



Nietzsche's Criticism of Kant's Categorical Imperative: An Inquiry

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Abstract

Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most influential philosophers in the field of ethics, in his criticism of elder ethical systems, undercuts the philosopher's ethics and considers it inefficient. This essay, taking Nietzsche's criticism as its canon, scrutinizes his critique of Kant's Categorical Imperative and clarifies that most of his reproves of Christian morality and philosophical ethics is, in fact, a reaction against the Categorical Imperative and the generalization latent in it. The essay at hand studies notions like Will, Reason, and Instinct before arriving at the conclusion that, the extreme contrast in ethics and opposition is due to two different perspectives adopted towards the human being and his will. Finally, we will find out that the canon of ethics is the Categorical Imperative and general maxim for Kant while Nietzsche, by reevaluating the values, introduces a moral criterion that recommends we seek the morality of any action in its conformity with the will to power. At the end of the article, we will show that Nietzsche's attack on the philosopher's morality, is concerned with Kant's Categorical Imperative more than every other moral system. Regarding this interpretation, we show that Nietzsche's reaction to Kant's Categorical Imperative does not mean that Kant's Ethics can be denied. These approaches are formed in separate discourses and we can just interpret them as continuous steps of progress in the history of Ethics. Nietzsche's approach to morality can't be considered without Kant's account of the Categorical Imperative.

Keywords: morality, the Categorical Imperative, will, reason, human beings.

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Introduction

Nietzsche's criticism of morality is an important part of his thought. Through this approach, he traces morality to a new realm which is usually called metaethics. This paper demonstrates that while the basic element of moral value in Kant's viewpoint is the Categorical Imperative, for example, the general moral law (the generality of morality), Nietzsche, by reevaluating values, believes in the compatibility of morality with the will to power as a criterion for recognizing moral actions (an individual approach).

Answering a famous criticism in moral philosophy that accuses Nietzsche of returning to the same Kantian Categorical Imperative would be our objective too.

Philosophical foundation

We can straight away approach the main topic of this essay by considering the essential element of Kant's philosophical system and then investigating Nietzsche's reaction to them. The concept of duty plays a central role in Kant's moral thought, so every action has moral value based on the condition that it is done out of duty, not because of the results it brings about. This point is also one of the most important differences between Kant's thought and Nietzsche's because Nietzsche does not attach importance to duty and tries to replace it with will directed to power.

Nietzsche, refusing noumenon or anything like that, replaces Kant's metaphysical approach to ethics with a focus on human nature. Furthermore, considering the human faculties, Kant appreciates reason and renounces desire and instinct in his investigations; while Nietzsche establishes his account of morality based on the superman's human instinct. The contrast between reason and instinct sets Nietzsche's *Will to Power* against Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*.

Categorical Imperative vs. The Superman's Will

The contrast which we explained above, in this paper is interpreted in the light of Kant's account of the Categorical Imperative from Nietzsche's point of view. The purpose of this essay is to compare the two ways of interpreting morality to make Nietzsche and Kant relevant. In fact, the problem of this paper is to reinterpret the roots of Nietzsche's reaction to Kant's Categorical Imperative, analyzing the philosophical and intellectual foundations of Kant and Nietzsche.

As a matter of discussion, we will show that the Categorical Imperative, as Kant formulates it, contains three different formulations all of which are rejected by Nietzsche because of different reasons. Typically his perspective leads him to reject every noumenon and avoid any result which presupposes that.

Based on the explanation of the philosophical foundations of Kant and Nietzsche on this issue and interpreting the contrast between the Categorical Imperative versus the Will to power, we can conclude that Nietzsche's approach to the human being is entirely individualistic, and, accordingly, he criticizes Kant for trying to generalize the Categorical Imperative to all human beings. It seems that Kant's metaphysics of morals turns into moral naturalism in Nietzsche's thought. In other words, Nietzsche aims to put forward natural interpretations of human life instead of metaphysical interpretations.

Will to Power

Nietzsche's reaction to Kant's view, which criticized moral philosophy and the values in Kant's account, is broadly accepted by most scholars in contemporary thought. This approach forms by

claiming the reevaluation of values originated from the crucial ethical principle that slave morality should be replaced with the superman's morality in order to preserve the vital human values and provide the basis for the flourishing of human will. Nietzsche's reason for paying attention to the instinct is rooted in the difference between human entities. He considers a noble's morality to be perfect and affected from vital instinct. Nietzsche, who considers the Categorical Imperative as the cause of the degrading of the superman's instinct, rejects any reference to the affairs of the supernatural world.

Conclusion

At the end of the article, we will show that Nietzsche's attack on the philosopher's morality, is concerned with Kant's Categorical Imperative, more than every other moral system. Regarding this interpretation, we show that Nietzsche's reaction to Kant's Categorical Imperative does not mean that Kant's Ethics can be denied. These approaches are formed in separate discourses and we can just interpret them as continuous steps of progress in the history of ethics.

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