



Research Paper

Kant's Absolute Good Will And Its Implications For Some Current Ethical Issues Like Suicide, War And Abortion

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ABSTRACT: This work titled: “Kant’s Absolute Good Will and its Implications for some current Ethical Issues like Suicide, War and Abortion” presents a critical consideration and application of Kant’s deontological ethical theory succinctly formulated in his categorical imperative. Kant provided this imperative as a moral standard of determining the morality of an action and the moral worthiness of an agent. This work employing the analytic and critical methods exposed the contents of Kant’s moral theory and tested its viability as a moral standard by applying it to three current ethical issues of suicide, war and abortion. The work gave a critical exposition of the concepts of good will, duty and the categorical imperative. It further presented exhaustive arguments for and against the ethical issues of suicide, war and abortion before applying Kant’s absolute good will as a standard for their justification or condemnation. In the end the work frowned at the rigidity of Kant’s standard for moral judgment which neither made rooms for exceptions nor considered the subjective dimension of every human act. For overlooking the consequences or outcome of one’s action as well as their personal interests, feelings and tendencies, the work considers Kant’s ethical theory as inadequate and recommends that it be combined with other moral standards so as to have a balanced and complete standard of moral judgment.

Keywords: Goodwill, Categorical Imperative, Abortion, Suicide, War.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant is undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in history of Western Philosophy. His contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, logic and aesthetics have had compelling influence on subsequent philosophical teachings. Kant is regarded as the founder of classical German idealism as well as the founder of “critical” or “transcendental” idealism (Frolov 209). Kant is famously known for his reconciliation of Rationalism and Empiricism through synthetic a priori propositions. He rejected the Empiricist extreme position of using only aposteriori reasoning in explaining all we can know and also rejected the Rationalist extreme position with their apriori reasoning. In his critical philosophy as outlined in his Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Kant tried to prove the impossibility of constructing a system of speculative philosophy (metaphysics) without a preliminary study of forms of cognition and the bounds of man’s cognitive abilities. This enterprise led Kant to agnosticism as he taught that the nature of things as they exist of themselves (things in themselves) is in principle inaccessible to human reason. We can only know things as they appear (the phenomena). Supra-sensible realities are inaccessible to human reason. God, the soul, freedom, eternity etc. cannot really be known.

It has been said that Kant’s ethical theory has been as influential as his epistemology and metaphysics, his ethical work, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785) consists of a search for an establishment of the supreme principle of morality based on duty, while his Critique of Practical Reason (1787) is an attempt to unify his account of practical reason with his work in the Critique of Pure Reason.

According to Kant, ethics has no empirical aspect, it is a metaphysical enterprise. He believes that moral knowledge, unlike knowledge of objects which is gotten by sense intuition, is not knowledge of what is but of what ought to be. It is not knowledge of how people actually behave but how people ought to behave. This knowledge is a priori because it does not depend on people’s actual behavior. This separation of ethics from anthropology which has an empirical aspect helped Kant to ground obligation a priori in reason. This also gave Kant’s ethical theory the character of necessity and universality, which would not have been possible if it was grounded empirically. Moral statements like “we ought to keep to our promises” cannot be verified by considering whether people in fact do so or not. The statement is true a priori independently of how people

behave. This mark of a priority is what actually imputes the character of universality and necessity to morality. Hence this ethical theory of obligation is not dependent on any empirical factors such as consequences.

For Kant practical reason or rational will, unlike theoretical reason which is directed towards knowledge, is the reason which is directed towards choice in accordance with moral law and is the fount of the moral law. Thus the ultimate source of the principles of the moral law is grounded strictly in reason without any reference to specifically human conditions. This is where Kant disagreed with earlier moral philosophers like Epicurus, Montaigne, Mandeville and Hutcheson who tend to find the ultimate basis of the moral law in human nature, conditions or situations (Practical 70) as well as later emotive ethical theories.

Kant's ethical theory proclaimed the categorical imperative as the basic law. This demands that man be guided by a rule, which being absolutely independent of moral content of an action could become a universal rule of behavior. Thus by Kant's reasoning, the only feature which gives an action moral worth is not the outcome achieved by such action but the motive behind it. Contrary to the formal nature of the categorical imperative, Kant put forward the principle of the self-value of each individual, which must not be sacrificed even for the good of the society as a whole. It is Kant's view that the only thing that is good without qualification is the good will. With the goodwill behind our actions, one's action must always be good independent of the outcome or consequences.

This work attempts an application of Kant's absolute goodwill to some current ethical issues like suicide, war and abortion. It afterwards draws out the implications of applying the categorical imperatives to these ethical issues. The work begins with a summary of Kant's ethical theory, which briefly treated the absolute good will, duty and the categorical as well as hypothetical imperatives. This is succeeded by a consideration of some ethical issues like suicide, war and abortion in the light of the categorical imperative. The next section surveys the implications of Kant's goodwill for these ethical issues. In the end the work rejected Kant's absolute good will as the only standard of moral evaluation because of its inflexibility in addressing complex moral situations as well as its inadequacy in accommodating the subjective dimension in human behavior.

Kant's Ethical Theory

Kant's ethical theory is called deontological theory. He is the primary proponent of this ethical theory. Deontology is the study of duty. It is Kant's view that what gives an action its moral worth is the motive behind it, and not the consequences or outcome of such action. According to Blocker and Hannaford, it is the view of Kant and other deontological theorists that "the rightness or wrongness of actions depend on certain formal moral criteria such as rules or principles. The rules and principles in turn, are not dependent on empirical considerations of the consequences of obeying such rules and principles" (213).

By removing his ethical theory from every empirical consideration such as consequences, Kant's ethics assumed the character of necessity and universality, which gives it greater force. In his ethical theory, the rightness of actions is grounded a priori in reason. It is specifically a theory of obligation. According to Wilfrid J. Waluchow Kant's ethical theory is known for its very strict deontological character which "stressed the absolute or "exceptionless" nature of moral rules, together with the irrelevance of consequences or feelings in the assessment of moral judgments" (173). As an astute deontologist Kant rejected all forms of consequentialism as well as every kind of non-cognitivism in ethical theory. For him morality is indifferent to the expression of our feelings, it has nothing to do with maximizing consequences like pleasure and happiness, the foundation of morality is reason. Our ability to deliberate on, and act upon, valid reason for action is what makes us moral beings. For proper discernment of the requirements of right reason Kant proposed the Categorical Imperative as the fundamental principle of his moral theory, and the fundamental basis for all of our moral judgments. And at the heart of the categorical imperative is Kant's absolute good will.

The Absolute Goodwill

Kant's ethical theory hangs on the unqualified goodness of the goodwill. For Kant, the will is the faculty of acting according to a conception of law. Kant opened his ethical masterpiece *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* with his famous statement: "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will" (7).

It is Kant's claim that apart from a good will all other things that appear intrinsically good are not unconditionally good; when one considers them closely one discovers they can be misused. According to Kant desirable talents of the mind like courage, intelligence, wit, temperance, resolution, perseverance as well as gifts of fortune like power, riches honour and even health can "become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good". These gifts can be employed for evil purposes just as they can be used for good purposes. Hence they cannot be said to be intrinsically good or good without limitation nor "absolutely good." Kant argues therefore that it is only the goodwill that is good without qualification or unconditionally good despite all encroachments. It is possible that the changes and chances of life may frustrate one's designs and prevent one from achieving his goal; the

goodness of his will still remains. A good will, according to Kant, "is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favor of some inclination and indeed, if you will, of the sum of all inclinations" (Groundwork 8).

Thus it must be understood that the goodwill is not good because of its accomplishments or because it has certain inclination to do what is right or because it acts out of self-love. The goodwill is always good in itself and is always good because of its willing. In the words of H. J. Paton, "The goodness of a good will is not derived from the goodness of the results which it produces. Besides, a good will continues to have its own unique goodness even where, by some misfortune, it is unable to produce the results at which it aims" (17).

Kant denied that goodness could arise from acting on impulse or natural inclination even if these coincide with duty. According to Kant "it is not sufficient to do that which should be morally good that it conform to the law, it must be done for the sake of the law" (Groundwork 11). In his example, a shopkeeper might do what is in accord with duty and not overcharge an inexperienced purchaser, Kant argues that there is a difference between a tradesman who did it for his own selfish end (not to attract the anger of customers) and one who did it from the point of duty and the principle of honesty (Groundwork 11). To elucidate this point Kant presents another example and argues that the kind act of a man who overcomes a natural lack of sympathy for others out of respect for duty has moral worth, whereas the same kind act of another man who naturally takes pleasure in spreading joy does not. According to him, "I assert that in such a case an action of this kind, however it may conform with duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth but is on the same footing with other inclinations, for example, the inclination to honor, which, if it fortunately lights upon what is in fact in the common interest and in conformity with duty and hence honorable, deserves praise and encouragement but not esteem; for the maxim lacks moral content, namely that of doing such actions not from inclination but from duty" (Groundwork 11).

Kant therefore concludes that a person's moral worth cannot be dependent on what nature endowed him with accidentally. What is crucial to morality is that moral agents think about their actions in the right manner. It is Kant's view that moral character is not bestowed on an action by the consequences or effect of the action, actualized or intended, all intended effects according to Kant could be brought about through other causes and would not require the will of a rational being, while the highest and unconditional good can be found only in such a will.

This opinion led Kant to conclude that it is the recognition and appreciation of duty itself that must drive one's actions. It is on this basis that Kant rejected utilitarianism, relativism, and egoism as totally inadequate ethical theories because none of them can make claims to unqualified good, these theories concern themselves with the good or right which are "always qualified by consequences, by inclination or by self love" (Blocker & Hannaford 215). The goodwill is good in itself and of itself. It is an "intrinsic or unqualified good". What makes it good is its very act of willing not its willing of consequences or intended effect. Hence the goodwill is good because it is the will that acts for the sake of duty.

The Concept of Duty in Kant's Ethics

According to Kant "duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law" (Groundwork 13). He insists that an action assumes a moral value only when it is strictly performed for the sake of duty i.e. out of reverence for the moral law. In Kant's deontological theory two kinds of duties are distinguished "acting for the sake of duty" and "acting according to duty." The first entails acting not because of any expected profit, not because of one's feeling or natural inclination towards such action but purely out of reverence for the moral law. An example of this is the above instance of a shopkeeper who did not overcharge an inexperienced purchaser on the basis of duty. It entails respecting the law even if the outcome of such reverence is unfavorable to the moral agent.

On the other hand to act according to duty entails acting out of prudent considerations for one's interest. An example of this is the charitable act of a man who takes pleasure in spreading joy or the heroic action of a man who puts off the fire burning his neighbor's house because his own house will be the next casualty. According to Kant actions in this class and all actions prompted by natural inclinations or emotional feelings have no moral value though they may be good. Hence for any action to have moral worth or value it must be strictly performed for the sake of duty. i.e., out of reverence for the moral law. According to Kant, "to preserve one's life is a duty, and besides everyone has an immediate inclination to do so" (Groundwork 11). From the above two presuppositions I can preserve my life not only as a duty but from the point of view of natural inclination. For Kant the later, though not morally wrong as suicide, has no moral worth. It is neither a moral action nor an immoral action. I must preserve my life out of a sense of moral obligation and not natural inclination. The above position of Kant may give the false impression that the less inclination one has towards his duty, the greater the moral value of his action and that the more we hate doing our duty, provided we overcome our reluctance and do it, the more moral we are. This view is contrary to our conviction that a man in

whom inclination and duty coincide is a better and more morally developed person than a man in whom inclination and desire are at war with his sense of duty. Kant's position must be understood to mean that when a man performs his duty contrary to his inclinations, the moral value of his action is clearer than it would be if he had a natural attraction to the action (Copleston 317). The action of a philanthropist would be proper and lovable and thus possess a moral value if it arises from a natural satisfaction in increasing the happiness of others and not his own.

From the foregoing on Kant's ethical theory we have determined that the will that acts for the sake of duty is the good will. This will is absolute and without qualification; that duty entails acting out of reverence for the law and that law is essentially universal. To translate the above into concrete moral life Kant made a distinction between maxims and principles. For him a principle consists of a fundamental objective moral law founded in the pure practical reason which obliges all purely rational moral agents whereas a maxim is the subjective principle of volition (Groundwork 14). A maxim is a principle on which an agent acts and which determines his decisions. These maxims may or may not be in accord with the objective principles of morality.

The question now arises as to how a maxim which is not in accord with the moral law confers moral worth on actions prompted by it. This question is taken care of by the distinction between empirical or material maxim and a priori or formal maxim. The former refers to desired ends or results i.e. objects of sensuous desire as well as any results to be obtained by action while the latter do not. It is the formal maxim that confers moral value on actions. Hence the action governed by the maxim which obeys the universal moral law out of reverence for the law will have a moral worth.

To translate his abstract concept of acting for the sake of duty into concrete moral life and to distinguish which action is right or wrong, Kant employed his Categorical Imperative introducing the criterion of universality.

The Categorical Imperative

Kant employed the categorical imperative as the yardstick for distinguishing right from wrong actions. This imperative according to Kant is the principle of universalization. According to him, "all imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as means to something else that is willed (or at least which one might possibly will). "The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end" (Groundwork 25).

He distinguishes three kinds of imperatives namely: the problematic hypothetical imperative (also known as imperative of skill or technical hypothetical imperative), the assertoric hypothetical imperative (also called imperative of prudence) and the categorical imperative. The hypothetical imperative is a rule of action for achieving an end. A problematic hypothetical imperative commands an action to be done only as a means to an end. This kind of imperative does not provide an end which everyone desires by nature. It says, for example, "if you want to be a medical doctor, then you must study medicine or if you want to be a successful gambler then you must learn the art." This imperative is not the moral imperative though the pursuit of the end may or may not be compatible with the moral law. Unlike the problematic hypothetical imperative, the assertoric hypothetical imperative commands an action which by nature is a necessary and desirable end, namely, happiness. The assertoric hypothetical imperative does not say, "if you desire happiness do this," it asserts that you desire happiness. Kant has denied all teleological ethics the status of moral imperative, also regards such actions that have happiness as their end as mere hypothetical imperative not qualified to be the moral imperative.

For Kant, the categorical imperative is not conditional. As a moral imperative it is unconditional. Its imperative force is not colored by the conditional "if you want to achieve B, then do X". It simply states, "do X." According to Kant, "there is one imperative that, without being based upon and having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by certain conduct, commands this conduct immediately. This imperative is categorical. It has to do not with the matter of the action and what is to result from it, but with the form and the principle from which the action itself follows; and the essentially good in the action' consists in the disposition, let the result be what it may. This imperative may be called the imperative of morality" (Groundwork 27). Categorical imperatives do not present actions as means to any other end; Actions are presented as objectively necessary in and of themselves (Blocker & Hannaford 216).

According to Perschke, "it is because this imperative is "pure"- free from dependence upon any inclination that it is fit to be a principle commanding our behaviour absolutely, not merely relative to certain desires or impulses given by nature (278). For Kant, "the categorical imperative alone has the tenor of a practical law; all the others can indeed be called principles of the will but not laws... the unconditional command leaves the will no discretion with respect to the opposite, so that it alone brings with it that necessity which we require of a law" (Groundwork 30). Kant says this moral imperative "holds as **anapodictically** practical principle" whereas the hypothetical imperatives hold as "problematically or assertorically practical

principles" (Groundwork 26). This is because it obliges all men without exception. The imperative of the moral law is absolute and categorical and no one can be exempted from it.

Kant insists that there is only one categorical imperative though we have many formulations of it in his works. The categorical imperative is: "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Groundwork 31). Other formulations of the categorical imperative include: "act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature" (Groundwork 31) and "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" (Groundwork 38). Kant's categorical imperative not only contains the character of universality but also the necessity that maxims conform to this law. Like the golden rule it demands that the good will must have as its maxims only that which can be willed to be moral law. According to Copleston, "Kant does not intend to imply that concrete rules of conduct can be deduced from the categorical imperative in the sense in which the conclusions of a syllogism can be deduced from the premises. The imperative serves, not as a premise for deduction by mere analysis, but as a criterion for judging the morality of concrete principles of conduct" (324).

Thus in using the categorical imperative as a yardstick for determining the rightness of actions or the moral worth of an agent one has to employ its principle of universalization. From this we can say that the moral worth of agents and the rightness of actions depend on one and the same criteria, namely the categorical imperative. This categorical imperative is Kant's first principle of morality and this is proved a priori, in a non-empirical manner, by reason. By this categorical imperative we are obliged to act in such a way that the maxim of our actions could be made into universal laws binding to all rational beings. If we can universalize our maxims then our actions are right and we are good, if we cannot universalize them our actions are wrong and we are bad.

Among the many examples given by Kant include that of a man wearied of life on account of series of misfortunes who wants to take his life and that of a man who needs to borrow money and is considering making a false promise to pay it back (Groundwork 31, 32). With regard to the first example employing the categorical imperative, the man's maxim will be: "From self-love I adopt it as a principle to shorten my life when its longer duration is likely to bring more evil than satisfaction." Surely this principle founded on self-love cannot become a universal law of nature because it would be wholly inconsistent with the supreme principle of all duty to preserve one's life, the action is wrong. With regard to the second example, we try to universalize his maxim "when in need of money, borrow it, promising to repay it, even when you don't intend to." Trying to universalize this maxim show that if everybody were to act like this, the institution of promising will seriously be undermined and the issue of trust will no longer be regarded. The action also can't pass the universality test, it is also wrong.

Kant therefore insists that we should do this test to judge the rightness of an action and the moral worthiness of an agent. The categorical imperative should be the standard of measuring the morality of actions. Kant's Categorical Imperative provides us with a moral test of our actions which among other things considers the logical coherence of the universalized maxim upon which one personally proposes to act. Our discussion below will tell us whether this test will successfully account for all of our moral obligations. This reservation is because there may be instances where our undesirable actions may not only be conceivable or possible but actually consistent. For example, there will be nothing inconsistent in the state of affairs in which a man assaults his offensive neighbor who intentionally and repeatedly plays his stereo at ear-piercing level early in the morning. Though this assault is wrong, it is unlike the man who issues false promise.

Hence the implication of Kant's first formulation of the categorical imperative test is that the right test of valid moral judgment does not consist of the consistency or non-contradiction of one's universalized maxim of action but that one cannot morally act on a reason (a maxim) unless he is prepared to accept that everyone else in exactly his situation should act on that same maxim also. If one is not willing to accept this, then he is bound by logical consistency to abandon his proposed line of action. Kant's theory approximates the universally endorsed rule of moral conduct known as the Golden Rule which states that one should do to others what one will like done unto him (Mt. 7: 12).

According to Wilfrid J. Waluchowwe may view Kant as requiring that a moral agent always ask the following three questions when attempting to determine what she ought to do: "1. Could I consistently will, as a universal law, the personal maxim upon which I propose to act? 2. Would my action degrade other rational agents or myself by treating them (or myself) as a mere means? 3. Would my action violate the autonomy of some rational agent, possibly myself? Should any of these three questions yield the wrong answer, my moral obligation is to refrain from acting on my personal maxim" (184-185). We will now use the categorical imperative in considering the morality of some ethical issues like suicide, war, abortion.

Suicide

Suicide is the direct taking of one's life carried out on one's own authority. Suicide can be direct or indirect, committed positively or negatively. Direct suicide is a voluntary taking of one's own life either as an end (e.g. euthanasia) or as a means to an end (e.g. hunger strike unto death). Some examples of direct suicide include: hanging of oneself, shooting oneself, taking poison etc. Indirect suicide on the other hand is an act of taking one's own life that is indirectly voluntary. In this case death is neither intended as an end nor a means to an end but only allowed as an unavoidable consequence proceeding from one's voluntary action which has at least two foreseen effects. For Fagothey, indirect suicide consists of "the deliberate exposure of one's life to serious danger" (210). Hence, indirect suicide occurs when one "places a cause whose proper effect is not death but something else although it is foreseen that death will follow from that cause" (Pazhayampallil 1035). In this case death is not intended but only permitted. Here one intends something which may be licit and which he believes to be of a higher order to physical life. Examples include: a pilot during war who dashes his plane loaded with bombs into an enemy warship or in the case of a shipwreck if a lifeboat is overcrowded, passengers may voluntarily jump into the sea, even though there is no possibility of being saved (Grisez & Boyle, 108).

For it to be suicide either directly or indirectly it must be carried out by one's own authority and not be commanded by an external body. Outside God who has authority over human life, the state also has such authority exercised through capital punishment. But if a state, exercising this right, orders a man to kill himself through any means as in the case of Socrates, such direct killing of oneself is not regarded as suicide.

Suicide is committed positively when one executes a death-dealing act upon oneself such as drinking a very potent poison, shooting of oneself on the head, throwing oneself off from a high-rise building, etc. It is committed negatively when one voluntarily ignores the necessary measures of preserving one's life. It constitutes suicide when one suffering from a serious illness refuses to take his medication, when one refuses to step out of the way of a moving train, etc. It must be noted that heroes and martyrs are not considered suicides for they preferred death to life on patriotic grounds and in matters of obeying the dictates of a right conscience.

Some Reasons for Suicide and Arguments in support of it.

Among the many reasons put forward for suicide are: one's inability to cope with problems, social isolation, the feeling of being useless and being a burden to others, a hopelessly protracted and painful illness and despair. Many hallucinated individuals, in the state of feverish delirium, amnesia etc. kill themselves to escape the frightening hallucinations. Some persons suffering from obsessions kill themselves under a severe stress of anxiety brought on by a crisis of some sort. Drug addiction can also lead to suicide. Other causes of suicide include: intoxication, boredom in life, disappointment in love, death of a loved one, financial setback, and humiliation. For religious people the most important cause of suicide is lack of faith in God and in the future life.

Some altruistic reasons are also given for suicide: captured spies or soldiers threatened by torture kill themselves to prevent betrayal of their companions, their accomplices or military secrets; a man kills himself to save his family from expensive long lasting treatment of his hopeless sickness; members of a resistant group also die of hunger strike for the civil liberties and rights of their people (Peschke Vol.2, 300).

Some have vehemently argued that there is nothing wrong in committing suicide. According to this school of thought, the argument that only God has the right to take life cannot hold water because if one can kill another person in self defense, take the life of other animals and if the state can inflict capital punishment on criminals and permit killing of enemies during wars and remain guiltless, why would not one take one's own life when it's continuous pains has become his worst enemy. It is also argued that a life that holds out some hope and promises is worth continuing, but when all that life offers is sorrow and intolerable pains which reduces one to nothing but a burden to himself, his family and the society, the person should retire honorably by taking his own life. Some also argue that if there is nothing wrong in interfering with nature to prolong life through advance medical prescriptions why will it be wrong to interfere with nature in shortening life. Some others justify suicide by arguing that if life is a gift from God given to one without his asking nor consent, one in realizing the burden it involves may reject it or do whatever feels like doing with it whenever he feels like doing so since it now rightfully belongs to him.

Brain Stoffell presents other reasons that motivate people to suicide which are unconnected with pain, suffering, and debilitation. According to him, "When a spy swallows cyanide rather than submit to torture that would result in confession and the subsequent capture and death of comrades, her courageous decisiveness is exemplary; but her reasons derive from loyalty rather than amelioration of her situation. A much closer parallel to the bioethical case is provided by the prisoner who suicides by hanging rather than go through some ghastly form of public mutilation and execution. His action exhibits great courage as well as eminent good sense in avoiding a much greater evil" (315).

Arguments against Suicide

In spite of these reasons put forward above in defence of suicide it is argued that direct suicide is intrinsically evil for the following reasons: firstly, man does not possess the right of ownership over his life, only God has perfect dominion over human life who has given it to man as a gift. Secondly, suicide is a crime against one's obligations towards the community and dependents, for a person's life is an investment of the community which is expected to yield fruit. Thirdly, suicide is a violation of one's duty to love oneself and to strive for perfection (Peschke, Vol.2, 301-302). It is further argued that suicide is an unjust act of cowardice carried out by selfish and weak-minded people who prefer to transfer their burdens to their dependents and loved ones rather than courageously confront them.

Moral Evaluation of Suicide

Suicide is generally regarded as a dishonorable act, which is morally reprehensible. In moral philosophy Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Camus and others rejected it while the Stoics, Hume and modern day humanists defend it as a right of self-determination given along with human liberty. For Camus, the suicide is a coward who confesses that life is too much for him and who fails to understand life thus seeing life as not worth the trouble (Myth 5). For Kant suicide is unacceptable, because the extinction of the subject of morality (man) implies the extinction of morality itself.

In positing the categorical imperative as criteria of moral evaluation, Kant insists on universalizing the maxim of our actions, among the examples he used in testing this criterion is the moral problem of suicide. In this example, "a man feels sick of life as a result of series of misfortunes that has mounted to the point of despair, but he still has perfect control of his reason to question himself as to whether his intended action does not contradict his duty to himself. He should then apply the test, to see whether the maxim of his action can be universalized to be a universal law of nature. Thus formulated: from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life if its continuance threatens more evil than it promises pleasure. The only further question to ask is whether this principle of self-love can become a universal law of nature. It is then seen at once that a system of nature by whose law the very same feeling whose function is to stimulate the furtherance of life should actually destroy life would contradict itself and consequently could not subsist as a system of nature. Hence the maxim cannot hold as a universal law of nature and is therefore entirely opposed to the supreme principle of all duty" (Groundwork 31).

From the above if the problem of suicide is put to test with Kant's absolute goodwill it cannot pass. Suicide is therefore wrong. Man must face the problems and challenges of life with hope and not escape his responsibility through suicide. If this action is universalized it will lead to the extinction of the human race. A father may commit suicide because he can't feed, house, cloth or cater for the educational needs of his children. In doing this the children are thrown into serious hardships, they may also commit suicide to escape their woes, hence the extermination of the family and eventually the human race. Thus suicide contradicts man's responsibility to act for the sake of duty, or in accordance with the moral law not for selfish interest. It contradicts the supreme duty of self-preservation and love of neighbor and cannot be recommended as a universal law. Suicide is cowardice and selfishness. It is unacceptable and morally reprehensible.

War

In this work we will deal with the problem of war in the strict sense as an armed conflict between states or large organized groups similar to states. The horror of recent wars (as witnessed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Congo, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Libya, Sudan, Syria, etc) as well as the dreadfulness of modern nuclear weapons raises a great and difficult question as to the moral admissibility of war. Opinions are divided as to the morality of war, the militarists see it as the last option to peace and freedom while the pacifists reject it totally because the evil it causes most often outweigh the harm that might otherwise befall a state. For the advocates of war, the militarists, the unconditional rejection of force would be nothing but license for might to prevail (Iraqi invasion of Kuwait is an example) hence diminishing moral and religious freedom whose loss is of greater value than physical destruction. In the history of philosophy while many philosophers expressed caution and warned against militarism, the 19th century philosophers like Fichte, Hegel and Nietzsche tried to justify wars. This argument brings about some moral justification for some wars in what is today known as Just War.

Arguments Justifying the Morality of Wars

Considering the devastating effects of wars ranging from loss of life and property to displacements, lawlessness and multiple traumatic hardships by the survivors of such conflicts, it would have been most appropriate to outlaw every form of armed conflict, but owing to man's greed, ambition, jealousy, hatred and

passions war has in many cases become inevitable. In many instances peaceful communities and states have seen war thrust on them against their wills by a belligerent and unjust aggressor. If they adopt a pacifist approach and refuse to defend themselves they may be annihilated or captured and be reduced to slaves who in future will be forced to join their conqueror to execute future wars. In this instance war is inevitable and even justified as a moral duty of self-defense. This justification of wars, in some instances regarded as holy wars, found support in many world religions especially Islam as well as early and late medieval Christianity. According to Naseri, “during this period many acts of violence were experienced by those who resisted conversion or those who abandoned the faith and the crusaders used force to retrieve lost territories” (74). These religious wars, inter-Christian rivalries, the inquisition and other unacceptable acts of violence, according to him, were predominantly influenced by religious convictions of the time.

Man by nature is a political animal who naturally congregates in a community that eventually forms a political state. The sovereign political state offers him security of life and property while he in turn is obliged to defend it even with his own life against an unjust aggressor. In the presence of such an unprovoked attack one is bound by duty to fight in defense of his state.

Just as individuals can justly take part in wars in defence of their state as well as in self-defence and in recovery of unjustly deprived goods so also is the state justified to wage war against an unjust aggressor whose acts of injustice threatens its continued existence as a state. If the only means available to a state to preserve itself, protect or recover its legitimate rights is war, then its engagement in war becomes a natural right, inevitable and justified. In such a situation the failure of the state to engage in war will be nothing but a voluntary condemnation of itself to political death, loss of its sovereignty and slavery to the aggressor. Hence it is the primary duty of every state, it is argued, to defend the lives and property of its citizens. If this can only be accomplished through the use of force, then the state is morally justified for use force.

It must be stated that though war can be just on one side and unjust on another, no war can be just on both sides. It can be unjust on both sides with the warring states violating each other's rights. While war as self-defence gains greater acceptance as both a right and a duty there is the danger of belligerent expansion by stronger nations against weaker ones. This leads to putting forward some conditions under which war can be justified.

Conditions for a Just War

St Augustine, influenced by Cicero, is the first person to expressly articulate the theory of a just war. The views of St. Augustine scattered across his works (like *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* Bk. XXII ch 74-75, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, Bk. VI q.10) were put together by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* when he said “In order for war to be just three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged.... And for this reason Augustine says: The natural order conducive to peace among mortals demand that the power to declare and counsel war should be in the hands of those who hold supreme authority. Secondly, a just cause is required namely that those who are attacked should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault. Wherefore Augustine says: A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges wrongs.... Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of the good and the avoidance of evil. Hence Augustine says: True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars that are waged not for the motive of aggrandizement or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers and of uplifting the good....” (II-II, q.40, a.1)

These conditions do not spell out permissions; they merely define limitations. Among the conditions enumerated by Peschke (594-595) in furtherance of the views of Augustine and Aquinas include:

1. War is lawful only for a just cause i.e. in defense of vital goods of the state community –to repel an unjust aggressor.
2. All other means of non-belligerent nature must have been exhausted.
3. The war must not jeopardize still higher goods than those to be defended and there must be a sufficient likelihood of success. “When the damages caused by war are not comparable to those of ‘tolerated injustice’, one may have a duty to suffer the injustice” (Pius XII, 748).

4. The military action may not extend beyond the needs of just defence and the restoration of the violated rights.
5. A competent authority must order the war.

Ethical Evaluation of War

The widespread nature of armed conflicts in the world today makes the world so much an unsafe place to dwell. Some of these wars have so protracted or are so devastating that they pose a very difficult ethical question as to their reasonableness. It is often asked whether the above conditions can really justify the horrendous wars we have witnessed in recent times with such great loss of human life and material resources. In such case one is forced to ask whether human life still retains its great value and if it does, is it not clear to man that modern warfare threatens the continuation of the human race. In the face of the horrors of the devastating effect of modern nuclear weapons and other precision supersonic weapons of mass destruction, the human race faces imminent extinction.

But it does not appear as simple as it looks, the question of whether a nation after exhausting all available peaceful means of dissuading an unjust aggressor should fold its arms and watch its citizenry crushed and exterminated by another power it could have repelled by taking up arms against is not yet answered satisfactorily.

Just war can even be more than a defensive war against an actual armed aggression. It is argued that even a preventive war against an unquestionably threatening, deadly aggression can also be justified. A case in hand is the Six Days War of 1967 when the Israeli Intelligence armed with a very reliable secret information of the imminent attack by Egypt and Syria, launched a preemptive strike against these enemies seven hours before they had planned to start a war that would have ruined the Israelis. This Israeli strike destroyed the Egyptian air force leading to Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. The question is: Should Israel have folded its arms watching themselves destroyed by the enemy?

Using Kant's categorical imperative makes this issue more complex than it appears. In the absolute sense we cannot universalize the maxim "fight when you are threatened", this will surely lead to the extinction of the human race because our existence is daily threatened by others in one way or the other.

In Kant's ethics also an action is right when it acts for the sake of duty i.e. out of reverence for the moral law. It can be argued that man has the right and duty to defend himself and his country, against an unjust aggressor. A soldier who fights in battle is doing so for the sake of duty even if his father or mother becomes the victim of the bomb he drops. The devastating nature of the battle notwithstanding, he has to forget about his personal feelings and inclinations and the consequences of his action and simply act for the sake of his duty to defend his country.

From this it becomes clear that Kant's absolute goodwill may not completely solve the morality of war. The moral justification or non-justification of war cannot be done absolutely but relatively since we cannot avoid the question of just and an unjust war. If, as it is argued, ethics "is principally preoccupied with value judgment" (Iwuagwu *The Relationship* 45), then every moral decision of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done must be considered not only from the point of view of duty but also from the point of view of the consequences of acting or not acting as well as the good to be accomplished and the harm that may be done by the action or inaction.

Abortion

Abortion has been defined from various perspectives some of which play down its moral implications. This work defines it in a brief but strict sense of the word. According to Peschke abortion is "the removal of the non-viable human being from the mother's womb by human intervention, whether by killing him before removal from the womb, or whether by exposing him to a certain death outside the womb" (314). Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae* sees abortion as: "the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth" (xi).

Abortion can be direct or indirect, spontaneous or induced (artificial). Spontaneous abortion or miscarriage occurs as a result of some abnormality of the developing baby or some illness on the part of the woman. Induced abortion also called direct abortion involves the ejection of human life from the uterus brought about intentionally by the patient herself or an accomplice. With regard to direct abortion, the ejection or destruction of the fetus is intended as an end of an action or a means to achieve this end, whereas in indirect abortion, the death of the fetus is merely permitted as a concomitant effect of a directly willed end (Peschke, 315). Example of indirect abortion is the death of a fetus not yet viable caused by the removal of a cancerous uterus of the pregnant mother.

Reasons Put Forward For Abortion

The advocates of abortion have proffered several reasons as justifying abortion; among these reasons also called “indications” are the following (Peschke, 321-322):

1. The Eugenic indication: This school advocates for abortion where there is a greater probability that the expected offspring will be affected with serious genetic or acquired defects or sicknesses
2. The Ethical indication: Here it is argued that when pregnancy is due to rape abortion is justified since the pregnancy is an undue burden forced upon the mother and also exposes her to great moral strains and social shame.
3. The social indication: Here it is argued that if the pregnancy is seen, as a great social or economic burden for the mother or the family, the child should be aborted.
4. Medical or Therapeutic indication: Here it is argued that when the life of the mother is seriously threatened by the pregnancy, the child should be aborted. Here it is also argued that for the purpose of mental health of the child, abortion is warranted.
5. Most recently the question of the fundamental right of the woman to dispense with pregnancy is being argued by pro-abortionists where sometimes refusal of abortion is said to be a violation of the right of the woman. This argument collapses when we consider also the fundamental right of the child to live.

Arguments For and Against Abortion

Several arguments have been proffered for and against abortion by the pro-lifers or anti-abortionists and the anti-life or pro-abortionists campaigners. This work will not delve much into this battle as the matter will be reserved for another work. The crux of the argument is the question of what the foetus in the womb of a woman is. According to Don Marquis, “Opponents of abortion choice typically have argued that because (human) foetuses are human, alive, and innocent, and because an abortion ends innocent human life, abortion is, unless special circumstances obtain, immoral. Call this argument ‘the human life argument’. Most supporters of abortion choice (in the philosophical world, at any rate) have argued that because (human) foetuses are not yet persons, and because what makes killing wrong is that the victim is a person, abortion is, unless special circumstances obtain, morally permissible. Call this argument ‘the personhood argument’” (395). Hence the whole abortion argument is principally premised on whether the foetus is a human person or not. It is after the determination of this that other issues like the future of value argument, the right of the fetus to life, the right of the mother and many other arguments can be addressed. For Michael Tooley, it will be “very difficult to formulate a completely satisfactory liberal position on abortion without coming to grips with the infanticide issue” (23). This is because the same argument that prevents us from killing an infant, endowed with personhood, presents us also from killing a fetus and even an adult. The position of this work is that the fetus is a human person whose right to life must be respected.

Ethical Evaluation of Abortion

In spite of the above arguments for abortion a directly willed and procured abortion has been rejected as intrinsically evil and wrong. Therapeutic abortions are merely permitted since the danger to the life of the mother is also a danger to the life of the child. Hence operations, treatments, and medications during pregnancy having as its immediate purpose the cure of a proportionately serious pathological condition of the mother are permitted when they cannot be safely postponed until the fetus is viable, although they indirectly cause an abortion.

This acceptance of the lawfulness of therapeutic abortion in cases of serious danger to the life of the mother is made possible by the ethical principle of “double effect” or “twofold effect”. According to this principle, it is allowable to perform an action with a good and bad effect provided:

1. The good and not the evil effect is directly intended.
2. The action itself is good, or at least indifferent.
3. The good is not produced by means of the evil effect
4. There is a proportionate reason to permit the foreseen evil effect.

When this principle is put to use it becomes clear that the will plays an important role in determining the morality of an action. Hence since abortion is the direct taking of the life of an unborn child, directly willed and procured abortion is a flagrant violation of the right of a child to life and this action cannot but be intrinsically wrong.

In the light of Kant’s moral philosophy, we cannot universalize the termination of the life of a child for social, eugenic or economic reasons for these do not threaten in any way our own existence. Therapeutic abortion may merely be permitted since the life of the mother and that of the child may be in danger. Justification of directly willed and procured abortion for any reason whatsoever will entail the violation of the categorical imperative which also states thus: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only” (Groundwork 38).

Appraisal of Kant’s Ethical Theory and its Implications for Current Ethical Problems

Kant's contributions in the field of ethical philosophy are really immense. His conception of the Absolute goodwill and his Categorical Imperative as the yardstick for the moral evaluation of actions and agents has greatly influenced moral philosophy since his time. In Kant's view the categorical imperative is our criterion for deciding what our obligations are. If the maxims of our actions can be made into universal laws which necessarily bind all rational beings then our actions are right and we are good, if they cannot be universalized then our actions are wrong and we are bad.

The moral force of Kant's deontological ethical theory notwithstanding, his categorical imperative as a yardstick of moral evaluation has attracted some criticisms from various fronts. Some scholars have rejected Kant's ethical theory for its inability to handle situations where conflicts of duties arise. There may be a situation where a conflict arises between duty X and duty Y, a situation where one can only perform one and not both. For example, a man faced with the dilemma of fulfilling his duty of defending his fatherland at war with an unjust aggressor and another duty of staying behind to take care of his aged and sick mother. He cannot do both at the same time. In this case Kant's deontological theory offers us no solution of how to resolve this dilemma.

It is also argued against Kant that his ethical theory "seems to confuse judgments of moral obligation and judgments of moral value" (Blocker & Hannaford, 218). It seems to run the two different kinds of judgments together. One can have a very humble motive and yet what he does is not right, since the rightness of an action is independent of the agent's motive. This means there is a distinction between the agent's intention and the action's consequences.

Another objection to Kant's ethical theory is that it allows for no exceptions. It is too inflexible for it cannot account for cases where exceptions have to be made. There are times when circumstances beyond our control make it difficult or even impossible to keep our promises or fulfill our obligations.

The implications of Kant's absolute goodwill when considered in relation to the ethical issues of suicide, war and abortion will be frightening. Kant's absolute goodwill and the categorical imperative acts strictly for the sake of duty and excludes every form of personal interest, inclination or tendency. It does not consider the outcome or consequences of one's actions. It excludes every subjective dimension to moral judgments overlooking what contemporary scholars have insisted constitutes ethical judgments. According to Iwuagwu, "a discussion on what morality is will be incomplete without considering it from its subjective and objective dimensions"(23). Kant's deontological ethical theory is one-directional and overlooks many considerations which a moral agent should look at before making moral decision.

In relation to suicide, the implication will be that even martyrdom and heroic acts which may be allowed for altruistic reason in respect of a higher good will not be justified. This is because an agent who permits his life to be taken would have failed in his duty of protecting his life and has thus permitted such action as a means to an end namely: eternal salvation and patriotism respectively.

In relation to war, the implication of Kant's categorical imperative will be a denial of self-defence which will lead to the following consequences: giving license to an unjust aggressor, the perpetuation of injustice, the failure of the state in its obligation of providing security of life and property and thus the eventual extermination of some races and states. It will be difficult to universalize the maxim "Take up arms and fight when unjustly provoked by an unjust aggressor" without bringing many other things into consideration. These include: whether the strength of one's army can match that of the aggressor, the expected outcome of such war, whether it will be favourable or disastrous and so on. These considerations are not in tandem with apodictic nature or the exclusive demands of the categorical imperative which imputes moral worth only to actions strictly performed for the sake of duty or out of reverence to the moral law while rejecting morality to actions with considerations for the end or consequences. In the face of the imminent danger posed by a belligerent aggressor, to wait before we can accept the universalization of our proposed maxim of response as well as excluding every consideration of the consequences of such proposed action will be tantamount to one harvesting one's own ruin by rejecting self defence which is as good as suicide.

In relation to the ethical issue of abortion, while Kant's absolute good will or the categorical imperative with its universalisation principle will be a perfect standard for checkmating abortions carried out for social, eugenic and economic reasons, it will have problem with indirect abortions effected on therapeutic grounds. Kant's categorical imperative does not allow for exceptions. Ectopic or extra-uterine pregnancies are exceptional cases in human reproduction which also require unorthodox solutions. There are also other unusual health challenges that may threaten the life of a pregnant mother as well as the unborn fetus such as a cancerous womb, uncontrollable high blood pressure and other pathological cases which may occur before the viability of the fetus. If one goes by the strictness of Kant's categorical imperative, the implication will be the rejection any therapeutic solution for these above mentioned pathological conditions thereby risking the loss of the mother and fetus.

In spite of the above objections to Kant's absolute goodwill as well as the implications of employing it as a moral standard, we cannot deny the fact that his categorical imperative is a valuable guide in making ethical

decisions. The ethical issues of suicide, war and abortion become wrong and unacceptable when subjected to the test of Kant's categorical imperative since in the strict sense we cannot universalize any maxim constructed with these problems. The intention of the moral agent must be of universal good not selfish good. The action must equally be good or at least amoral. Hence Kant's ethical theory, though not without its faults, is a conscientious and valid contribution in deciding the morality of the human agent and his actions.

II. CONCLUSION

Kant's absolute good will with its categorical imperative indeed provides a good measuring standard of moral evaluation. But his very strict objective criteria which gives no room for other considerations such as consequences, passions, tendencies, desires, habits, interests and other individual idiosyncrasies leaves his deontological ethical theory grossly inadequate. A holistic view of morality should incorporate both the objective and the subjective dimensions of it which reflects the true picture of man's life in the society. Kant's deontological theory is both exclusive and one-directional ignoring individual feelings and the consequences of his actions. The failure of Kant's categorical imperative to make room for exceptions makes it so rigid, otherworldly and seemingly impracticable. If there is no law without exception, why should the moral law be unconditional? Laws are made for normal situations but make provisions for foreseen and unforeseen abnormal situations. In life there are unusual or abnormal situations which deviate from the ordinary or regular course of events. Kant's ethical theory is so unbending that it refuses to take these situations into consideration. Procured abortion which consists of the direct killing of an unborn fetus is considered an abominable crime. But there is also indirect abortion which also involves the loss of life of the unborn fetus consequent upon the voluntary action of the moral agent. The killing in this case may not be directly willed but permitted. This permitted action may be a means to an end namely, to save the life of the mother through surgery which will address an urgent health challenge that cannot be postponed until the viability of the fetus. The survival of the fetus depends on the mother being alive. This painful decision to permit and undergo the surgery is taken in consideration of the end in view as well as the consequences of inaction namely, the loss of the mother and the baby. Kant's categorical imperative does not provide for cases like this. It does not also provide for engaging in war outside from doing so as a duty, all other consideration like security of life and property from an unjust aggressor, preservation of one's freedom and defence of territorial integrity are inconsequential.

One will therefore conclude by saying that Kant's absolute good will should be embraced as one of the standards of measuring the morality of an action and the moral worthiness of a person but not the only standard. Because of its inadequacy highlighted by its strictness and failure to make rooms for exceptions, other subjective standards should be married with Kant's strict objective standard for a proper and balanced standard for determining the moral value of an action and the moral status of an individual.

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