

## Entrepreneurial Education through a Kantian Lens: Building a Philosophical Model

By

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### Abstract

*This study proposes a philosophical framework for entrepreneurship education grounded in Immanuel Kant's moral theory. Amid growing concerns about the ethical deficiencies in contemporary entrepreneurial practices and training, the research argues for a shift from outcome-oriented models to value-driven education. Drawing on Kantian concepts such as moral autonomy, the categorical imperative, and the principle of humanity, the study highlights the potential of deontological ethics to guide ethical reasoning and principled decision-making among aspiring entrepreneurs. The study adopts a qualitative philosophical research approach, specifically conceptual analysis, to examine how Kant's ethical framework can inform the development of entrepreneurial education curricula that prioritize integrity, social responsibility, and moral decision-making alongside economic success. The research discovered that integrating Kantian ethics into entrepreneurial education fosters self-discipline, ethical reasoning, and purpose-driven innovation among learners. It concludes that entrepreneurial education framed through Kantian principles promotes moral responsibility, which is essential for long-term societal development. The paper recommends that policymakers and educators infuse entrepreneurial curricula with moral philosophy, particularly Kantian ideals, to cultivate ethical entrepreneurs capable of balancing profitability with integrity.*

**Keywords:** Kantian Ethics, Entrepreneurship Education, Categorical Imperative, Moral Autonomy.

### Introduction

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a key driver of innovation, economic development, and social transformation, particularly in developing countries where job creation and youth empowerment are pressing concerns. Educational institutions have responded by integrating entrepreneurial education into their curricula, often emphasizing opportunity recognition, risk-taking, and business acumen. While this pragmatic focus has fostered creativity and enterprise, it has also revealed significant gaps—especially in the area of ethics. The dominant narrative within entrepreneurship education continues to reflect a utilitarian perspective, where actions are judged by their effectiveness in achieving goals such as profit, scalability, or impact, rather than by their moral worth (Jaganjac, , Abrahamsen, Olsen, & Paulsen. (2024). 2024). This results in a generation of entrepreneurs who may be innovative but lack the ethical depth required to make principled decisions in morally complex situations.

Scholars have called for a more thoughtful, principle-based approach to entrepreneurship education due to concerns about the cursory way ethics are treated. Conventional corporate ethics courses sometimes reduce ethics to compliance or socially acceptable behavior, failing to engage students in meaningful philosophical argumentation. According to (Pellegrini, Ciappei, Marzi ,Dabić&Egri. (2021), ethical education in entrepreneurship runs the risk of becoming unduly procedural, reactive, or context-dependent in the absence of a fundamental philosophical framework. Their model addresses this weakness by incorporating Aristotelian and Kantian

ideas to offer a moral compass based on duty, virtue, and reason. They contend that fostering moral reasoning ought to be just as important to entrepreneurship education as fostering creativity or market awareness.

Kantian ethics offers a convincing framework for morally sound business practices because of its emphasis on moral autonomy, the categorical imperative, and respect for persons. Kantian philosophy judges deeds according to their conformity to general moral principles and the intentions of the moral agent, in contrast to consequentialist theories that judge morality according to outcomes. Particularly in the complicated and unpredictable global business environments of today, this emphasis on duty and universalizability fits in nicely with the ethical goals of entrepreneurship. In support of this, Hägg, Haataja, Kurczewska, & McKelvie, (2024.) present the concept of "ethical dualism" in entrepreneurship, which refers to the conflict between upholding moral principles and pursuing organizational or personal objectives. They advocate for a deontological integration into entrepreneurship education to develop entrepreneurs who are morally conscious throughout the entrepreneurial journey.

Given these philosophical and pedagogical developments, there is a growing need to reimagine entrepreneurship education as a space not only for skill acquisition but also for moral development. Ethical entrepreneurs are those who can critically examine their motivations, consider the impact of their actions on others, and make decisions that can be universally justified. Embedding Kantian ethics into entrepreneurship curricula offers a way to cultivate such individuals. This paper, therefore, seeks to propose a philosophical framework—grounded in Kantian thought—that can inform entrepreneurial education and shape morally responsible entrepreneurs who prioritize principle over mere profit.

Entrepreneurial education has grown rapidly in response to the demand for innovation and economic development, yet it often neglects the ethical foundation necessary for principled decision-making. Current programs tend to emphasize utilitarian and outcome-based models, focusing on profit and market success while offering limited engagement with deep moral reasoning. Ethics is frequently treated as a secondary topic, disconnected from the core entrepreneurial curriculum, leading to graduates who may lack a strong ethical compass. This is especially problematic in today's world, where entrepreneurs face complex moral challenges with far-reaching societal consequences. There is a critical need to integrate a deontological framework—specifically Kantian ethics—into entrepreneurship education, to promote moral autonomy, duty-based reasoning, and respect for human dignity. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a philosophical model grounded in Kantian thought to shape ethically responsible entrepreneurs. The paper sought to critically examine the ethical principles of Immanuel Kant and explore their applicability in structuring entrepreneurial education. Also to develop a philosophical model for entrepreneurial education that integrates Kantian values such as moral duty, autonomy, and universalizability to promote ethical and socially responsible entrepreneurship.

The findings of this research will benefit educators by offering a structured, philosophical model that can be integrated into existing curricula to promote deeper ethical reflection among students. It will also support institutions in developing well-rounded entrepreneurial programs that prioritize both business success and moral accountability. For students and aspiring entrepreneurs, the study provides tools to navigate real-world dilemmas with clarity, consistency, and integrity. Furthermore, it contributes to academic scholarship by bridging

philosophy and education, opening new pathways for interdisciplinary research in ethics, education, and entrepreneurship.

### **Entrepreneurship Education**

Entrepreneurship education refers to the structured teaching of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to identify opportunities, take initiative, and develop innovative solutions in uncertain environments. It aims not only to prepare students for business ownership but also to cultivate entrepreneurial thinking—such as creativity, resilience, opportunity recognition, and value creation—in both business and non-business contexts (Fayolle, 2018; Nabi, Liñán, Fayolle, Krueger & Walmsley, (2022). Nabi et al., 2022). As economies increasingly rely on entrepreneurial innovation for growth, higher education institutions have integrated entrepreneurship education into their curricula across disciplines and academic levels.

Originally emphasizing the creation of ventures and business plans, entrepreneurship education has since changed to take a more comprehensive approach. In order to enable students to learn by doing, recent models support experiential and learner-centered pedagogies like project-based learning, simulations, and community engagement. (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021). These methods align with calls for entrepreneurship education to be transformational rather than merely transactional, equipping students not only to launch startups but also to solve real-world problems with social and ethical consciousness.

However, while the expansion of entrepreneurship education is notable, scholars have raised concerns about the overemphasis on economic outcomes—such as venture growth, scalability, and profitability—at the expense of ethical and social considerations. Nabi et al. (2022) highlight that current programs often focus heavily on practical skills and market success, with limited integration of values-based reasoning or ethical reflection. This utilitarian focus risks producing graduates who prioritize profit over principle, especially in environments where entrepreneurial practices are lightly regulated.

Consequently, there is a growing call for entrepreneurship education to incorporate philosophical and ethical frameworks that promote reflective practice, social responsibility, and principled leadership. Philosophers and educators alike argue that entrepreneurship education must go beyond technical skills to cultivate moral reasoning and ethical decision-making (Pellegrini et al., 2021). Integrating such dimensions would ensure that emerging entrepreneurs not only innovate but also act in ways that respect human dignity, promote fairness, and contribute to societal well-being. Entrepreneurial education, when informed by Kantian ethics, becomes more than a technical or economic endeavor; it transforms into a moral mission to prepare individuals who can innovate with integrity. Kant's emphasis on rationality and moral law encourages learners to view entrepreneurship as a calling that serves humanity, rather than a mere avenue for personal enrichment (Kant, 1785).

Ethically structuring entrepreneurial education through Kant's model involves embedding principles such as respect for autonomy, responsibility to others, and moral duty within the learning environment. This means curriculum development must include moral philosophy and applied ethics as fundamental components. For example, ethics-based entrepreneurship modules can help learners evaluate decisions through Kant's lens of universalizability—asking whether their intended action could serve as a law for everyone without contradiction (Nwosu & Igwe, 2014).

This approach shifts the focus from profit-maximizing strategies to value-based innovation. Educators, therefore, play a crucial role in modeling ethical behavior, encouraging students to question assumptions, and guiding them through moral reasoning exercises. Entrepreneurship, from this perspective, becomes a disciplined practice of ethical problem-solving—where success is defined by positive societal impact, not just financial returns (Rae, 2010).

### **Kant's Philosophical Bases for Entrepreneurship Education**

Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy offers a robust framework for reimagining entrepreneurship education in a manner that emphasizes ethical integrity and moral responsibility. Central to Kant's deontological ethics is the concept of the categorical imperative, which posits that individuals should act only according to maxims that can be universally applied. This principle encourages entrepreneurs to evaluate their actions not based on outcomes but on whether the underlying intentions can be deemed morally acceptable if adopted universally (Kant, 1785/1993). Such an approach shifts the focus from profit-driven motives to duty-bound ethical considerations.

In the context of entrepreneurship education, Kant's emphasis on moral autonomy becomes particularly pertinent. Moral autonomy refers to the capacity of individuals to govern themselves through reason, making decisions based on moral duty rather than external influences or personal gain. Educating aspiring entrepreneurs to develop this autonomy ensures that they can navigate complex business environments with a steadfast commitment to ethical principles. Hägg et al. (2024) highlight the importance of fostering moral autonomy in entrepreneurs to promote ethical decision-making throughout the entrepreneurial process.

Another cornerstone of Kantian ethics is the principle of humanity, which asserts that individuals should always be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means to an end. This principle has profound implications for entrepreneurship, where stakeholders—employees, customers, suppliers—must be engaged with respect and dignity. Integrating this principle into entrepreneurship education cultivates a sense of social responsibility and ethical mindfulness among students, preparing them to build ventures that prioritize human well-being alongside economic success (Jaganjac et al., 2024).

Kant's philosophy also underscores the importance of duty for its own sake, advocating actions performed out of moral obligation rather than for anticipated rewards or consequences. This perspective challenges the prevalent utilitarian approach in business education, which often emphasizes outcomes over intentions. By instilling a sense of duty-driven ethics, entrepreneurship education can produce leaders who uphold ethical standards even when faced with adverse conditions or temptations to compromise (Pellegrini, Ciappei, Marzi, Dabić&Egri. 2021).

Furthermore, Kantian ethics promotes consistency and universalism in moral reasoning. Entrepreneurs educated under this framework are encouraged to develop stable ethical principles that guide their actions across diverse contexts and cultures. Such consistency is vital in today's globalized economy, where ethical relativism can lead to justifying questionable practices under the guise of cultural differences. By adhering to universal moral laws, entrepreneurs can ensure that their ventures contribute positively to society at large (Pellegrini et al., 2021).

Recent scholarly work has begun to integrate Kantian principles into models of entrepreneurship

education. For instance, Pellegrini et al. (2021) propose a comprehensive model that combines Kantian and Aristotelian thought to delineate the soft (art) and hard (science) aspects of entrepreneurship education. This model emphasizes the development of both ethical reasoning and practical skills, advocating pedagogies that foster reflective thinking and moral deliberation alongside business acumen. Such integrative approaches are essential for cultivating entrepreneurs who are both competent and ethically grounded.

In conclusion, Kant's moral philosophy provides a compelling foundation for entrepreneurship education that prioritizes ethical integrity, moral autonomy, and respect for human dignity. By embedding Kantian principles into the curriculum, educators can prepare entrepreneurs to navigate the complexities of the business world with a steadfast commitment to ethical conduct. This approach not only enhances the moral compass of future business leaders but also contributes to the development of ventures that are socially responsible and ethically sound.

### **Philosophical Arguments among Scholars on Kant's Bases for Entrepreneurship Education**

Scholars have presented diverse perspectives on the applicability of Kantian ethics to entrepreneurship education, with some affirming its relevance in cultivating ethical entrepreneurs, while others critique its limitations in dynamic business contexts. Pellegrini et al. (2021) argue that Kantian ethics provides a foundational structure for shaping moral reasoning in entrepreneurship. They propose a dual-framework model combining Kantian deontology with Aristotelian virtue ethics, where Kantian principles supply the rational, duty-bound component of ethical action. Their model emphasizes that entrepreneurship education must teach students to recognize universal moral laws and act accordingly, thus building ventures rooted in respect, fairness, and responsibility.

On the other hand, Neck and Greene (2011) critique the rigidity of Kantian ethics when applied to entrepreneurial practice. They argue that entrepreneurship is inherently uncertain and experimental, requiring flexibility, iteration, and adaptability—traits that conflict with Kant's emphasis on strict moral duties and universal maxims. From this perspective, an overreliance on Kantian ethics might constrain entrepreneurial creativity or discourage risk-taking. Instead, they advocate for a pragmatic, effectual approach that allows entrepreneurs to make ethically sensitive decisions in fluid, evolving contexts rather than relying solely on rigid philosophical rules. Jaganjac et al. (2024) revisit this debate and suggest that although Kantian ethics may seem inflexible, it offers a corrective to the overly utilitarian mindset present in current entrepreneurial discourse. They emphasize that Kant's insistence on treating individuals as ends in themselves directly challenges exploitative business practices. In their view, the categorical imperative helps students develop a strong ethical compass, particularly in environments where regulation is weak or profit motives dominate. Thus, while acknowledging entrepreneurship's dynamic nature, they maintain that Kantian ethics equips students with the moral fortitude necessary to resist unethical pressures.

Another nuanced position is offered by Hägg, Haataja, Kurczewska, & McKelvie, (2024), who explore the tension between ethical individualism and entrepreneurial responsibility. They acknowledge the strength of Kantian moral autonomy in promoting independent ethical reasoning but argue that entrepreneurship education must also incorporate relational and contextual ethics. For them, entrepreneurship is not only a personal endeavor but also a social one. While Kant's philosophy highlights the importance of duty and rationality, it may neglect the



relational dimensions of entrepreneurship, such as empathy, community accountability, and shared values—areas where ethics of care or virtue ethics might be more suitable complements.

In summary, there is no unanimous agreement among scholars about the sole suitability of Kantian ethics for entrepreneurship education. Some scholars see it as an essential moral foundation that cultivates principled entrepreneurs (Pellegrini et al., 2021; Jaganjac et al., 2024), while others caution against its rigidity, suggesting it should be integrated with more flexible or relational ethical models (Neck & Greene, 2011; Hägg et al., 2024). Nonetheless, these debates highlight the richness of Kantian thought and its potential to provoke meaningful reflection in entrepreneurship education when thoughtfully contextualized that serve moral purpose and ethical innovations.

## Conclusion

This paper underscores the pressing need to reevaluate and reform entrepreneurship education through the lens of moral philosophy. The dominant utilitarian orientation of current educational models where success is measured primarily by profit and innovation neglects the moral responsibilities and ethical challenges that entrepreneurs regularly encounter. Through critical analysis, the study demonstrates that Kantian ethics, centered on moral autonomy, the categorical imperative, and the principle of humanity, provides a robust framework for instilling principled decision-making in future entrepreneurs.

While some scholars critique the rigidity of Kantian principles in the dynamic world of entrepreneurship, this research reveals that such a framework does not suppress creativity but rather complements it by offering a stable moral compass. By prioritizing rational ethical reasoning over mere consequences, Kant's philosophy empowers students to evaluate entrepreneurial actions within a consistent moral structure making them not only effective innovators but also responsible societal contributors. Therefore, integrating Kantian ethics into entrepreneurship curricula presents a viable path for nurturing morally grounded business leaders capable of effecting transformative change.

## Recommendations

1. Educational institutions should revise entrepreneurship curricula to explicitly include Kantian moral philosophy. Courses should address ethical responsibility and social justice by teaching students to apply moral laws universally, emphasizing the development of personal integrity alongside business skills.
2. Educators should implement teaching methods that cultivate students' moral autonomy and capacity for critical reflection. Activities such as ethical simulations, dilemma-based discussions, and case studies should be framed using Kant's categorical imperative to help students internalize principled decision-making.
3. Institutions should design a philosophical-practical model that balances entrepreneurial creativity with Kantian moral accountability. This model should integrate ethical deliberation into business planning, encouraging students to evaluate entrepreneurial actions not solely by outcomes but by their adherence to universal moral duties.

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