

Essay on Kant

a) Explain Kant's theory of ethical decision-making. (33)

Kant's theory is deontological. This means that rules are just good (because it is our duty) and they are not good because of the consequences. Being deontological means that it is always good for everyone.

Kant believed that reason was at the heart of any good rule. We all share reason and this is what will enable us to deduce a universally compulsory true rule.

Kant looked for what would make it something universally true and he said that it must be unconditionally and universally **GOOD**. It has to be good in itself (intrinsically). Kant said that this was **GOOD WILL**. Kant believed that this unconditional good couldn't be something like courage or intelligence because these things could be corrupted (i.e. a courageous thief) but he concluded that it was not possible for good will to be corrupt as it is to do with having the right motive.

Good will or summon bonum according to Kant was **to do you duty**.

Kant argued that an action must be pure and it must have no other motive than that it is your duty. If the action is done and you derive pleasure from it, it is not a pure duty as it must be **free from all self-interest**. An individual does what is right **ONLY** because it is right.

According to Kant, we can tell what our duty is in three ways. If you can say these three quotes then that certain action you are, applying them too is your duty.

- 1) "I ought to act in such a way that I could will my maxim to be a universal law."
- 2) "Treat humanity never as a means but always as an end in itself."
- 3) "Act as if you were a law making member of a kingdom of ends."

Regardless of any consequence, we must do our duty. This means that DUTY is a CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE because it is a "just do it" command and does not involve an "if" which would make it a hypothetical imperative.

Good will is shown in going through the process out working out whether an action is your duty or not.

b) Evaluate the claim that Kant's theory is of no use in the real world. (17)

Some may claim that Kant's theory is of no use in the real world because for the main, you have to go through the same system when trying to work out whether any action is right or wrong. It seems impractical.

However, it is very simple and clever. Kant sets his theory out in a neat way. For example, if someone is aiming a firearm at you, you may have the right to kill him or her. At face value, murder is wrong. How can murder be out duty? We cannot universalise it at all but we can universalise defence. If you said that you were defending yourself against the attacker then you can go through the three rules, therefore the action is right and is your duty.

In spite of this, it does seem of no use because it lacks compassion. It does not take into a count the situation at all. What is right for one person may be very wrong for another person in a different situation (or even the same). Kant's theory means that everyone has to do the same and therefore there is no lenient in between. It is absolute.

Having said this, the absolutism of the Kantian theory is beneficial for the fact that it gives a structured, ordered and unquestionable framework for moral decisions so there leaves no scope for wrong actions at all. Kant's theory prevents the selfish and unjust reaction we have in us (wanting the best for friends/family and the worst for enemies). It renders us to be less self-absorbing and more caring for the needs and rights of others.

It restores the injustice of utilitarianism (the greatest good for the greatest number) and the suffering of minorities by claiming that and acting as though all individuals are equal and should therefore be treated the same.

Nevertheless, it gives the individual no freedom of choice. According to Kant, you must NOT do an action if you cannot apply the three rules to that certain action.

Conversely, it could easily be of use in the real world for the reason that no one is used. Kant states that no human being must be used as a means but always an end in itself.

In conclusion, as I have discussed, there are clearly impracticalities if individuals were to apply the Kantian theory but also advantages over some of the other ethical theories.