

THE MAIN IDEAS OF THE FOUNDER OF THE GERMAN SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

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***Annotation:** This article analyzes the ethical views of Immanuel Kant. Immanuel Kant is the founder of German classical philosophy and his views on morality and morality have a special place in human development.*

***Keywords:** work, moral, syllogistic, freedom.*

Immanuel Kant was a famous German philosopher. Kant is also considered to be a central figure of the modern philosophy. He urged that human concepts and other categories structure our view of the world and its laws which, according to him, is reason, or the main source of morality. Today, Kant's ideas continue to hold an influential place in contemporary thought. This is especially true in major fields such as ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics and political philosophy.

Immanuel major work called Critique of the Pure Reason was published in 1781. His main aim was to bring reason together with experience and also move beyond what was thought as failures of traditional metaphysics and philosophy. Kant hoped to end the age of great speculation where some objects outside the experience were seen to support futile theories.

Immanuel was born on April 22, 1724, in Königsberg, Prussia. He was the fourth child of nine children. After learning Hebrew, he changed his first name from Emanuel to Immanuel. Throughout his life, Kant never went more than 10 miles from Königsberg. His dad was a great German harness maker all the way from Memel.

Immanuel Kant grew up in Pietistic household which stressed extreme religious devotion, humility, and a literal interpretation of the Bible. As a young man, he received a stern education that basically preferred Latin and other religious instruction over science and mathematics. Despite all this religious education, Kant was still skeptical of religion later in life and was even an agnostic.

As a child, Immanuel showed great aptitude to learn. His school was the Collegium Fredericianum before enrolling at the University of Königsberg in 1740 at only 16 years of age. While enrolled at the university, he studied philosophy under Martin Knutzen, who was a rationalist.

Martin was familiar with the great developments in the British philosophy and also science. He also introduced Immanuel to the mathematical physics of the famous Isaac Newton. Martin dissuaded the young Immanuel from idealism that was then negatively his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant developed a theory called transcendental idealism. This basically means that reality is strictly mental. He even produced some arguments that were against the traditional idealism in the second part of his book. In 1746, his father passed away and this interrupted his studies for a while. He later became private tutor in Konigsberg where he still continued his scholarly studies.

Immanuel Kant is popular for the great work in philosophy of ethics plus metaphysics. He also made great contributions to many other disciplines. For example, he made a very important astronomical discovery about nature of the Earth's rotation. This discovery won him a Berlin Academy prize in 1754.

In 1755, he published a book called *General History of Nature and Theory of the Heavens*. In this book, he explained the Nebular hypothesis. In this hypothesis, he attempted to explain that the entire solar system was formed from a very large cloud of a gas, called a nebula. He also described the order of solar system and also deduced that Milky Way was very huge disk of stars. When this was theorized, it formed a much bigger spinning cloud of a gas. All these theories opened new horizons for the field of astronomy.

In the early 1760s, Immanuel produced a number of very important books dealing with philosophy. One of his works-*The False Subtlety of the Four Syllogistic Figures*-was published in 1762 followed by two other works in the following year. In 1770, he was made a Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Konigsberg. He wrote his own inaugural dissertation as a defense of this appointment.

Much of Kant's work reconciled most of the differences that existed between empiricist and rationalist traditions of 18th century. Basically, he had a great impact on the Roman and German idealist philosophers of the 19th century. His works was also starting point for most of 20th century philosophers.

On religion, Kant believed that for the sake of morality, humans are justified to believe in God. This was even though they could not know God's presence empirically. Kant's influence has also extended to social, behavioral, and physical sciences.

He also lectured anthropology for more than 25 years. In 1797, his lectures on anthropology were later published for the very first time in German.

Kant's understanding of moral freedom and of moral principles has been central to discussions of morality from his time forward. His moral philosophy is a philosophy of freedom. Without human freedom, thought Kant, moral appraisal and moral responsibility would be impossible. Kant believes that if a person could not act

otherwise, then his or her act can have no moral worth. Further, he believes that every human being is endowed with a conscience that makes him or her aware that the moral law has authority over them. Kant calls this a “fact of reason,” and he regards it as the basis for a belief in human freedom. However, Kant also believes that the entire natural world is subject to a strict Newtonian principle of causality, implying that all of our physical actions are caused by prior events, not by our free wills. How, then, can freedom and morality be possible?

In simplified terms, Kant’s answer to this problem is that although humans are subject to causality in the phenomenal realm, we are free in the *noumenal* realm. To make sense of this answer, it is necessary to understand Kant’s distinction between theoretical and practical reason. The *Critique of Pure Reason* gives an account of theoretical reason and its limits. Theoretical reason can understand the natural world through the categories of the understanding. *Practical* reason addresses questions of how the world *ought* to be and tells us our duty. It also leads humans to a concept of an ideal world, which it becomes our aim to create. However, the proper functioning of practical reason requires the existence of certain conditions, such as God, immortality of the soul, and, most importantly, free will. Because none of these is contained within the categories of the understanding, theoretical reason can know nothing about them. However, argues Kant, because theoretical reason is also incapable of *disproving* their existence, we are justified in accepting their existence practically. As he puts it in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant “had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.”

According to Kant, ethics, like metaphysics, is *a priori*, meaning that our moral duty is determined independently of empirical considerations. Kant’s ethics can therefore be contrasted with ethical views such as utilitarianism that hold that the morality of acts is derived from their consequences. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant outlines his fundamental ethical principle, which he calls the “categorical imperative.” The moral principle is “imperative” because it commands, and it is “categorical” because it does so unconditionally, that is, irrespective of the particular inclinations and circumstances of the actor. This moral principle is given by reason and states that we may act only in such a way that the maxim of our action, *i.e.* the principle governing our action, could be willed as universal law. For example, one is forbidden to act on the maxim “lie whenever it provides an advantage” because such a maxim would destroy trust among humans, and with it the possibility of gaining any advantage from lying. Those who act on non-universalizable maxims are caught in a kind of practical contradiction. In another formulation of the categorical imperative, Kant specifies that we must always respect

humanity in ourselves and others by treating humans always as ends in themselves, and never merely as a means.

Freedom, for Kant, is thus not the “freedom” to follow one’s inclinations. Instead, freedom implies morality, and morality implies freedom. To act on one’s inclinations or desires, even if one desires the morally correct act, is to be determined by the causal forces of nature, and therefore to be unfree or “heteronomous.” To act morally is to act “autonomously,” meaning to act according to the law that one gives oneself. It is not sufficient only to perform the acts required by morality; it is also necessary to act intentionally in accord with one’s moral duty.

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