

SCTCMG 2021
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»

KANTIAN ETHICS: THE PHENOMENA OF RESPECT AND
WORTH (WORTHINESS)

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Abstract

The article provides an analysis of the categories of worth and respect in Kant's ethics. It systematizes the main approaches to the definition of worth and respect as they are treated by Kant in his main ethical works. The authors note that the phenomenon of worth (worthiness) is given by Kant in three main approaches – as inborn worth (dignity) of a human person, worth of the moral law, worth of good will ready to obey the moral law. The last two approaches concretize or actualize panhuman worth (dignity) that is confirmed by the unity of reason and will in a person, which is stated by the three well-known formulations of the categorical imperative – their main concepts are human person (humanity), reason and will. Also, Kant provides three variants of interpretation of the phenomenon of respect – self-respect (subjective), respect to from other people (objective), respect from god (absolute). Although Kant's ethical doctrine is opposed to consequentialism, we argue the moral law implies and provides these three positive and, in a way, invaluable effects for a human person that postulates and observes the moral law. Respect is treated as a side as well as immeasurable reward for human beings who display their worthiness. The authors insist on the essential relation between worth and respect. According to the authors, misunderstanding and plenty of interpretations regarding this issue in modern Kant studies arise from insufficient differentiation between potential (panhuman) and actual (moral) worth in Kant's works.

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Keywords: Dignity, moral law, respect, reason, worth, will



1. Introduction

There are key contradictory categories in each philosophical discipline that, if properly synthesized, implicitly contain its problematics. Depending on the chosen approach, the correlation between them forms the basic question and sets the vector for solving the main issues formulated in a particular discipline including disciplines about the human being.

1.1. The basic anthropological question

Probably the key philosophical question of any anthropological doctrine is the question of the relation of human nature and essence. This question involves a number of other issues, but their solution will depend on this one alone: the origin and purpose of personal existence, human prospects and destiny, opportunities and hopes, driving forces and existential meanings. In the work *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* Kant (1997) formulates these two vectors as physiological and pragmatic: “Physiological knowledge about man explores what nature makes of man, the pragmatic one - what man as a freely acting being makes of himself, what he can and should make of himself” (p. 138).

1.2. Naturalistic and metaphysical approaches

Through the prism of ethical issues, the view on man has formed two main directions in philosophy: some of them bring the natural and the essential together in different variations, thereby forming a naturalistic direction in ethics (Aristotle, Epicurus, Spencer, Feuerbach, Freud, Mill, Nietzsche, etc.), others separate and contrast human nature and essence representing the metaphysical wing (Kant, Hegel, Windelband, Rickert, Scheler, Hartmann, etc.). According to the latter, ethical virtues are self-sufficient, self-valuable and cannot be deduced from the natural existence of man, since the essence of man is intelligible and contradicts his physical existence. Thus, with a share of pathos and pride Kant writes that the metaphysics of morals completely isolated from everything empirical, i.e. not mixed with any anthropology, theology, physics, or metaphysics is not merely a necessary substratum for the entire theoretical knowledge of duties, but also desiderata of the greatest importance for the actual fulfillment of their prescriptions (Kant, 1994, p. 182). Thus metaphysics of being in Antiquity and metaphysics of knowledge in Modernity were replaced by metaphysics of morals (Snarskaya et al., 2017, p. 582).

2. Problem Statement

Accordingly, Kant's (1994) metaphysical approach views the explored the phenomena of worth and respect beyond the limits of naturalism and raises them to the height of the human spirit, although we cannot assert that these phenomena, which are really important for his ethics, were definitely interpreted by Kant, since in Kant's main works on ethics - *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *The Metaphysics of Morals* - the accents shift depending on what Kant (1994) is interested in at each particular moment. Therefore, it is not possible to give the only interpretation of the worth and respect phenomena in his writings.

2.1. Multiplicity of approaches to the phenomenon of worth

In his works on ethics, Kant (1994) offers several approaches to understanding the phenomenon of worth, depending on what is in the focus of his attention at the moment – a person, reason or free will. Obviously, all the three concepts are important, and therefore, clarification of the role of each of them is crucial for understanding the essence of these approaches.

2.2. Multiplicity of approaches related to the object of respect and the relation between worth and respect

Respect is also one of the most important concepts of Kantian ethics, but in Kantian studies there is no unanimity concerning what exactly deserves respect - a person, the moral law or its observance, which is largely caused by the uncertainty of Kant's (1994) own position.

3. Research Questions

The main research questions that are based on the above suggested exposition of the key Kantian concepts of worth and respect are: clarification of the three approaches to the phenomenon of worth in Kant's ethics; systematization of the approaches to the phenomenon of respect depending on the bearer of the moral feeling; correlation identification of worth and respect.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is based on the material of Kant's main works in this area. It is to determine the status of the worth and respect phenomena in Kantian ethics in order to, firstly, systematize his views on the limits of applicability of these concepts, and, secondly, sharpen the focus on the prior approach proposed by Kant (1994) himself, for currently there is no agreement in Kantian studies as for the relation between worth and respect.

5. Research Methods

During their work the authors made use of the conceptual analysis which enabled them to define the content of the key concepts of the study such as worth and respect; the structural and functional analysis made it possible to outline the boundaries of these concepts' applicability and build a hierarchy of the approaches to the phenomena of worth and respect.

6. Findings

6.1. To the question of dignity

Kant's (1994) works on ethics provide an extensive interpretation of worth. He repeatedly noted that human worth or dignity was the inner unconditional value of the human being which cannot be measured, has no price or equivalent; this kind of value is the prerogative man as such or humanity in his

person (Kant, 1994). Even if the person himself tries to devalue his value, others have no right to do so; a person, unlike other things, cannot be treated as one would wish to since a person possesses an intrinsic unconditional inalienable worth, which does not allow others to consider him only as a means to achieve any goal. Unlike other properties, human worth is priceless and cannot be exchanged for something else - it sacralizes human beings.

Accordingly, on the first pages of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant draws a distinction between the metaphysics of morals as a discipline dealing with what should be done and the metaphysics of nature as the theory of outer reality. Following what should be done, a free human person strives to oppose its natural inclinations neglecting personal desires and focusing on the duty. At the same time, a free person accepts the duty as absolutely necessary, i.e. as having the law status. Obviously, if the law were given to a person from the outside, his personality would not yet be involved in it - a recruit who has nowhere to escape in front of a military registration employee with a draft card does not yet have a personality, since the duty which he is obliged to is not his own choice.

Thus Kant (1996) offers us a different interpretation of worth (although he himself never systematized them), concerning the worth of the moral law and its formation: he says that legislation which determines any value must therefore have worth - unconditional incomparable worth. By virtue of its supreme status in relation to any other laws, the moral law also has worth that encourages a person to recognize its status.

Finally, in the above-mentioned works, we can mark out the third and the last interpretation of worth, for mere postulation of the significance of the moral law can still be insufficient for full comprehension of the worth phenomenon: although the knowledge of the law contributes to the moral law recognition, it does not necessarily cause a proper consequence in the form of subjection to it. That was recognized by Kant himself when he noted that ethics gives laws not for the actions themselves, but only for their maxims since to perform an act that might follow the recognition of the maxim one needs to make efforts over oneself. Therefore, in *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant (1996) distinguishes between two elements of any legislation – the law objectively representing an act, and subjective motives.

It should be noted that as far as *The Critique of Practical Reason* is concerned, for the first time worth is mentioned at the end of the first book *The Analysis of Pure Practical Reason* - in the chapter related to the motives of practical reason. However, due to the fact that the motives in Kantian ethics determine the quality of actions, the role of worth, intuitively recognized, comes to the fore in the form of free good will that brings into subjection to the law in spite of various inclinations - worth depends on the moral conduct. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant (1995) pays more attention to it: in the middle of the second section for the first time Kant narrates about human worth and repeatedly marks this word in italics as a very significant concept for the problems of morality, and human worth as dignity is considered the dignity of a rational being who on his own obeys the moral law.

6.2. To the question of respect

But what does a worthy person deserve or what is a worthy person worthy of in Kantian ethics? Kant's answer is traditional: virtue is its own reward. According to Kant, eudemonia, in contrast to Socrates' ideas, is not an invariable companion of virtue, for Kant is against morality that may be

substantiated with the help of extrinsic grounds. Also, he objects to any kind of reward for "exemplary" behavior, which would automatically requalify it into legal. Indeed, human worthiness or dignity does not mean any reward – it is only confirmation of human value that cannot have any equivalent. Neither salary nor promotion is due for dignity; on the contrary, it happens you have to pay for dignity by salaries, status, etc. Kant's ethics is the ethics of overcoming and self-restraint, it testifies the quality of human actions: Kant calls virtue a moral way of thinking in the struggle (Kant, 1995, p. 475).

However, this is not entirely true, and maintaining dignity at the proper level has some positive effects for a person which consist in some variations of the feeling of respect.

Obviously, the phenomena of respect and worth (dignity) are essentially interrelated: the tribute paid to worthiness is called respect: Kant (1996) says that the only appropriate expression for the assessment that a rational being should give to human worthiness is the word respect. He considers respect on the same level with love when he says that all moral relationships ... can be reduced to love and respect" (p. 537). He pays great attention to the phenomenon of respect in all his works on ethics – what deserves and does not deserve respect, how it manifests itself and relates to the categorical imperative. He considers respect a particular feeling, but its characteristic feature is that it is produced spontaneously by the mind; it cannot be inculcated by any extrinsic influence (Kant, 1994, p. 171). However, Kant does not provide a strict classification, and in different works he offers various interpretations of what, in fact, is worth respect. Summarizing everything that Kant says on the pages of the cited works, we can argue that Kant examines respect in relation to three types of phenomena. Firstly, the person as an end deserves respect as the person is a subject of practical reason that possesses freedom and under no circumstances is subject to objectification. Guseynov (2019) writes about that:

Against this horror, namely, the horror of human slavery, especially disgusting when it is voluntary, cultivated under the accompaniment of good intentions and under the cover of sophisticated sophisms, Kant fought all his life, both as a philosopher and as a man. (p. 7)

Secondly, the moral law deserves respect. Actually, if will is objectively determined by the law, then subjectively it manifests itself as respect for the law or recognition of the determination of will by law, which, in turn, activates personal will. A person with free will pays the tribute to worthiness in the form of respect for the execution of the moral law. As we see, the concepts of person, law and will that are distinctive for the phenomenon of worth are reflected in the phenomenon of respect as well. Thomas de Koninck (2009) rightly adds that "Human dignity, expressed in various ways, has always been associated with our rational nature and the resulting free will" (p. 17).

However, despite some ambiguity in the interpretation of what deserves respect, it should be noted that Kant claims that humanity (regardless of its attitude to the moral law and its performance) deserves negative respect compared to positive respect deserved by those who recognize and execute the moral law (Kant, 1995, p. 515). In this light, the latter one (which we highlighted above in relation to worth) as confirming the claim of the individual to represent humanity in his person is prioritized.

Kant's answer to another question about who exactly pays the tribute to the law and is the bearer of respect, is threefold: first, from the subjective point of view, adherence to one's own moral law by a

person brings about a special kind of self-satisfaction: Kant (1995) writes that there is a word that can denote satisfaction with one's own existence better than pleasure – it proves to be an analogue of happiness which must necessarily accompany the consciousness of virtue. This word is *self-satisfaction* (it was italicized by Kant) (p. 514). In another work, he writes that the more an enlightened mind indulges in the thought of enjoying life and happiness, the further a person is from true satisfaction (Kant, 1994, p. 164). In the third work, Kant (1996) defines it as a special kind of pleasure (p. 243). Undoubtedly, Kant distinguishes self-satisfaction (*Selbstzufriedenheit*) from defective qualities arising from selfish inclinations of the soul. Probably, the word “self-satisfaction” is not expressive enough, since in German, English and Russian there are somewhat ambiguous connotations of this concept: the altruistic nature of self-satisfaction is not quite obvious. Perhaps, Kant's thought could be expressed more precisely in a certain kind of attitude towards individual worthiness – a subjective experience of self-satisfaction might be more adequately rendered as a feeling of self-respect. It is the feeling of self-respect, out of which the fulfillment of duty can be accompanied, according to Kant (1996), by a cheerful mood – a joyful spirit arising from the consciousness of one's own freedom, independence from natural inclinations (p. 534). No other action can cause this feeling to such a full extent and does not correspond in its transparency to pure practical reason as only the execution of the moral law completely depends on the legislative will of the subject himself: the autonomy of will of the subject makes his moral actions exhaustively his own merit (in a high sense). Thus, even success in the field of philosophy cannot claim this high status, for in many respects it depends on innate abilities, educational institutions and teachers' help, support of the immediate family, the patronage of administration, recognition from colleagues, etc.

In addition to this kind of experience of one's own worth, adherence to the categorical imperative produces respect to the subject of actions from other members of his community: on the part of society a person who unselfishly fulfills the moral duty is also worth of respect. Kant argues that respect for the law from someone is what “the spirit bows to” in the words of Fontenelle mentioned by Kant. In another work, Kant notes that neither the gifts of the spirit (reason, wit), nor the character traits (determination, courage, purposefulness), nor the gifts of happiness (health, wealth, power) can be considered good without limitation (Kant, 1994, p. 161). Limitless goodness belongs to those who execute the moral law, which is recognized in the form of respect shown by society.

Third, from the absolute point of view, a person who fulfills the moral law is worthy of respect from the higher powers as evidenced by the admission to Kingdom of Heaven. Any ethical doctrine somehow touches on the question of the relationship between happiness and virtue – the key categories of ethics, - and Kant's doctrine, as we know, is no exception. The doctrines that aim at uniting virtue and happiness have already been mentioned, and Kant goes into detail on the theories of Epicureanism and the Stoics in this matter when he notes that the former reduces virtue to happiness, and the latter reduce happiness to virtue. Yet both, according to Kant, proceed from the false assumption that there is a necessary connection between the two. Kant's (1995) answer turns to be different: morality, properly speaking, is not a teaching about how we should make ourselves happy, but about how we should deserve happiness (p. 528). Nevertheless, we ought to remember that his point regarding the correlation of practical reason and religious morality indubitably prioritizes the former. Christian Kingdom of Heaven and Heavenly anticipations and prospects cannot serve as a stimulus for a person to lead a moral way of

life – insisting on that required both moral and intellectual courage from Kant for it threatened his personal safety and challenged the established intellectual tradition (Karimov et al., 2019, p. 4)

7. Conclusion

7.1. Conclusion on the phenomenon of worth

The key concepts in all three approaches to the phenomenon of worth are person, law, and will. Worth can be grasped as a combination of all these concepts, of which the last two rather concretize what originally a person is. They actualize the content inherent in a human being, thereby demonstrating its value. A person must practically show that his value cannot be exchanged and that there is no equivalent for his personality. In the coordinates of Kant's ethics, a human being initially has an abstract or, in Kant's own words, inner dignity (*dignitas interna*). Accordingly, the inner must become the outer, or, in Hegelian terms, the possibility must actualize and come into being. The actual performance of the moral duty triggers the mechanism of inner dignity, and its bearer becomes a person who practically follows the moral law formed by him/herself from good motives. He is a moral subject in the narrow and proper sense now. What a person is only capable of and what causes respect for him/her, must be confirmed in the activity of practical reason, must be realized, thereby an individual person must be worthy of his belonging to humanity (Dean, 1996, p. 89-90). It is noteworthy that, summing up the study of the phenomenon of dignity in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant (1994) uses all the key concepts for our study of worth:

...although in thinking the concept of duty we think of subjection to the law, yet at the same time we thereby represent a certain sublimity and dignity in the person who fulfils all his duties. For there is indeed no sublimity in him insofar as he is subject to the moral law, but there certainly is insofar as he is at the same time lawgiving with respect to it and only for that reason subordinated to it. Our own will insofar as it would act only under the condition of a possible giving of universal law through its maxims - this will possible for us in idea - is the proper object of respect. (p. 218)

Needless to say that the concepts of person, moral law and will are constitutional elements for Kant's ethics on the whole and for the three well-known formulations of the categorical imperative in particular: one of them focuses on the importance of the law, the other - on human person and humanity, and the third one - on will.

7.2. Conclusion on respect

Although Kant's ethics is opposed to consequentialist doctrines, there are three positive and somewhat invaluable consequences for a person who postulates and fulfils the moral law: self-respect (subjective), respect from society (objective), and respect from the Christian God (absolute). At the same time, each of them is principally not thematized, for a person cannot and should not count on retribution for the performance of his own duty. They are a side as well as immeasurable reward for a human being.

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