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Department of Higher Education
Yangon University of Distance Education**

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A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF “GOOD WILL” IN KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY FROM THE MYANMAR PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

Moe Aye Theint*

ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to prove “Why the concept of Good Will can be applied as the basis of Myanmar Philosophical Thought?”¹ It is because that the concept of Good Will in Kantian philosophy can replace as categorical discipline with the concept of *Cetanā* in Myanmar Philosophical Thought.² The research methods used are the descriptive and evaluative method.³ This study will contribute to some scholars to know the Myanmar Philosophical Thought.⁴

Key words: Duty, Good will, *Cetanā*

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is the study of what is right or good in human conduct. Ethics is one branch of philosophy and as a science “deals with human conduct in so far as it is considered right or wrong, good or bad.” A Greek word, ‘ethos’ is said to be the basis of the term of ethics. Ethos means customs and usages belonging to some social group. Used in this scene, ethics has acquired great significance with the evolution of human civilization and with the increasing complexity of human society.

The purpose of ethics is to enable to distinguish between right and wrong actions. Ethics is great importance because questions of right or wrong, proper or improper, are involved in all spheres of human activity. Ethics as a discipline is occupied with the problem of the ideals of human conduct, with what ought to be. When conduct rises from fact to an ideal, it becomes ethical. The subject of ethics is the study of values aimed to evaluate human conduct in terms of good or bad, right or wrong under the standards of society.

As compared to philosophy, ethics is a more familiar term and is used by even those who have no conception of philosophy. In common usage human beings are familiar with practical ethics rather than with ethical theory. Ethical commands are a part of every culture. But as a discipline, ethics seeks to investigate all aspects of human conduct, theoretical as well as practical. Ethics is concerned with the concepts of morality like rightness, goodness, duty,

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¹ Research problem

² Research finding

³ Research method

⁴ Contribution

responsibility, justice, virtue, conscience etc. Ethics is not only concerned with examining, judging and estimating the normal quality of human conduct but also with reflection on the nature of values. It is both a critical and objective evaluation of conduct performed by normal human beings in society.

The history of Western ethics is a continuous reflective search for an adequate and acceptable moral standard in respect of the actions performed by men individually and in relation to each other. There would have been no occasion for such a search if men did not find themselves in situations of genuine doubt concerning their conducts. To partially overcome this difficulty, one may derive the standard of action from common sense or conventional ethics.

In Kantian ethics, ethics is usually spoken of in terms of duty and doing the right thing. Kant himself thought that what was good was an essential part of ethics. Kant asked if there was anything that everybody could rationally agree was always good. The only thing that Kant thought satisfied this test was a good will. Kant then pondered what this meant for human conduct. According to Kant, only an action done for a good will was a right action, regardless of the consequence. So, Kant thought that an action could only count as the action of a good will, it satisfied the test of the Categorical Imperative.

The main objective of this paper is an attempt to prove why the concept of Good will can be applied as the basis of Myanmar Philosophical Thought. It is because that the concept of Good will in Kantian ethics can be replaced as categorical discipline of concept of *Cetanā* in Myanmar Philosophical Thought. The aim of this paper is to contribute some scholars to understand Myanmar Philosophical Thought.

Kantian Ethics

Immanuel Kant (1724-1809), was arguably one of the greatest philosophers of all time. Kant thought that it was possible to develop a consistent moral system by using reason. Kant based his ethical theory on the belief that reason should be used to determine how people ought to act.

Kant emphasizes upon inherent or intrinsic value. He holds that the laws of nature are the laws of reason and these laws of reason are reflected in the moral law which springs from man's innermost being. When the human will is governed by reason, it is the moral law which legislates within the individual. Man's moral nature, his sense of duty thus brings him into direct contact with the order of the universe. Only a rational being possesses the ability to act in conformity with the moral law. Reason demands that a man acts not on the basis of urges and personal likes and dislikes but consistently and impartially.

The moral law appears within man as a sense of ought or what is popularly called conscience. It is this sense of duty which originates through man's creative intelligence. According to Kant, it is clear that all moral conceptions have their basis and source in reason as a regulative principle in human affair. They are recognized by the ordinary reason of men, as well as by reason in its more speculative activity. The true object of reason is to produce a will which is good in itself. Devotion to the dictates of the moral law within is man's highest duty. The moral law demands the recognition of duty over the natural impulses and desires. It is concerned with what ought to be. Loyalty to this moral command is thus the very heart of goodness.

Kant describes the relation between a good will and duty. According to him, a good will is one that acts for the sake of duty. In fact, human actions have inner moral worth only if they are performed from duty. If a person performs not from a sense of duty then his or her action has no inner moral worth. If a man performs from a good motive or a sense of duty, then the action is good, even though the intended consequences do not follow.

He says that the moral quality of the act is not determined by its results. A good will or good motive is the imperative condition of the moral life. In order for the motive to be good, a

man must act from a sense of duty. If a man performs an act from inclination or desire alone, the act has no intrinsic value. For Kant, the action is a direct command by a categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is to distinguish right from wrong actions. Moreover, it is not only the test but also the unconditional directive for behavior. It is binding on everyone because each rational being acknowledges an obligation to follow reason. Kantian ethics is based on the supreme principle of morality, the Categorical Imperative, a law of morality that all humans have a duty to obey. His first principle of this categorical imperative is the following;

“Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”¹

According to Kant, the first proposition of morality is that to have moral worth an action must be done from duty. Kant regarded that all moral duties could be deduced from this categorical imperative. Here the idea seems to be that when people act immorally, they want everyone else to obey “the rules” but want to make an exception for themselves. Kant gives a second principle of the Categorical Imperative, known as the principle of humanity;

“Act is such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.”²

In the second principle, Kant states that one should act in such a way that he or she treats humanity as an end and never as means only. Here the idea is that humans are an end in themselves and that no action that does not respect human can be universal law. For Kant, the intelligent man governs himself. Man is not governed from without but from within. In obeying the sense of duty within himself, man is not obeying any outside legislator: he is obeying a law imposed by his own reason. Kant was strongly impressed with the necessity for order and law, he also felt that the central fact of life was the voice of duty, the “I ought” which implies the freedom and independence of the individual.

The Concept of “Duty” in Kantian Ethics

What is our conception of the morally good will? We can understand it in terms of the concept of duty. Kant argues that to have a good will is to be motivated by duty. This is best understood by examples. Suppose a shopkeeper sells his goods at a fixed price, giving the correct change, and acting honestly in this way.

Of course, this is the morally right thing to do. But this doesn’t show that he has a good will, since acting like this is just in his self-interest. So we can act in accordance with duty, but without being motivated by duty. Kant controversially claims that this applies just as much to doing good things for others is right and should be praised and encouraged, but these actions don’t necessarily have moral worth. If someone was to do something good for others even when they didn’t want to, but just because they believe that it is the morally right thing to do, that would show that they have a good will. So to have a good will is to do one’s study (what is morally right) because it is one’s duty (because it is morally right).

But what is morally right? What’s does a good will? Here, things get tricky. A good will isn’t good because it aims at certain ends, because there are no ends that are good without qualification. We can’t for instances, say that the good will aims at the general happiness, because happiness isn’t always morally good. So the good will must be good “in itself, just on the basis of what it is like as a will.

Morality is a set of principles for everyone. So the concept of duty is the concept of a principle for everyone. So, somehow, the good will is a will that chooses what it does,

¹ Kant, Immanuel (1958) “*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*”, trans. H.J. Paton. New York, Harper Collins. 1964. P- 88

² Ibid. P.96.

motivated by the idea of a principle for everyone. Kant thought that all human beings should be treated as free and equal members of a shared moral community, and the second version of the categorical imperative reflects this by emphasizing the importance of treating people properly. It also acknowledges the relevance of intention in morality.

Kant is saying that people should always be treated as valuable and should not just be used in order to achieve something else. They should not be tricked, manipulated or bullied into doing things.

Kant thought that the only good reason for doing the right thing was because of duty and then that people would not have acted in a morally good way. But having another reason as well as duty doesn't stop an action from being right, so long as duty was the operational reason for human action.

If human beings do something because they know it's their duty, and if duty is the key element in their decision to act, then they have acted rightly, even if they wanted to do the act or were too scared not to do.

How can this idea serve as a motive or criterion for the good will? Kant rephrases it to have a good will, people should act only on maxims that they can also will everyone to act on. Kant later calls this principle the "Categorical Imperative." People can adopt this as a maxim, a principle of choice. People choose only to make choices on the basis as maxims that everyone could act on. But this maxims doesn't specify any particular end or goal (such as happiness). It only mentions the idea of a principle for everyone, a universal law.

Kant's version of duty based ethics was based on something that he called the categorical imperative which he intended to be the basis of all others rules. The categorical imperative comes in two versions which each emphasize different aspects of the categorical imperative. Kant is clear that each of these versions is merely a different way of expressing the same rule, but they are not different rules.

The first one emphasizes the need for moral rules to be uninversalisable. Always act in such a way that people would be willing for it to become a general law that everyone else should do the same in the same situation.

The supreme principle of morality would have an extremely wide scope, one that extended not only to all rational human beings but to any other rational beings who might exist for God, angels, and intelligent extraterrestrials.

For Kant, a good motive or a good will is central while there are many things which men call good, a good motive is the only things which men call good, a good motive is the only thing that has intrinsic value. Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification except a Good will. Goodness is to be found in an inner quality of will, motive or attitude and not in an outward performance or the consequences of one's act. The true object of reason is to produce a will which is good in itself, since nothing else is always and necessarily good. Other things, like intelligence, courage and happiness are usually good, but they may be used so as to promote evil. Thus a good motive is the highest good and the qualified of all other good.

Kant explains the relation between a good will and duty. A good will is one that acts for the Sake of duty. Indeed, human actions have inner moral worth only if they are performed from duty. If a person acts not from a sense of duty then his or her action has no inner moral worth. If a man acts from a good motive or a sense of duty, then the act is good, even though the intended consequences do not follow. He says that the moral quality of the act is not determined by its results. Therefore a good will or good motive is the indispensable condition goes the moral life. In order for the motive to be good, a man must act from a sense of duty. If a man performs an act from inclination or desire alone, that act has not intrinsic value.

As the will is a good in itself and is not subjected to any external factor, an action done out of good will. Kant made the second proposition of duty after explaining the meaning of

good will. The two concepts are inseparably related because an action done out of good will has no other motive but the performance of duty.

The Concept of “Good will” in Kantian Ethics

Kant constructed the basis for an ethical law by concept of duty. Kant began his ethical theory by arguing that the only virtue that can be unqualifiedly good is a good will. The good will is unique in that it is always good and maintains its moral value even when it fails to achieve its moral intentions. Kant regarded the good will as a single moral principle which freely chooses to use the other virtues for moral ends. For Kant, a good will is a broader conception than a will which from duty. If the people were to think about this seriously and in a philosophically rigorous manner, they would realize that there were some moral laws that all rational beings had to obey simply because they were rational beings, and this apply to any rational beings in any universe that might ever exist.

According to Kant, every rational human being could work this out of themselves and did not need to depend on God or their community or anything else to discover what was right and what was wrong. Nor did them not to look at the consequences of an act, or who was doing the action. So, he believed that put forward something that would help people deal with the moral dilemmas of everyday life, and provide all of man with a useful guide to acting rightly.

Kant asked if there was anything that everybody could rationally agree was always good. The only that he thought satisfied this test was good will. It is impossible to conceive anything in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without limitation, save only a good will.

Kant begins his argument by reflecting on whether anything is morally good without qualification. He argues that only the “good will” is. Anything else can either be bad or contribute to what is bad. For instance, intelligence and self-control are good but they can enable someone to do clever or difficult bad things, if that is what they choose. Power can be good, but it depends on what use we put it donor is happiness good without qualification. If someone is made happy by hurting others, his happiness is morally bad. So we evaluate happiness by morality.

Kant then made a second claim. What is good about the good will is not what it achieves. It doesn't derive its goodness from successfully producing some good result. Rather, it is good “in itself”. If someone tries their hardest to do what is morally right but they don't succeed, then we should still praise their efforts as normally good.

The Concept of *Cetanā* in Myanmar Philosophical Thought

Cetanā as a leader of mental factors determines the behavior of body and mind. In his “The Manuals of Buddhism,” *Ledi Sayadaw*, a Myanmar Theravada Buddhism monk and scholar, describes *Cetanā*. How does knowledge of *Cetanā* involve confidence? Knowledge of *Cetanā* makes man stand on his own feet and rouses his self-confidence. Confidence strengthens our peace and happiness and makes us comfortable and courageous. Hence, knowledge of *Cetanā* is our protector anywhere.

Our past *Cetanā* has caused ourselves to be what we now are, so our present *Cetanā* will determine our future. Hence the knowledge of *Cetanā* and the glory of the future are so limitless that gives us great self-reliance.

If we realize that the evil we do will return to strike us, we shall be very careful of our action. Hence knowledge of *Cetanā* will restrain us from wrong doing for the sake of other as well as our own.

The more we know the knowledge of *Cetanā*, the more power we gain to direct our future and to help other beings more effectively.

Man himself is responsible for his own happiness and misery and his *Cetanā* creates his own heaven and hell. *Cetanā* is master of a man's destiny and determines his past, present and future.

The Concept of *Cetanā* in *Dhammapada*

It can be assumed that Myanmar ways of thinking can be constructor based on the story of *Thera Cakkhupala* and *Muathakundali* in the verse (1) and (2) of *Dhammapada*. It is the teaching of Buddha in *Khuddaka Nikaya*. Verse (1) and (2) are related with the concept of *Cetanā* and Law of *Kamma*. *Kamma* means *Cetanā* or intentional actions whether mental or physical; that is all thoughts, words and deeds. The concept of *Cetanā* can be regarded as philosophical concept based on Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Philosophy is basically an attitude and an activity of the human mind. And it does not study particularly the subject matter such as zoology and astronomy etc. But philosophy studies physical as well as mental. All mental phenomena are concerned with mind. It is clear the importance of mind in all our action from that of *Thera Cakkhupala* and *Matthakundali* in the verse (1) and (2) of *Dhammapada*.

In the story of *Thera Cakkhupala*, although *Thera Cakkhupala* was an *arahat*, he was blind. So the Buddha preached the following story why this causative event appeared. *Cakkhupala* was a physician in one of his existence. Once, he had deliberately made a woman patient blind. That woman had promised him to become his slave, together with her children, if her eyes were completely cured. But she lied to the physician that her eyes were getting worse. The physician knew she was deceiving him, so in revenge, he gave her another ointment, which made her totally blind. So as a result, he lost his eyesight many times in his later existences. Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows;

“All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner, they have mind as their chief; they are mind made. If one speaks or an act with an evil mind, ‘*dukkha*’ follows him just as the wheel follows the hoof prints of the ox that draws the cart”.³

In the verse (1) from the philosophical point of view, all mental phenomena have intention or *Cetanā* as their forerunner in the sense that *Cetanā* is the most dominant. According to law of *kamma*, *Cakkhupala*’s blindness was the consequence of his having acted with an evil intention or *Cetanā* in a previous existence.

In studying another verse, the story of *Matthakundali*, *Matthakundali* was a young Brahmin, whose father, *Adinnapubbaka* was never gave anything in charity. His son fell ill at that time he realized that his son was dying. *Mathakunndali* saw the Buddha without giving in any charity or observing the moral percepts, when he passed away with his heart in devotion to the Buddha, He was reborn in the *tavatimsa* celestial world. Therefore we can see that *Matthakundali* by simply devoting his mind to the Buddha had attained much glory. Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

“All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner, they have as their chief, they are mind made. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness (*sukha*) follows him like a shadow that never leaves him.”⁴

In this story, *Matthakundali*’s happy existence in *tavatimsa* world was the result of his mental devotion to the Buddha. According to Buddhism, man is made up of a matter and mind. And mind is composed of four aggregates such as feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness. In the mental formation, *Cetanā* (good will) is the most important one which coordinates the other mental factors. *Cetanā* (good will) is the thing which plays a predominant part in all actions of man.

³ Daw Mya Tin (Trans), Edit by The Editorial Committee, 1995, Sutta Pitaka , Khuddaka Nikaya, The Dhammapada, Verses & Stories 3rd edition, The Myanmar Pitaka Association, Yangon. P. 1

⁴ Ibid, P.2

CONCLUSION

Kant believed that morality is a matter of duty. Human beings have moral duties to do what is right to do and moral duties are not to do things which are wrong to do. Whether something is right or wrong doesn't depend on its consequences. Rather, an action is right or wrong in itself.

Only the good will is good without qualification. Another way of saying this is that it is the only thing of unconditional value. Everything else that is valuable depends, in some way, on the good will. For instance, intelligence is valuable for all sorts of purposes. In other words, it is valuable as a means to an end.

In Buddhist philosophy, *Cetanā* is the essence of human action. Culture is the achievements of man and the basic principle is the achievements of man and basic principle of their achievements is that of *Cetanā*. *Cetanā* or human will that is the unit of cause of mankind. Human culture is the *Cetanā* culture indeed. Culture is the creation of men this creation is implied by actions of men. *Cetanā* determines all actions, men is formed by *Cetanā* in various way. As Myanmar Philosophical Thought is based on Buddhism and Buddhist Cultural phenomena it can be said that the concept of *Cetanā* is the basis of Myanmar Philosophical Thought.

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The Term “Pāragū” in the Buddhist Scriptures

Theingi Cho

Abstract

The term “Pāragū” is a Pāli word, and it means “one who attains the other bank called *Nibbāna*”. In Pāli Texts, the six types of “Pāragū” are mentioned. The Buddha is “the Pāragū of the complete *Dhamma*”. An Arhat is a “Pāragū”. Those who attain *Nibbāna* where death ceases to exist are “Pāragū.” These are the expression of “Pāragū” specified by “supramundane word”, as *lokuttarāvohāra* in Buddhist Scriptures.

Keywords: *Nibbāna, Pāragū, lokuttarāvohāra*

Introduction

Today, the term “Pāragū” is widely used in various fields of study including those of literature and education. Its definition is referred to as a specialist in same fields of study concerned or an expert in that field. For example, depending on the specialization one masters

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