

Finding the Optic for Criticism of Kant's Moral Philosophy

Научный руководитель – Александров Эмиль

Рассказов Виталий Сергеевич

Студент (бакалавр)

Тюменский государственный университет, Школа перспективных исследований, Тюмень,
Россия

E-mail: v.rasskazov.sas@gmail.com

When people talk about the less intuitive and the most provocative ethical theories, it comes as no surprise when Kant suddenly appears in the picture. The feeling of absurdity is due to the universal nature of the conceived theory that follows from the approach of treating morality similar to a geometrical figure, which begets the most problematic part of it, as I will try to show.

The departure point of my criticism of Kant's position is in his definition "of freedom as a property of the will of all rational beings" (Kant, 1996, p.96). This presupposition creates the space for moral obligation for all rational creatures [5]. However, this application does not only affect us with our unclear rational status, but any rational being there could be, premising their possible morality too, and it is precisely what I want to focus on. To summarise, the presupposition gives all the possible rational beings the capacity to make sense of morality and, therefore, at least try to act morally at all [5].

Robert Hanna in *Reason, Freedom and Kant: An Exchange* points to an important question in this regard: "How can my innate capacity for pure reason ever motivate me to do anything, whether the right thing or the wrong thing?" (Hanna, 2007, p.113) [4]. In other words, where does the connection between my capacity to do something and my "doing" lie? Although Hanna writes that the only way to go for Kant should have been grounding the answer to the inclination question in the physical capacities of the beings under question, as we know, Kant chose a different route [4]. The route is to conceive us as having a twofold source of the determination of our wills: either from reason or from sensibility, where one is equated to autonomy and freedom, and the other to slavery and being ultimately irrational, "held captive" by our nature that, elsewhere, he compares to a "crooked timber" (Guyer, 2009, p.113) [3]. Similarly, moral responsibility exhibits the same logic and, thus, has to apply to all possible rational beings in an equal manner [4, 5].

To this end, I propose a thought experiment. Think of the possible rational beings that have the same mental constitution as ours yet have a different physical constitution so that it does not involve emotional reactions to others and their actions. Let us call them 'gumans'. They have the Kantian conception of morality—the capacity to act morally and judge actions as good or bad. However, in contrast to humans, they do not feel the need to say "thank you" when one of the other gumans opens a door for them to enter. For Kant, the motivations for their actions would be completely identical to the way we have them—except for these peculiar cases that I have just described. The reason for that is that their freedom is also presupposed because of their capacity for moral reasoning. Thus, there would be the same two sources to determine their wills: their desires, which are certainly not identical to the reactions to others' actions they lack, or their respect for duty, in which their autonomy is manifested. As for Kant, no difficulty arises with respect to moral responsibility since it is grounded in these creatures' freedom and autonomy that they have in virtue of their rationality.

The question here is: Is it the case that the feelings of, e.g., compassion, people as a norm have are not a necessary component for morality and are wholly tied to irrationality, as Kant

conceived it? The answer should be of a psychological sort to supposedly dispel the delusion of the twofold nature ruling over an individual and inclining to different sides from time to time, upon which the view of morality as a game of absolutes rests.

The answers could be various, so I want to engage with two particular perspectives: Peter Strawson's on why morality can be conceived without an absolute playground of imperatives and Philippa Foot's questioning of irrationality [1, 2]. By engaging with these two authors in conjunction, we can consider the implications of humans' lack of emotional capacity in a moral context.

The first approach comes from the perspective of grounding the imposition of moral responsibility in the morally significant emotional reaction to such an action, considering the commitments and the situation that occurs [1]. What is interesting to my analysis is the statement that the claim implies: that the imposition of moral responsibility does not have freedom or autonomy as a precondition, even in cases where the action in question has pure respect for the law as a motivation. Given all the prerequisites, this helps us to see that the capacity for morality is always underpinned and shaped by the doings of others, so humans would not have had the reach to the concept in question at all.

Foot's approach is good at explaining the grounds for Kant's psychological proposals, where "psychological hedonism" is applied "in respect of all actions except those done for the sake of the moral law" (Foot, 2003, p.165) [2]. Thus, dispelling them is only a way to see "the moral virtue" of a man pursuing an "honest action" for the sake of "his career" and consequently the absence of it in a man acting charitably, not happening to "further the good of others" (Foot, 2003, p.165) [2].

Thus, applying such optics is a way to identify the supposed sources of the absurdity, to provide a diagnosis of the perspective manifested in Kant's moral theory, and, consequently, the identification of such a problem should, as it appears, point towards a cure.

Источники и литература

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