

**ON THE CONCEPT OF DUTY IN KANT'S ETHICS: AUTONOMY,
FOUNDATIONS, AND MODERN APPLICATIONS**

Raja Sharma Dey and Dr. Debraj Chakraborty

Abstract

The concept of *duty* (Pflicht) occupies a foundational place in Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy, functioning as the bridge between the moral law and the will of rational agents. Kant's ethical system rejects heteronomous motivations—such as inclination, consequence, or emotion—and grounds moral worth exclusively in the principle of acting *from duty* in accordance with the moral law. This article explores the evolution and structure of Kant's conception of duty, as articulated in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). It examines how duty arises from respect (*Achtung*) for the moral law, how it embodies autonomy of the will, and how it relates to the categorical imperative—the unconditional command of reason. The analysis further situates Kant's duty ethics within the broader context of Enlightenment moral thought, contrasting it with teleological and consequentialist traditions. In its final sections, the paper addresses the contemporary relevance of Kantian duty ethics in modern moral challenges, including digital ethics, civic responsibility, and artificial intelligence. The study argues that Kant's rigorous conception of duty remains a critical moral resource for navigating ethical uncertainty in technologically mediated societies. Through a synthesis of textual analysis and philosophical reasoning, the paper demonstrates that Kant's duty-centered ethics continues to illuminate the enduring relationship between freedom, reason, and moral obligation.

Keywords: Duty, moral law, autonomy, categorical imperative, ethics, moral philosophy, modern relevance