

## ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON IMMANUEL KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND "[ADOLESCENT] DELINQUENCY"

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### ABSTRACT

*Based on Immanuel Kant's philosophy of morality, the research aims to understand his thoughts on human morals and how he views juvenile delinquency. Research was conducted using descriptive qualitative method through literature review and interview. Research discusses Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy known as the theory of "Kantian Ethics" and discusses juvenile delinquency and how Kant's moral philosophy views juvenile delinquency. Kant thought that the only actions that could be considered right would be those done out of moral obligation, not out of emotional impulse or personal desire. Based on the results of the interview, we concluded that juvenile delinquency is an act that deviates from the norms and values in society committed by teenagers. Kant, in his view of juvenile delinquency, would probably emphasize the importance of personal responsibility in adhering to moral principles. Therefore, Kant would probably judge the act of juvenile delinquency as immoral due to its contradiction with universal moral principles.*

**Keywords:** *Autonomous Will, Immanuel Kant, Teenagers Delinquency, Obligation, Philosophizing Morals*

### Introduction

According to the researchers, Immanuel Kant remains fascinating due to his views on human morals and moreover, related to juvenile delinquency scenes. Immanuel Kant was a 17th-century philosopher. Kant had such a unique lifestyle, simply put, that every time he did an activity, he had his own time slot to fulfill those activities (Kant & Patton, 2005). It was even mentioned that Kant's neighbors at that time could memorize that every half past four in the afternoon, Kant would leave the house and take some walks. Considering this situation, Kant was someone that lived regularly and was full of discipline. Kant was a philosopher in the 17-18th century, and at that time the problem for the philosophers of that century was about religious beliefs and moral practices (Kant, 1949; Llewelyn, 2003; Nagl, 2019). During the 16th and 17th centuries, there was a scientific revolution that led to a cultural movement called the "Renaissance" (Kant, 1996b).

Due to the birth of this culture, religious doctrines were challenged by intellectual elites. Friedrich Nietzsche, for instance, described the "death of God" as the shift away from religion (Leiter, 2015, 2019). Obviously, such new thinking presents complicated problems for moral philosophers. If religion was no longer the foundation of morality, what other foundation was there to rely on, if there was no God and therefore no guarantee of justice to ensure that the good were rewarded and the bad punished, then why should we bother to be virtuous (Kant, 1795). In order to respond, moral philosophers have to go back to understanding what morality means and why we ought to be morally upright.

One school of philosophy, utilitarianism, was pioneered by philosophers such as David Hume and Jeremy Bentham (Wilson, 2022). Furthermore, utilitarianism addressed ethical issues. According to Utilitarians, humans' main task would be to seek out things that would provide them with both happiness and prevent them from suffering (Han et al., 2022). These are interesting findings, but Kant believes that utilitarianism misunderstands the true nature of morality (Dufner, 2022). For Kant, the fundamental problem with utilitarianism was that they overemphasized the value of an action because of the consequences or results of that action (Alison, 2022). Labeling actions which make people happier as being good, while actions which would not, as being evil.

The authors themselves are convinced that an action may be deemed beneficial even if it does not make people happier (Hilaire, 2022), such as a friend who strictly forbids his friend from speaking harshly, in which case his friend may be offended by his friend's prohibition, but his friend did it based on his concern as a friend. Kant once said "...the only thing that is worthwhile in itself (is) intentionality (Hutmacher, 2020)". Kant's assertion made complete logical sense. We may dwell on anything that we would consider "good" - health, wealth, appearance, intelligence, etc (Kant, 1996a). However, we might also be concerned with situations where things we deem to be "good" are not always actually desirable (Métivier, 2023). For instance, an intelligent person may deceive others; a wealthy person may oppress others with his wealth; a rapist's health makes him more eager to abuse his victims, etc (Kant, 1996a). On the other hand, according to Kant, wholesome intentions were always desirable in all circumstances (Ramel, 2022). Thus, Kant claimed that goodness of intention refers to someone acting in accordance with his or her conscience .

Easily said that people have to perform something out of obligation, but at the end

of the day, how would we know exactly on what to perform. For sometimes we would face moral dilemmas that leave us confused about what action needs to be performed in order to be morally justified (Kant, 2022). However, obligation according to Kant would be self-evident in most situations. In case of uncertainty, though, by applying a general principle that Kant calls the "imperative category (Peterson, 2014)." Kant offers several versions of the imperative category. Kant offered several versions of this imperative category, one of which is to ask oneself. Another side of the imperative category proposed by Immanuel Kant states that "others should be treated as ends, not means to an end". According to Kant, "others should be treated as ends, not means to an end." This is often known as the principle of ends. It looks similar to the principle "We should treat others as we would like to be treated."

Kant defines enlightenment in his essay as "the liberation of man from enforced immaturity". Quite possibly, Kant's definition of enlightenment as "the liberation of man from forced immaturity (Bossenbroek, 2017; Norwood, 2022)." What does this mean and what does it have to do with the concept of morality - the answer goes back to the problem of religion according to which man no longer thinks and acts on the basis of himself and his conscience, but simply accepts moral rules inherited from religious tradition, or authorities such as Pastors, Imams, Presidents, Kings and even God (Kant, 1795). Indeed, this may describe what most people understand to be the spiritual crisis of the West. After all, if religious moral values are no longer necessary or as Friedrich Nietzsche said, God is no longer alive, there is no way to determine what really matters, i.e. how to know what is right and what is wrong (Kant & Korsgaard, 1998). Kant's answer to the question was that people should find out for themselves. Kant believed that "morality" would be something that could only be discovered through reason. Morality was not something that was imposed on us from outside of ourselves.

Nowadays, there is an overwhelming amount of juvenile delinquency that occurs. Some teenagers commit various negative or deviant actions that some consider to be normal things to do, and some also consider that these things are things to be proud of (Young et al., 2017). Those often refer to such behaviors as symbols of bravery. Teenage years have been referred to as the rebellious period (Kimbrell et al., 2023). However, the authors contend that normalizing the term "[adolescence] is the rebellious period" would be erroneous. In fact, by normalizing such a term, many teenagers will be increasingly

rampant in committing acts that violate norms and deviate from ethics, thinking that "what we have been doing has been normal ". The purpose of this research is to comprehend Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy and rationale on human morality and how he perceived delinquency.

## **Methods**

Methods of this research were descriptive qualitative methods, using literature review and interview techniques. Literature review conducted by searching and collecting theories related to the research topic through literature sources such as books, both physical books, e-books and journals. Interviews were conducted online via Whatsapp call to three respondents, where the interviews discussed how the respondents viewed juvenile delinquency. The results of the discussion will be presented in several sub-sections.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **A. Findings**

The authors conducted interviews with three informants, where the first informant has the status of a parent, the second informant has the status of a student and the third informant is a teenager who has been working. The authors interviewed these three interviewees by asking about the topic of teen delinquency. The first interviewee is Antoni "pseudonym" whose status is as a parent. According to Antoni's statement, juvenile delinquency is considered as deviant behavior of the teenagers. Antoni mentioned that the main factors behind juvenile delinquency were the absence of attention provided by parents and the absence of meaningful pursuits to keep the teenagers engaged.

Based on the interview conducted by the authors to Antoni, the essence of his statement was that juvenile delinquency is invariably related to the role of parents in their lives. Parents whose role is not properly performed would make a child or teenager more likely to commit deviant acts. In his opinion, parental love and attention were the most crucial things in anticipating the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. Parents who have provided the right amount of affection would make their children morally qualified. Conversely, parents who have less attention and affection or spoil their children too much oftentimes become immoral teenagers susceptible to juvenile delinquency.

Rani "pseudonym" expressed that juvenile delinquency was an act that violated the values and norms that existed in society and these actions could disturb other communities.

Rani stated that the main factor contributing towards juvenile delinquency occurs due to the family environment which arguably is not favorable, which leads to adolescents being exposed to promiscuity and eventually committing deviant acts due to the influence of this promiscuity. The essence of the statement presented by Rani during the interview process was that adolescent socialization has been closely related to acts of juvenile delinquency. Healthy associations would make adolescents less likely to commit deviant acts and vice versa. Rani also stated that teenage delinquency may also occur on the basis of the teenager's own will as teenagers are willing to explore new things to find their own identity, even though the new things they do are morally deviant.

Interviewee three, Joko "pseudonym", stated that juvenile delinquency was all deviant behavior that deviated from societal norms. In his opinion, delinquency occurs mainly due to insufficient moral education within family and school. He also claimed that juvenile delinquency occurs primarily due to teenagers' curiosity to challenge themselves to new possibilities, even though these new possibilities deviate from the norms of society. Joko stated that every teenager has the potential to commit deviant acts because adolescence is a period that is easily influenced by the environment, mass media, and friendships. Teenagers whose self-defense system appears weak, and are not provided with the grounding of religious values and lack of supervision from parents would be more likely to commit scenes of teenagers' delinquency.

## **B. Discussion**

### **Philosophical Morality Dilemmas**

Morality has been commonly interpreted as the rules for humans to thrive in life. Moral Philosophy offers itself as knowledge that offers an insight into the interests of society. Philosophical values applicable in society could be used as the foundation of virtuous and wise moral values (Kant, 1999). Immanuel Kant believed that morality refers to the values system of "how we as human beings should live well (Kant, 1999)". According to Kant, morality was divided into two parts, namely heteronomous morality and autonomous morality (Apandie & Rahmelia, 2022; Kant et al., 2011; Leiter, 2019; Manuputty et al., 2023; Merdiasa & Kristiani, 2021; Rahmelia et al., 2022; Wersig & Wilson-Smith, 2021). Heteronomous morality refers to an attitude where obligations are honored and fulfilled based on the will that comes from outside the actor, thus undermining moral values. Kant also argued that there would be nothing more frightening than when

one bows to some other person's will.

The authors saw this as occurring during the scene of juvenile delinquency where one of those reasons for juvenile delinquency was due to the influence of the friendship environment where a person who was considered arguably "mischievous" in the friendship environment would influence other individuals to do the same thing as what he did. Autonomous morality refers to people's understanding of their duties, which they perform as actions of their own free will because they are considered morally just or intelligent.

Based on the explanation of autonomous morality mentioned earlier, the authors contend that adolescents committing delinquency lack an understanding of their own duties since they cannot act in a just and morally intelligent manner even though they have free will in themselves. According to Kant, who regards virtue as the ultimate goal of pure practical reason, moral standards ultimately lead to religion (Alison, 2022; Chepeleva, 2021; Magdalena et al., 2022; Riani et al., 2022; Suriani & Betaubun, 2022; Tekerop et al., 2019). Duty was recognized as God's command based on moral standards. Since God is the morally most perfect being, both His commands and His will are morally ideal. Through such harmony, commitment to God's guidance is recognized. Kant recognized the origin of religion in such matters. Under this perspective, since morality precedes religion, morality brought the individual to religion.

Meanwhile, the authors here disagree with the views expressed by Kant, the authors are more of the opinion that it is religion that leads humans to morality, although not all religious people have good morality. The authors argue that religion leads us to morality because in religion there are teachings or commands that require or direct a person to do morally good deeds. Although in reality, not a few teenagers who theologically have a deep comprehension of their religion still commit acts of delinquency or deviate from existing norms. Based on this incident, the authors argue that religions themselves are not to blame, but individuals themselves who cannot apply the teachings of their religion properly, even though they have a good understanding of their religion, but in practice they still cannot apply the teachings of their religion. After all, no religion teaches things that are wrong or deviate from morals.

The authors argued that adolescence could be considered as self-discovery period where many adolescents wanted to experience something new. As a result of those things, teenagers often commit deviant actions and violate existing norms (Pattiasina et al., 2022;

Pransinartha, 2022; Saputra et al., 2023; Supriatin et al., 2022; Teriasi et al., 2022; Triadi et al., 2022; Wishart et al., 2022). These deviant actions were usually called juvenile delinquency. The delinquency committed by teenagers certainly has its own reasons why teenagers do this. Teenagers can no longer be called children, but are not mature enough to be considered adults. He is looking for a way of life that is more suitable for him and this is oftentimes done by trial and error which often leads to mistakes.

Within the neighborhood of friends also greatly influences in creating teenage delinquency, where the influence of friends will affect a person's attitude if within the scope of friendship he cannot sort out which ones give good influence and which ones don't. Therefore, teenagers should be more selective in choosing friends so as not to fall into deviant things. Therefore, teenagers have to be more selective in choosing friends so as not to fall into deviant things. The role of parents also strongly influences shaping the morals of adolescents so that there are no moral deviations in adolescents themselves. Through the education or guidance from parents, children would be able to sort out which scope of friendship is good for them. A harmonious family will also be more able to make children a more moral person. Not only in the friendship and family environment, in the school environment we also encounter a lot of juvenile delinquency such as fighting with schoolmates, skipping class, smoking at school, bullying and so on.

Apart from the family, friendship, and school environment juvenile delinquency can also occur because adolescents have become victims of socio-economic coercion, such as poverty (Galona, 2019; Kimbrell et al., 2023; Lakawa, 2021; Mensch, 2020; Riordan, 2021; Yosia, 2020; Young et al., 2017). The authors agree with this because in reality many adolescents who live in a low economy are more prone to commit deviant acts. The authors did not intend to demonize a society that has a low economic level, but the authors often see that this is the reality. Due to having a low or poor economy, not a few teenagers are desperate to commit deviant acts, such as stealing, begging, becoming drug dealers or users, and so on. Due to the low economy, many teenagers do not have access to formal education, which is one of the factors that support the moral improvement of adolescents.

Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher who lived in the 18th century and is recognized as one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy (Kant, 1996b). One of Kant's major contributions was in the field of moral philosophy, where he developed a theory of morality called "Kantian Ethics" (Boothroyd, 2022). According to

Kant, morality was not dependent on the effect or consequence of an action, but on the intention or intent behind the action (Kant, 1889). Kant believed that the only actions that can be considered right are those done out of moral obligation, not out of emotional impulse or personal desire (Elisha, 2008). In addition, Kant also proposed that individuals should be valued as ends in themselves, and not just as tools to achieve other ends. This concept is known as "free will" or "autonomous will", where the individual has the ability to discover for himself or herself the actions that are performed based on moral considerations.

### **Kantian Ethics: Autonomous Will**

In Kantian Ethics, Kant also developed the principle of the categorical imperative, which is a basic moral principle that says "Behave only in accordance with the maxims that you can will at the same time so that your maxims become general laws" (Kant, 1996a). This principle taught that moral actions have to be carried out with universal principles, thereby being applicable to all people and in all situations alike. Kant also taught the necessity of respect for human dignity, where every individual has the same moral value. Essentially, he meant that a person should not be treated as a tool or object, and that any action that dehumanizes a person cannot be morally justified. Kant believed that morality is a system of rules and principles that applies to all people and situations, and has an objective basis. In his view, morality is not relative or changeable, but is constant and universal.

According to Kant, the ground of morality lies in human reason. He argued that reason has the ability to distinguish between morally right and wrong actions. Therefore, individuals ought to rely on their intellect to make the right moral decisions. Another crucial concept in Kant's moral philosophy was the concept of obligation. According to Kant, moral actions are performed due to moral obligations that arise from reason. Moral obligations are not derived from emotional impulses or personal desires, but come from universal principles that should be applied to all people and situations alike. In addition, Kant also distinguishes between actions performed out of obligation (deontological) and actions performed to achieve certain goals (teleological).

According to Kant, all actions taken out of obligation can be considered morally right, because actions taken to achieve certain goals can easily be morally justified even though the goals are bad (Kant, 1996b). Based on the explanation presented earlier, the



authors understand that Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy emphasizes the importance of integrity, rationality, and morality in human actions. The authors comprehend that Kantian Ethics teaches that moral actions must be carried out because of moral obligations, carried out with the principle of universality, and have to respect human dignity in each individual.

Previously, the authors have explained that Kant's moral philosophy or what is known as "Kantian Ethics" has several principles or concepts in it (Kant, 1981). These concepts or principles are the imperative categorical principle, the concept of free will or autonomous will, the principle of respect for human dignity and the concept of moral obligation. The imperative principle teaches that moral actions have to be carried out in conjunction with universal principles, so that they can be applied to all people and in the same situation (Dufner, 2022; Peterson, 2014). However, the authors consider that this principle ignores cultural differences and different values among people and unable to accommodate complex and diverse situations in real life.

### **Kant's Moral Philosophy and Delinquency of Teenagers**

Kant's concept of free will meant that individuals have the ability to choose their own actions freely and the right actions are those that are done not out of emotional impulse or personal desire, but out of moral obligation (Kant, 1981). The principle of human dignity, which is the principle that everyone has equal moral value and our moral obligation is to respect the human dignity of each individual (Darnita & Triadi, 2022; Kurniati et al., 2023; Ligan, 2022; Pongoh, 2022; Simanjuntak, 2019; Veronica, 2022; Wirawan, 2021). It also sees that people are not treated as tools or objects to achieve other goals and any action that dehumanizes people cannot be morally justified.

The authors maintain that the concept of human dignity is incapable of universal application, due to the different views and values among different societies and cultures (Ahmad Ardillah Rahman et al., 2021; Erika et al., 2023; Madva, 2019; Mariani, 2020, 2022a; Pengky et al., 2023; Sanasintani, 2020; Selawaisa, 2023; Susila & Risvan, 2022; Utami, 2022; Wainarisi et al., 2022, 2023). In addition, the concept of human dignity could not handle situations involving conflicts between individual interests and the interests of society or the state. Obligation concept, in which moral actions have to be done due to moral obligations that arise from reason (Kant, 1981). Moral obligations are not derived from emotional impulses or personal desires, but come from universal principles that must be applied to all people and in the same situation. The authors saw this principle as

neglecting the role of emotions and feelings in moral decision-making. The authors also argued that by following moral obligations, one may neglect one's own needs and desires as well as those of others.

Through various explanations of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy and the explanation of juvenile delinquency mentioned earlier, the authors contended that Kant's moral philosophy has a fairly distinctive view on the issue of juvenile delinquency (Alison, 2022; Andiny, 2020; Christina et al., 2023; Dandung et al., 2022; Kristin et al., 2022; Loheni et al., 2023; Malau, 2021; Mariani, 2022b; Munte, 2023; Nagl, 2019; Pengky et al., 2023; Pradita, 2021; Riska et al., 2023; Siburian et al., 2023; Susila & Pradita, 2022; Tedy et al., 2023; Telhalia, 2023; Trisiana et al., 2023; Widiasari, 2021; YUEL et al., 2011). Kant argued that humans ought to act in line with universal moral obligations and ought not to take actions that contradict rational moral principles. As such, if adolescents commit acts that contradict rational moral principles, such acts can be categorized as juvenile delinquency. According to Kant, morality is neither negotiable nor bargainable and everyone ought to act in line with universal moral principles.

In terms of juvenile delinquency, this would mean that acts of delinquency, such as robbing or stealing would not be justified or tolerated, even if the offender was a teenager. Kant also argued that one ought to be responsible for their actions, and have to accept the consequences that arise from such actions. Therefore, if teenagers commit immoral acts, they should be prepared to accept the consequences of such acts, including if they are arrested and punished. Apart from that, Kant also emphasizes the importance of understanding that adolescents as humans who are still learning and developing, have the potential to change their behavior. Therefore, as a society, the author suggests that we have to provide opportunities for adolescents to improve their behavior and guide those adolescents to become responsible and moral citizens.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the authors' thoughts on Kant and his philosophy of morality, Kant was not dependent on self-interest or particular circumstances, but rather based on universal moral principles. In terms of his views on juvenile delinquency, Kant would probably emphasize the significance of personal responsibility in adhering to moral principles. According to Kant, one ought to act on their moral obligations without considering the outcome or consequences of their actions. Therefore, Kant would probably judge the act

of juvenile delinquency as immoral since it goes against universal moral principles (Kant, 1952). However, keep in mind that Kant's view of morality is not fully applicable to social problems such as juvenile delinquency. These problems involve many complex factors such as the social environment, economic factors, and the mental state of the individual. Therefore, finding solutions to delinquency problems may not only be based on universal moral principles, but also require multidisciplinary and holistic approaches.

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