.

III. A Kantian Solution for the Ethical Issues Set by the Modern World

In the present venture, it is noteworthy that the wave of globalization does not have a precise ethical code of conduct that may assume accountability for any ethical difficulties. That is why globalization is beyond the scope of human navigation. In the 21st century, it is also evident that humans face different common problems in the world community, such as environmental and human issues caused by scientific and technological developments. However, these common issues can be overcome through

⁵ Islam, Md. S. (2020). "Cultural Identity Crisis in The Age of Globalization and Technology: An Indian Perspective." *Philosophical Papers: Journal of the Department of Philosophy*. Vol. XVI, University of North Bengal Press, p. 74.

⁶ Ehrenfeld, D. (2005). "The Environmental Limits to Globalization." *Conservation Biology*. Vol. 19, Wiley Publication, p. 323, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3591244> (12-12-2023, 03:53 PM).

a standard solution. This stock solution must be based on shared ethical values because traditional solutions cannot solve contemporary problems. However, a moot question in this regard is: Is maintaining a shared moral framework possible? This question arises because there is apparent diversity among ethical values. Different cultures or societies hold different ethical values. That means ethical values vary socially and culturally. Setting a common ethical framework for the world community is problematic in that case. However, a shared moral framework is needed for this century, so we must look for convergence among different values. We can pick common values from other societies or cultures to set a common ethical framework for the global community. Here, to find out the standard solution to various value-oriented problems of the 21st century, I want to go back to the 18th-century philosophy of Immanuel Kant. It is evident that Immanuel Kant was a philosopher whose philosophical ideas were very influential, and the significance of his philosophy was far-reaching. Hence, here I shall find a solution for the worldwide ethical and religious problems through the help of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy.

As I have mentioned, different ethical problems set by the 21st century are common in that everyone struggles with these issues. For this, a standard solution is required. However, before explaining the solution to the common problem, I want to illustrate Kant's conception of morality, which will help us to understand the nature of the solution. Through his entire transcendental critical philosophy, Kant highlights that humans are the only species in this cosmos capable of the extraordinary power of reason. This faculty of Reason governs our knowledge system—i. e., ability to judge actions and behaviour. That means the faculty of Reason possessed by humans helps them to constitute their nature by improving their values. Kant, in his moral philosophy, intends to show us that human beings are not merely rational; instead, they are moral beings, as well. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788)⁷ and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)⁸, Kant explains the moral nature of human beings. There, he is immensely concerned about human actions because this is the parameter through which we can evaluate the moral worth of human beings. According to him, an action can only be moral if it is carried out only out of obligation or duty, without falling under any sense of inclination, desire, happiness, etc. This sense of duty comes from our inner goodwill prescribed by our practical reasoning capacity. Our goodwill stimulates the reverence for moral laws by making us aware of our duties to ourselves and others. But now the question is: What kind of moral laws are prescribed by our

⁷ Gregor, M. (2015). *Immanuel Kant: Critique of Practical Reason*. Cambridge University Press.

⁸ Paton, H. J. (1964). *Immanuel Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Harper & Row Publishers.

reasoning faculty that make human beings worthwhile? In this context, Kant introduces his conception of the Categorical Imperative.

Through the idea of the Categorical Imperative, Kant intends to show us that when humans act solely for the sake of duty, then on that note, their actions will be moral. These duties or obligations must be categorical by nature. That means humans should perform their duties without falling under any conditions. To clarify this conception of Kant, I can give an instance:

- (A) If you want to become a popular political leader, then never commit corruption.
- (B) As a political leader, it is your duty not to commit corruption.

In example (A), it is apparent that the maxim or rule used behind that action is an “if-then” maxim, which means the rule behind this action is not categorical or unconditional. This action will be done out of the hypothetical imperative where someone will act out of the intention of gaining popularity. Kant considers such actions as immoral. However, in example (B), the maxim behind this action is purely categorical because that action can be performed without falling under any condition. This action will be done solely out of the sense of duty and nothing else. Here, Kant highlights his idea of the Categorical Imperative as the “supreme principle” of morality.⁹

Now, I would like to illuminate the three expressions of the idea of the Categorical Imperative, which are immensely important for our present venture. Through his moral philosophy, Kant highlights three expressions of the concept of the Categorical Imperative through which we can evaluate the moral worth of human actions. These expressions are:

- A. “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (4:421).¹⁰
- B. “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (4:429).¹¹
- C. “Act only so that the will could regard itself as at the same time giving universal law through its maxim” (4:434).¹²

⁹ Gregor, M. J. (1996). *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, p. xxiii.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 80.

¹² Ibid., p. 84.

In these expressions mentioned above, the initial expression of the idea of the Categorical Imperative is called the “Formula of Universal Law.” According to this formula, an action will be moral when the agent of that action wishes that action to be a universal law. For instance, if someone steals and wants the stealing to become a universal law. In that case, it will be considered moral, but that is never possible because stealing can never become a universal law, and hence, it can never be a moral act.

Now, the second expression is called the “Formula of Humanity.” By providing this formulation, Kant intends to mean that humans as rational beings are end in themselves. That means humans are the sole creatures of this world who possess a reasoning faculty that prescribes laws for their actions and also to the faculty itself so that it can evaluate and update itself for different situations. Due to this self-legislative feature, Kant considers human beings as an end in themselves. And just because humans are end in themselves, they are valuable. This is the cause humans should respect themselves and each other and never use others or themselves as a tool to achieve a certain objective or for personal advantage. Through this formulation, Kant mainly intends to highlight the idea of reverence for humanity.

Lastly, the third expression is called the “Formula of Autonomy.” Through this formulation, Kant shows us that our reasoning capacity prescribes laws to us. However, ultimately, we have free will through which we can choose the maxims for our actions. That means the choice (which maxim is suitable for our action) is up to us. The rightness and wrongness of every action mainly depended on the doer's intention behind that action. Some actions may be performed under the intention of inclination and some of intention of duty. However, it is entirely up to human beings which one they choose. Due to this, Kant also considers humans to be autonomous beings. Here, through the third formulation, Kant intends to mean that autonomous human beings should consider the maxims repeatedly before willing any law as universal.

After illustrating all these expressions of the “supreme principle,” i.e., the idea of the Categorical Imperative, Kant introduces his conception of the “Kingdom of Ends” or “Ethical Community.” In this context, Kant states that:

“By “kingdom” I mean the orderly community of different rational beings under a common law.”¹³

¹³ Liddell, B. E. A. (1970). Kant on the Foundation of Morality: A Modern Version of the Grundlegung. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, p. 167.

After a detailed explanation of the Kantian concept of morality, it seems a little easier to understand what Kant meant by the terms “Kingdom of Ends” or “Ethical Community.” A kingdom of ends or an ethical community should be a kingdom of rational human beings or the ethical community of rational human beings. However, the question is, is this ethical community accessible to all human beings? In my opinion, the response is no. The next question is: Why is this kingdom or this community not for all human beings? To find the answer to this question, we should first know what Kant meant by the idea of the kingdom of ends or ethical community. In Book III of the *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1792)¹⁴, Kant intends to show us that the primary goal of morality is to attain the highest good. Here, by the term “highest good,” Kant wants to mean the equitable distribution of happiness based on the moral value of human beings. Thus, the degree of happiness is determined by the moral standard. What you do is what you get. So, for the achievement of the highest good, you should be moral at first. However, it is noteworthy that by the term “highest good,” Kant never meant individual happiness; rather, he intended to mean collective happiness. Achieving the highest good is the collective endeavour of the people of the ethical community, i.e., the unity of all rational moral beings striving towards the same goal. That means the highest good cannot be achieved by a single individual working alone to improve themselves morally. Instead, people can accomplish this through the collective endeavour of all human beings by improving their moral worth. This collaborative endeavour for the highest good is necessary to erode the social origins of evil and the formation of the ethical community. Moreover, Kant suggests that this ideal ethical community is governed by a set of public moral laws that are universally valid. In the ethical community, every individual comes under and must obey these universally valid general laws. So, the response to the question mentioned above is clear, i.e., by working collectively to improve the moral worth of each individual of the respective community, they can get access to or can build the ethical community or the “kingdom of ends.”¹⁵ And I think from Kant’s idea of ethical community, we can find a standard remedy to the common problem raised in the modern world.

Now, the question is, how can Kant’s idea of an ethical community help us find the solution to the problems caused by the age of globalization? In this context, we can say that different ethical issues set by the style of internationalization are common by

¹⁴ Pasternack, L. R. (2014). *Kant on Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. London and New York: Routledge Publication.

¹⁵ Lott, M. (2020). “Moral Duties and Divine Commands: Is Kantian Religion Coherent?” *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*. Vol. 37: Issue: 1, pp. 57-76. DOI: 10.37977/faithphil.2020.37.1.3 (10-12-2023, 08:18 PM).

nature, and to overcome these issues, we have to develop a common ethical framework for the age of globalization. As we have seen, Immanuel Kant also suggests a moral community where each individual works collectively for the betterment of themselves and the community. Similarly, in the age of globalization, if different members think about each other's dignity and respect each other's cultural, ethical, and religious values, we believe that through this means, we can overcome these global issues collectively. In a different vein, in the case of environmental problems, we should think about our environment, our home where we live. The progress of the nation and the world is necessary, but not by harming natural resources, destroying our habitats, or destroying humanity. Hence, if we consider Kant's idea of ethical community, we can find that by applying their rational ability, human beings can enhance their moral nature, which helps them find unity among diversity. If we can strengthen our rational ability, then this will allow us to build our moral thinking so that we can feel obligated to ourselves and other organisms around us. Suppose we can enhance our moral nature with a sense of duty or obligation. In that case, it will be easy for us to overcome different ethical issues that emerged through the method of globalization. That means, before changing the world, we have to change ourselves. We have to strengthen our intrinsic rational and moral nature. By doing this, we can constitute that ideal world community with no scope for ethical problems.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, as a concluding remark, it can be said that the wave of globalization may be profitable for some but not for all. Worldwide progression may benefit economically developed countries, information technology (IT) sectors, etc.; however, its negative impacts also affect traditional livelihoods in agriculture, rural-urban inequalities, economic inequality between rich and poor, rural unemployment, and many more. Though the positive impacts of global proliferation are huge, but its detrimental effects cannot be disregarded. As mentioned, the globalizing process lacks a formalized "policy statement" or ethical foundation. But being a part of the global community, it is our duty to set a common ethical framework collaboratively by keeping the dignity of the entire human race and the intrinsic value of our environment in mind. Hence, the moral of the story is: If we go with Kant's view, we can say that development is okay when it is universal, but particular development always comes with negative impacts. For instance, it is evident that globalization is always more beneficial for developed countries rather than developing countries. That means we should set our goal for universal good over particular gains. So, worldwide growth is required to survive in the contemporary world, but we must deal with this progression cautiously. We need to reduce the negative impacts of globalization by setting this common ethical policy. This common ethical framework is nothing but to enhance the sense of unconditional

reverence for morality in each human being in order to handle all the direct and indirect predicaments given by the modern world. This common ethical framework will help us to mitigate the negative impacts of globalization by finding an alternative way. This solution will work effectively solely when we can utilize our reasoning capacity properly and enhance our unconditional moral nature by working on it collectively. After enhancing the sense of obligation in each human being, they will definitely think rationally about every species, which promotes positive universal growth and improvement of the global society. Hence, if we follow this common Kantian ethical framework, we can mitigate different ethical issues caused by globalization. That means we must collectively strengthen our inner moral qualities to implement a common ethical framework like “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,” or collective well-being.