

Kant and business

Business



Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher from the 18th century, who put forward a new theory of morality. He was very much concerned with formulating a criterion of moral obligation that is different from the traditional moral philosophies of his time, which consisted in the development of good character traits that must be possessed by humans. Other moral philosophies rejected by Kant include utilitarianism, which determined morality based on the consequence of their actions (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001).

Kant was able to formulate one supreme principle of morality, which he called the categorical imperative. Kant thus wrote several works to explain his theory of morality, with titles such as “ The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,” “ The Critique of Practical Reason,” and “ The Metaphysics of Morals (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001).” His first work, The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals gave Kant’s clearest explanation of his notion of the categorical imperative.

Kant posited that the categorical imperative is the ultimate moral principle, which means that it could serve as the moral principle to guide to all human actions. Given the huge function of the categorical imperative, Kant provided that it must meet specific criteria. Hence, the categorical imperative should be objective, rational and freely chosen (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001). The categorical imperative was formulated, thus:

“ So act, that the rule on which thou actest would admit of being adopted as a law by all rational beings. (Kant, 1785).”

Kant's moral philosophy is centered on the notion of obligation. This is because Kant believed it is best to have an objective rationale for morality, rather than subjective factors such as pleasure. Moreover, Kant believed that the proper actions of man could be determined through reason alone (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001).

Kant believed that moral obligation would be met when three essential elements are complied with. The first one involves obligation, which serves as the rational consideration for the human will. Second, this obligation shall be expressed in the form of a command that demands a specific course of action. Lastly, Kant demands that

the moral standard should not be based on consequences of the act. (The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001).

closely connected with the categorical imperative is the principle of universalizability, formulated by Kant as follows:

“ So act, that the rule on which thou actest would admit of being adopted as a law by all rational beings (Kant, 1785).”

This principle means that an action can only be considered an ethical imperative if his desired action could be formulated as a general rule for all humans facing similar circumstances in the future (Kant).

Laws that could serve as an example of Kant's ethical philosophy in the business context are laws against jobdiscrimination. There are many laws that prohibit businesses from discriminating employees on account of their age, gender, national origin, color, or religion. Examples of these laws are

the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (The U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission).

All of these laws comply with the criteria set by Kant to his categorical imperative. These laws look at the notion of obligation and make the laws applicable to all people in similar situations. They also serve as definite rule of conduct that are based on reason and not subjective factors like emotions.

References

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The U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. *Federal Laws Prohibiting Job Discrimination Questions And Answers*. Retrieved January 31, 2008, from <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html>