

Ethical Rationality and Religious Commitment: A Critical Study of Kant

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ABSTRACT

Immanuel Kant's (1724 -1804) examines the interaction between morality and religion. He particularly as developed in his critical works such as Critique of Pure Reason and Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone. Kant argues that morality inevitably leads to religion, since ethical life requires the postulation of certain rational ideas that transcend empirical experience. The discussion focuses on three central aspects: finite rational volition, the practical postulates of reason, and the concept of the highest good (*summum bonum*). Kant maintains that human moral action is governed by maxims and guided by the autonomy of the will, where duty and respect for the moral law determine the moral worth of actions. In this framework, the postulates of God, freedom, and immortality are not theoretical proofs but necessary practical assumptions that sustain moral striving. The highest good represents the ultimate unity of virtue and happiness and serves as the final end of moral life. Through this analysis, the paper argues that religion in Kantian philosophy is grounded in morality and reason, and that the ethical pursuit of the highest good culminates in the ideal of the “*kingdom of ends*.”

Keywords: Religion and Morality; Finite Rational Volition; Practical Reason; Postulates of Practical Reason; Highest Good (Summum Bonum); Autonomy of the Will

INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a famous German philosopher of eighteenth century devoted his whole life in the pursuit of philosophy. He not only touched every branch of philosophy, but also there were several disciplines on those days on which he had a very encyclopaedic knowledge. Keeping all these points in our mind, we can remember a very significant line of an eminent Kant scholar, L.W. Beck - ‘Argue for Kant argue against Kant but without Kant philosophical discussion is impossible’.

In the last chapter of Critique of Pure Reason, Kant discusses “*The Transcendental Doctrine of Method*.” One section of this chapter is titled “*The Canon of Pure Reason*.” Kant’s philosophical system is closely connected with this canon. In this section, Kant explains how pure reason gradually transforms into practical reason and how religion depends on practical reason, because religion is based on ethics.

According to Kant, in the ethical life a human being that command in heard is own command. In the same way in the religious life a human being that commands in heard is God’s command. Kant says, “Man while, since the command, obey the authorities! Is also moral, and since obedience to it, as to all injunctions of duty, can be drawn into religion, it is fitting that a treatise which is dedicated to definite concept of religion should itself present an example of this obedience, which however, can be evinced not through attention merely to law in the form of a single state regulation and blindness with respect to every other, but only through combined respect for all (regulations) taken together.”¹

Morality finds its foundation in the holiness of its law and in reverence for that law. This holiness is associated with religious life. In the first preface of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant says: Morality thus inevitably leads to religion, through which it extends to the idea of a powerful moral lawgiver outside humanity, whose will represents the final end of creation and which, at the same time, can and ought to be the final end of human beings. In this paper we try to solve some questions these are – How does morality lead to religion in Kant’s philosophy? How does Kant’s moral philosophy lead to a rational conception of religion through the ideas of autonomy, moral law, practical postulates, and the highest good? and how can the problem of religious fanaticism in the present world scenario be addressed through Kant’s philosophy?

Now we can consider the content of the morality leading to religion in three sections.

1) Finite Rational Volition:

Kant’s moral argument associated with two premises. These are, obedience to the moral law commits the finite rational being to make the highest good his end, and another is, the highest good can be conceived practically possible by him only if they admit the existence of a God and a future life. These two arguments are basically based on finite rational volition. In the first argument we are elaborately consider the next section in this paper. Now we consider the second argument, the highest good his end. The highest good is very important in Kant’s critical philosophy. Kant says highest good is a chief goal; it is representing ‘the world morality would create.’ In this context, we must consider three basic notions in morality: motives, ends, and maxims. These notions belong to both the theoretical and practical aspects of self-knowledge. This self-knowledge involves discovering the human capacity for knowledge and provides a specification of practical concepts in our reasoning about moral action from the standpoint of a finite rational agent. The human will relates moral laws to an imperative. Kant says, “The conception of an objective principle as far as this principle is necessitating for a will is called a command (of reason), and formula of this command is called an Imperative.”² The imperative is fundamental for understanding the nature of finite rational volition, not only imperative but also the concept of ‘duty’. But equally important are three concepts which are close attention must be important. These are ‘motive’, ‘end’ and ‘maxim’. Now the question arises what is duty?

Kant says, “An action done from duty has its moral worth, not in the purpose to be attained by it, but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon; it depends therefore, not on the realization of the object of the action, but solely on the principle of the volition in accordance with which, irrespective of all objects of the faculty of desire, the action has been performed.”³

The rational will always acts with motive. Motive means motive in duty. This is a nature of practical ground which characterizes the good, autonomous will, but the heteronomous is morality bad. Now the question arise what does mean by autonomous will? Heteronomous will?

Kant says, “Autonomy of the will is the property the will has of being a law to itself (independency of every property belonging to the objects of volition). Hence the principle of autonomy is ‘Never to choose’ except in such a way that in such a way that in the same volition the maxims of your choice are also present as universal law.”⁴

Another hand heteronomy of will means, “If the will seeks the law that is to determine it anywhere else than in the fitness of its maxims for its maxims for its own making of universal law – if therefore is going beyond itself it seeks this law in the character of any of its objects – the result is always heteronomy.”⁵

These two are fundamentally two kinds of motives for human action. Kant says, these are in various ways, but it is the same difference which is being expressed in all of them. The good wills determined by reason, ‘the moral law’, ‘reverence for the law’, ‘Constatative from its maxim’. In the other hand heteronomous will constitute, ‘inclination’, ‘self-love’, ‘the principle of own happiness’. In this point Kant was negatively highlighted in his religion and ethics. He says, “The will, or power of choice, is determined either by the rational will or by inclination, depending on which incentive the agent incorporates into his maxims.”⁶

The finite rational will always has an end. In this context Kant says, the will a ‘faculty of desire’ or ‘faculty of ends’. In a practical point of view human action are associated with, purposively. According to Kant the concept of ‘will’ is involves both motivation and purposiveness. This context can be examined by the comparing the concept of the finite rational will to that the divine will. The divine will is totally free from sub justice inclination. Now the question arises, what is divine will?

“The concept of a divine holly will is the concept of a will necessarily determine solely and exclusively by the objectively practical. Kant sometimes speaks of such will as standing under objective laws, though not as imperatives. This is, however, a misleading way of stating his view. Just as God, whose understanding is intuitive, needs to ‘faculty of principles’ to obtain cognition of all things, so a being whose will or faculty of desire consists only in the fact that ‘the divine understanding determines’ its activity to the production of those objects which it represents – such a being needs no laws to determines its will. The motives of the divine will can be only the objective good of the object of its understanding, and its purposiveness consists only in the well – pleasedness which God takes in the immediate products of his intuitive understanding.”⁷

The purposiveness of human will is different form divine will. God does not adopt and or they never choose between motives of action. The divine character of finite rational volition is to found for the investigating the relation of motives and end to its action in terms of maxim. Now the question arises what is maxim?

Kant says, “A maxim is the subjective principle of volition: an objective principle (that is, one which would also serve subjectively as a practical principle for all rational beings if reason had full control over the faculty of desire) is a practical law.”⁸

Maxims obvious both man’s reason and his finitude, in these two thing’s sensibility is his freedom and his subjection. Kant says, in all this thing determines by reason. The structure in maxim is distinguished from human will to sub rational will and letter distinguishes form holy will. Kant puts maxim distinguishes ‘form’ and ‘matter’. Wood says, “In the maxim of finite rational volition, both freedom and nature, both the formal and the material aspects of human action, are given at once. Human action is purposive, and each human act has a particular end represented for it. But this representation of an end is made by means of a maxim, a rule. The will always chooses in accordance with rule, and never chooses only particular acts. Action in terms of a maxim is always finite rational action, action determined by reason under conditions of finite material existence. A maxim is not an abstract principle concocted in thought, but a principle embodied in human action, ‘a principle on which the subjects acts’. Human habits consist for Kant of rules of the subject’s action; and are therefore the embodiments of maxim.”⁹

Maxim is related with autonomy. We are already considering the autonomy. In this context Kant says, “The principle of humanity, and in general of every rational agent, as an itself (a principle which is the Supreme limiting condition of every man’s freedom of action) is not borrowed from experience; firstly because it is universal, applying as it does to all rational beings as such, and no experience is adequate to determine universality; secondly because in it humanity in conceived, not as an end of man (subjectively) – this is, as an object which, as a matter of fact, happiness to be made an end – but as an objective end – one which, be our ends that they may must, as a law, constitute the supreme limiting condition of subjective ends and so must spring from pure reason. . . . Form this there now follows our third practical principle for the will – as the Supreme condition of the will’s conformity with universal practical reason – namely, the idea of the will of every being as a will which makes universal law.”¹⁰

This principle is denied all maxims. This will is not subject to the law. The subjects are making the law. So cannot accord owns will’s universal law.

We know all our actions like good or evil, autonomous or heteronomous is related to maxims. The maxim of any action is, for morality, the practical principle or rule under which it falls. Therefore, only after we understand the nature of maxims and their fundamental importance for finite rational will can us adequately grasp the nature of the good will, as well as the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous volition.

Kant's ethical theory rests on the claim that a will is good if and only if its maxim possesses a universal, lawgiving form, and if the will is determined or motivated by this form rather than by the content (matter) of the maxim. Maxims that are adopted and followed because of their legislative form are called "formal principles," since they express the subject's obedience to an objective practical law. By contrast, a "material principle" is one that motivates the will through the ends or content of its maxim, presupposing such an end as the basis for adopting the maxim. Since principles of this kind assume an immediate relation to an object (or end) as the determining ground of the will—and since all such relations for a finite rational being arise through sensibility (intuition)—material principles are, without exception, empirical and cannot provide genuine practical laws. Volitions governed by such principles are therefore determined by sensibility, or sensibly conditioned.

We already consider maxim is too related with the rational volition. In another hand happiness is related with related with rational volition. Hence happiness is related with moral and religious activity. Now we shall discussed happiness is a rational volition.

All types of action in human volition are defined as motive and its ends in its maxim. Basically Kant's moral theory holds that autonomous volition. Wood says, "Man's finite nature imposes upon him certain natural needs, or 'natural ends'. These needs make themselves felt in man's inclinations. Form these natural ends; reason creates an idea in which 'all inclinations are combined into a total sum'. This idea is called by Kant 'happiness'".¹¹

Happiness is given by experience. It needs a desire of finite creature. Happiness is *apriori*, because every being who are rational and finite. The necessary object of the natural end is desire. In this context arises the empirical question, whether any given state of affairs will make a person happy? This proposition is not a transcendental proposition. It is an *apriori* metaphysical proposition by the nature of finite rational being necessarily have happiness. In this context Wood says, "Certainly our weal and woe are very important in the estimation of our practical reason. ... Man is a being of needs ... and to this extent his reason certainly has an inescapable responsibility from the side of his sensuous nature to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to ... happiness But ... that he has reason does not in the least raise him in worth above mere animality if reason only serves the purposes which, among animals, are taken care of by instinct ... But he has reason for a yet higher purpose."¹²

2) The Practical Postulates:

Kant define his moral arguments are not like three traditional arguments for God, freedom and immortality. These three arguments are the practical postulates. These arguments are not only traditional but also speculative or metaphysical arguments. However the moral arguments commonly criticized as being 'theoretical' in character. In that position there are two divided way. Hence, these postulates are not proof in our practical life, but these are pragmatic belief. In this context Kant use an analogy. They say, "The physician is not necessarily acting in obedience to a moral imperative in seeking to cure his patient, so his ends are 'optional' and 'contingent' in the example. If he finds that it is impossible to cure the patient, he can with perfect rationality abandon his pursuit of this end, and turn his attention to curing another patient or to relieving the suffering of the doomed man. His belief that the patient has phthisis is also only one possible belief which might be the condition for the employment of means to his end; another physician might judge the patient to have bronchitis, or yet some other ailment, and adopt and altogether different means. The physician's belief is 'subjectively but only comparatively sufficient'; because it is merely the best practical hypothesis he can come up with."¹³

So this is called pragmatic belief. This type of belief is concerned with religion in Kantian philosophy. In other hand moral postulates is related with the famous logical 'decision procedure' I.P method or reductions ad absurdum method. We shall consider first postulates i.e. God in the domain of reductions ad absurdum method. Wood says, "If I deny existence of a God or of a future life, I can be made to deny the validity of the moral law. But I know the moral law to be valid. Therefore, if I am to avoid this contradiction, I must not deny the

existence of a God and future life. But if we view them precisely in this way, I think it can also be shown that they are extremely inadequate. For consider: I am told on the one hand that a command is invalid if in obeying it one must pursue ends which he cannot conceive possible of attainment; and I am told, on the other hand, that the moral law has been shown in the Analytic of the second Critique to be valid. Now from this I ought to be able to infer that in the Analytic of the second Critique it was shown that all the ends one must purpose in obeying the moral law are ends which he can conceive possible of attainment. But one such end (the most important on in fact, the highest good) was not even discussed in the Analytic and in fact discussion of it was explicitly postponed until the Dialectic. And no attempt whatever was made in the Analytic to remove this threat to the validity of the moral law. Hence if I really take seriously what Kant says, it follows not that I must believe in a God and a future life, but rather that the argument of the Analytic was incomplete, and that the moral law may very well be invalid.”¹⁴

Another postulate is immortality. Kant says this is one of the postulates in practical reason. They claim this postulate is necessary because this is a possibility of highest good. The autonomy of practical reason, as we have seen, appears to undermine the possibility of the highest good. It does so by moving from our knowledge of human moral nature—observed within the sensible world—to the conclusion that moral perfection, or holiness of will, is unattainable for humanity as a whole. Since holiness of will is a necessary condition for achieving the highest good for any rational being, this line of reasoning compels us to conclude that the highest good itself is impossible, leading to a *practical absurdity* (*absurdum practicum*).

In discussing the first postulate in the *Second Critique*, Kant does not explicitly explain why this argument is dialectically flawed. However, based on his broader account of the dialectic of practical reason, we can infer that the error lies in extending a claim beyond its legitimate bounds. Specifically, the argument illegitimately moves from a fact about human beings as they appear in the sensible world to a conclusion about their nature as they are in themselves. What can be justifiably claimed is only that humans cannot attain holiness within the world of sense. The first antinomy arises when this limited claim is extended into the unwarranted assertion that holiness of will is absolutely unattainable. If this reflects Kant’s resolution of the first antinomy, then the postulate of immortality can be understood as asserting that, in a super sensible mode of existence—a “future life”—radical evil may be overcome and holiness of will becomes attainable. Accordingly, any clarification of this postulate would involve analysing the nature of such a super sensible existence, specifically the conditions it must satisfy in order to serve its practical purpose.

We already discussed another postulate freedom. Kant’s philosophy of religion as such, we will not be dealing with it in as much detail as we will deal with the other two postulates make the highest good. The moral law presuppose the volition which can possible only if freedom is postulate.

So we see the postulates of practical reason or morality. This postulate is defined as Kantian religious domain. These religious domains achieve highest good. In the process or reached in highest good through this postulates. We already known Kant’s moral defence of faith was reduced to the three postulates. In this context Kant highlight the famous logical procedure reductions ad absurdum method. In the other hand Kant also hold the final end of all moral striving that is called ‘highest good’ or *summum bonum*. This highest good is also condition for volition and the action with the moral law.

If we are to understand Kant’s true conception of God and immortality as objects of moral faith, we must look beyond the transcendental ideas of God and immortality, and even beyond the *reductio ad absurdum practicum* argument itself. Instead, we should examine the role that moral belief—moral faith—plays within the inner life of the moral agent. These ideas arise only in the sphere of practical reason; their objects are postulated as matters of moral faith, and we believe in them only insofar as they are meaningful “for us as moral beings.” Thus, attention must ultimately turn to Kant’s account of moral faith.

3) The Highest Good:

In Kantian philosophy highest good means, end of pure practical reason, another hand highest good means

proper fulfilment of its function and end of the uncontrolled totality. This is moral labour.

As we are already seen the nature of finite rational volition. We know this is an end of pure practical reason. This is played a crucial role in end in themselves. After the last stage of the rational volition of the human race is highest good. Now we consider this discussion.

In human race before highest good, there are two types of good in there. These are: i) Moral Good and ii) Natural Good. Then gradually we are transforming into the highest good. Kant defines religious good. Now we goes to highest good before we discussion on moral good and natural good.

i) Moral Good

The moral law defined in the finite rational agent's for legislative maxim. There are two kinds of moral agents. One is unconditioned and another is unqualified. Second is a condition by the first. The second is derived from man's moral rationality. Man's capability is free and autonomous volition. In another hand condition good is constituted systematically and universally added in the material of a formally legislative maxim. Wood says an examination of moral good and natural good these two concepts and their foundation in Kant's philosophy will enable us to see how the two components of the highest good are to be conceived of and related one another?

According to Kant moral good is defined as virtue. This good identify inclination to well-being. Moral good is unqualified good of virtue. This is an object of practical reason. Such objects are not include not only unqualified and unconditioned God, but also qualified and conditioned ends or object of the finite rational will. Kant scholar Allen W. Wood says, "In treating of the unqualified good merely as the goodness of the maxim of a given act, we noted that its unqualified or unconditioned goodness followed from the fact that a formally legislative maxim, adopted on account of its form, is the formal condition of all good ends. The moral good, however, is not simply a formal condition, but an end which is good without qualification. The moral good is something which one strives for. If the moral good required as a necessary component of the end of any particular act were taken merely to be the having of a formally legislative maxim for that act, then the moral good would have the peculiar quality that one could not even seek it without it following as an analytic proposition that one had completely attained it. For to seek an object of pure practical reason is just to act according to a maxim with a legislative form, motivated by that form. But if one does this, then one has thereby attained the moral good, if the moral good is regarded only as the maxim of the action in question. The moral good, so regarded cannot be something one strives for, or that one makes progress in attaining. In order, therefore to be in the proper sense an end of moral action, the moral good must not refer only to the having of a formally legislative maxim in the case of the particular act in question. Rather, it must refer to something which can be striven for, and adopted as an end of action to be promoted and brought about".¹⁵

According to Kant, if we are done from duty then we are morally good. Kant's theory asserts that we do have duty to other man as ends in themselves to aid them so far as we are able to moral process and they fulfil their higher destiny. Kant illustrates many places in this context. Kant includes a methodology in his 'moral law'. This methodology characterise a practical reason access in human mind. They access or influence in maxim. Wood was clearly explaining this methodology. Now we look his lines, "In both accounts of such a 'Methodology', Kant deals with the teaching of pupils and how it may achieve the above end. The subject of moral education was one which profoundly concerned Kant, and he held that such education was necessary precondition for man's moral improvement, even the sole ground of hope for human moral progress. The most detailed and practical treatment of the topic of moral education is to be found in Kant's treatise Education. In the introduction to this work Kant argues that man, as man, is solely a product of education and that the attainment of an individual's moral destiny is impossible without the help of others. Practical Education forms an important part of the educator's task in Kant's view, and Kant offers many observations concerning the best way of developing the moral character of pupils".¹⁶

This understanding of man's moral characters through education and religious community play such an important role in Kantian philosophy.

ii) The Natural Good

Kant's moral reason includes man's nature ends in the object of pure practical reason. Kant says the second condition component of the highest good, which is called 'natural good'.

Formal condition for all objects of pure practical reason is moral validity of man's maxim. The moral good is not only unconditional good but it also supreme condition of all types of good. Kant says this type of good is a virtue. Morality good means a worthiness to be happy. The basic need of finite being is inclinations and sensuous desires. The desire provides finite rational being with his natural end. These types of end are unified by reason and reason as produce into an idea of happiness. Reasons balance the natural ends. This judgement pursuit some person's own happiness or natural good, some of the person think this type of judgement is a feeling. But Kant says this judgement of reason. Wood defines in this context with an example. A man who has access to large sums of money at work may feel tempted to embezzle. He might, in a moment of impulse, slip a roll of large bills into his pocket and leave the office. However, being more rational, he pauses before acting rashly. He considers whether such an act would truly serve his long-term happiness and align with his overall desires. Even if he does not reflect on the morality of his action, he evaluates it from the standpoint of prudence. He thinks about whether he could successfully escape with the money, whether he would have to leave the city, give up his job, and abandon the stability of his life so far. He also considers the consequences for his personal relationships—whether he would need to confront his wife and family or leave them behind altogether.

If he is prudent, he carefully weighs all these factors. His immediate temptation to steal is checked by his desire for a stable life, the respect of family and friends, and the security of his established position in the community. After weighing these considerations, he may conclude that embezzlement would not contribute to his overall happiness. Alternatively, he might decide that his job, family, and stable life are not valuable enough to outweigh the potential gain, and choose to take the risk—perhaps even fleeing the country with the money. In either case, the decision results from a careful and rational assessment of his desires and circumstances.

So Kant says the highest natural good is possible in the world. This is able happiness under the objective condition of the harmony. The highest good is an idea of object which takes a formal condition of such ends. This combines in conditioned and in harmony with duty in all ends. This discussion is related with the moral and natural goods, between the legislative form of a maxim and a natural end, between virtue as worthiness to be happy and human happiness. Kant's concept of the highest good clarifies the role of rational theology within his ethical system and brings to completion the project of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in its practical application. It does so by establishing an unconditional end for all moral striving—a final purpose for human action. Up to this point, our discussion has focused on the foundations of Kant's ethics, particularly moral motivation and the kinds of ends prescribed by the moral law. We have treated an end, or object of pure practical reason, merely as the content of a formally valid maxim. This approach is justified, since it is the moral law—and its formal requirement of the rational universality of maxims—that conditions all good ends and all objects of pure practical reason.

However, once the moral law has been established, it becomes possible to develop a systematic account of its objects and to define a final end for human action. This end corresponds to the moral law and serves as the idea of its concrete realization in the world. Like pure theoretical reason in the first *Critique*, pure practical reason.

The demand of the reason is highest good. Hence highest good is the ultimate meaning and the goal of the entire world. Kant says the purpose in the life can have exercised has rational capacities fully in relation to the purposes of man's actions. This demand of then reason is make leads dialectical complexity. These complexities are not being resolved. We must recognize the necessary limitations of our own nature, and respond to them in full realization that the problems and complexity is the essential part of the finite rationality

itself. So reason is the ultimate of the highest good. In Kantian philosophy this highest good technically known as ‘kingdom of ends’, in religious life man has to achieve kingdom of ends.

Finally we conclude this paper, we are divided in three section of this paper and our finding of this paper is the highest end of moral being is highest good or kingdom of ends. However, highest good or kingdom ends is same but in Kantian philosophy specially emphasis in this word. Kant says, “The concepts of every rational being as one who must regard himself as making universal law, and must seek to judge himself and his actions from his point of view, leads to closely connected and very fruitful concept namely, that of a kingdom of ends”.¹⁷

So, morality has to gradually transform into the kingdom of ends or highest good through moral procedure like maxim, universal law or postulates of the practical law or morality. Therefore, there is a morality leading to religion. Hence, religion is based on morality, and morality yields the raw material for religious life. The ultimate goal of religious life, achieved through morality, is the *Kingdom of Ends* or the *Highest Good*. We already know that reason has to play an important role in this context. Therefore, we can conclude that religion is grounded in reason alone.

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