Mains Practice Question

Q. "An action which leads to undesirable consequences may be moral and an action that leads to good consequences can be immoral." Comment (150 Words)

08 Sep, 2022   GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Start your answer by giving a brief about Immanuel Kant's Theory.
- Discuss Kant's idea of duty.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a great German philosopher. He formulated a moral theory grounded in the idea of duty. It is a **deontological theory**. "Deontology" is derived from the Greek roots deon=duty + logos = reason. From these words, we can see that **in deontological theories an action is seen as moral in virtue of its being a duty obligation or obedience to moral laws'.**

Body

We may associate 'duty' for example with military duty. But duty in this sense is derived from a Military code. **Kant's concept of moral duty is much wider**, it is an **outcome of an individual's rational thought.** Human actions may lead to good or bad consequences. But these do not determine the moral worth of actions. In other words, an action that leads to undesirable consequences may be moral, and an action that leads to good consequences can be immoral. Consequences have nothing to do with moral obligation or duty, which alone counts for determining whether an action is moral or otherwise. In short, an action is moral if it is the outcome of a moral agent's sense of duty.

Kant says that **when any individual acts intentionally in a particular way in a given situation, he sets up a rule of conduct for others.** It is the rule which underlies his action. Intentional action is not based on blind impulse but on rational thought. Such actions are in conformity with his moral duty. If a moral agent acts according to his duty, he can rationally recommend such actions for others.

Another way of expressing this prescription is that one should obey the moral law. This raises

The question of what moral law or duty is for the individual. Kant does not enumerate a set of rules or moral duties. He describes the moral law in a formal and abstract way, the moral agent perceives his duty in any given situation by applying the formal law.

From the above reasoning, Kant derives a universally valid moral rule of action known as the

Categorical Imperative. When a moral agent acts rationally, his action is based on a rule or maxim.

The rule regulates his action. If a debtor evades repayment of his loan, he will be acting on the maxim:

"One should evade loan repayment whenever one can". When as a rational agent he acts on this maxim,

he is making an implicit recommendation that others should follow the very same maxim. Now a rule or maxim that everyone must follow would be a law, a rule of action that is universal or applicable to everyone. This is what Kant means by a universal law. From this reasoning, it Follows that intentional action is rational and thus morally permissible only if one could rationally Recommend it to others. This is the same as saying that a moral agent's action is rational and morally permissible only if he could will that the maxim of his action become a universal law.

Kant's categorical imperative can be paraphrased as: A rational moral agent should never act except in such a way that he can also will that the maxim of his action become a universal law. This formulation is Known as the universal law version of the categorical imperative.In Kant's own words,the categorical imperative can be expressed as: "So act that the maxim of your will might always hold as a principle of universal law".

Conclusion

- Kant's concept of duty is similar to the **Nishkama Karma** propounded by Bhagavat Geeta.
- Mahatma Gandhi also believed in duty-based ethics.
- Swami Vivekananda said, "devotion to duty is the highest form of worship to God".
- Kant's ethics have wide application in administration to guide actions of administrators that is based on moral and constitutional values.

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