

Kant and mill ethical theories philosophy essay



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John Mill's Utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant's Fundamental Principle of the Metaphysics of Morality present the two philosopher's divergent views on the field of moral philosophy. Mill's Utilitarianism is a more refined ethical theory compared to Kant's breakdown of the metaphysics and its use in proving what is right and what is wrong. Kant employs his corroboration of the subsistence of metaphysics as a discipline in his ethical philosophy. "...if a law is to have moral force, i. e., to be the basis of an obligation, it must carry with it absolute necessity." (Kant preface). This dictum forms the base for Kant's ethical theory. Mill disputes Kant's assertion that our moral force must be driven by an obligation. Instead, Mill argues that humans are driven by a desire to be happy.

Immanuel Kant utilized practical reasoning in his moral theory and suggests that there exists only one moral obligation; categorical imperative'. He states, " Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant second section). This obligation is derived from the notion of duty, and describes the categorical imperatives as the demands of moral decree, and further emphasizes that an individual's behavior ought to live up to the moral laws. These categorical imperatives should be the constitution governing all men; they should be the principles of human life.

Kant argues that all ethical duties inherently expected of humans stem from these categorical imperatives, and it systematically follows that human obligations are put to the test. He goes on to state that employing these imperatives, an individual regarded as rational could be able to achieve

specific ends using certain means. Kant's categorical imperative forms the basis of the deontological ethics. The fundamental principle of the metaphysics of morals postulates that moral law is a base or foundation of reason in itself and it does not have to be influenced by other contingent factors. The biggest flaw of Kant's moral theory is that it fails to mention the role of human desire in the choices individuals make. Kant's theory succeeds only in highlighting moral versus immoral human actions, and specifically makes it easier in making choices that exclusively involves evil versus good. It does not provide insight into what an individual should do in case he or she is faced by two evils, and he or she has to make a choice between the two. For instance, what does one do when faced with the exclusive choices of either lying or killing? Mill's ethical theory offers an insight.

Mill's utilitarian ethical theory provides a rule that illuminates this quandary. Utilitarian theory supports Machiavelli's 'the end justifies the means'; "according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality" (Mill ch II). The greatest happiness principle proposes that humans should inherently choose the option that gives them the most happiness. Mill constructs a world where the happiness of humans is judged. Mill believes that the best happiness is achieved when everyone is happy; the absence of suffering and pain. He believes that true happiness must be moral or intellectual in nature. Physical happiness does not qualify as true happiness. Happiness is greater than feeling of contentment.

Mill talks of different forms of happiness, high and low happiness. When an individual experiences both forms of happiness, he or she develops a preference of one over the other. Mill opines that simple pleasures are

preferred by individuals who have not experienced greater ones.

Nevertheless, he still holds that higher pleasures are really valued. Because happiness predetermines human desires, it is only logical that our actions are determined by will; will to be happy. Mill however posits that the realization of human desire can at times be subjective to the will of an individual or an individual's habit. Mill's utilitarian therefore covers more on human motives as compared to mere indulgence. Every intrinsic human desire is a derivative of elementary human desires to be happy or achieve gratification. Sometimes the pursuit of basic human pleasures may result in pain as a result of sacrifices humans consciously or subliminally make. Such sacrifices for the sake of happiness in the end are fully justified.

A significant difference between Mill and Kant, based on the two writings, is the gradation of ethics. Under Kant's metaphysics of science, an individual can be regarded as morally upright while still being selfish. Under Mill's utilitarian, an individual cannot be morally right if he or she is selfish since Mill's ethical theory requires humans to extend happiness to others. " All honour to those who can abnegate for themselves the personal enjoyment of life, when by such renunciation they contribute worthily to increase the amount of happiness in the world" (Mill ch II). Kant negates the utilitarian idea by stating that there exists a divergence between desires and ethics and that contemplations of human rights temper estimations of cumulative utility. Kant holds that everything in existence possesses a price or a dignity. He adds that whatever possesses a price can be easily replaced by something else of the similar value as it, but whatever has a dignity can never be replaced.

Both philosophers have deep thought on the issue of morality. Mill has his thoughts based on utilitarian grounds, which is an elaborate system that revolves around happiness of people. It hypothesizes that an individual ought to act in a way that ensures the happiness of those around them. Kant has his philosophy of giving morality a good versus bad angle. He, on the other hand, hypothesizes that reasoning and human nature should be the determinants of morality and not human desires. Morality is the root of human interaction and without it, humans would not discern right from wrong. Morality is very important but between the two philosophers John Mill offers an upgraded version of ethical philosophy that is more elaborate and practical.