

Kant

- a) 'People should always do their duty' Explain how Kant understood this
(33 marks)

Kant's theory is deontological because it is based solely on duty, and not the end result. Kant believed that to act morally is to do one's duty and therefore this duty is to follow the moral law. He uses this quote to allow an understanding of how you should act. "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe...the starry heavens within me and the moral law within me". This morality that we can understand is already innate within us (careful – Kant is not an intuitionist. It is only innate in the sense that it is a priori – that we verify it through reason and not through experience) and it is our duty to follow it, even when our emotions seem to take control of a situation. Kant argued therefore that we should not be sidetracked by feeling and inclination; we should not act out of love or compassion. Duty will override these inclinations or motives.

We can now look at another aspect of Kant's theory and understand that there is a link between good will and duty. Kant believed that the highest form of good is good will and to have good will is to follow one's duty. "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will." These duties are actions that are morally required and to avoid the actions that are morally forbidden. To receive a good consequence by performing a moral action out of the desire it brings is to act in self-interest and thus is not a morally good action, this is summed up in a statement from Kant: "a good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes. It is good in itself" For example, if a murderer was hunting down the victim and you knew where the victim was, it would be your duty to tell of where they are. Due to the fact that it is the action being looked at, to lie even in this case would be wrong. In Kant's opinion we are not moral for the sake of our emotions and virtues such as love or compassion, we are moral for the sake of duty, both duty and reason can help to guide our emotions so that we aren't ruled by them, this system of ethics created here is therefore based on reason and not intuition (good), our instinctive knowledge. In Kant's own opinion to be a moral being you must act rationally and to act rationally is to act out of good will, where you are doing your duty for the sake of duty alone and not being overruled by emotion. To act out of duty would be to perform actions that are morally obligatory and not to perform those that aren't.

The Categorical Imperative helps us to understand those actions, which are obligatory, and those, which aren't. The Categorical Imperative tells us what we ought to do. "All imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically... If the action would be simply as a means to something else, then the imperative is hypothetical; but if the action is represented as good in itself... then the imperative is categorical" Hence the fact that Kant believed moral statements to be prescriptive, where they are prescribing an action, an ought can easily become a can. The actions that are prescribed are irrespective of the result, and it is our duty to follow these moral laws, they are rules that should be agreed upon by all people however they are not. Categorical Imperatives differ from a hypothetical imperative, Hypothetical imperatives don't prescribe or demand any action. These are conditional: If I want x, I must do y. They are not moral and for Kant the only moral imperatives were categorical. Such as, "I ought to tell the truth" This is not making any relation to

desires/ needs. Again to act morally is to simply follow ones duty and not self inclinations.

One of the principles of Kants theory is that of the universal law, The Categorical Imperative seen here is that, “Do not act in any principle that cannot be universalised!” Moral laws must be applied in all situations, again referring back to the murder hunter situation discussed previously. Kant’s argument was that if you were to allow exceptions then it would harm someone (?) and have an eroding effect on society (??). It would become intolerable. (Katharine, this is not what Kant is saying at all. It’s not about harm. It’s about should. If I should, everyone should. That’s what ‘should’ means)

The second principle of the Imperative is that you should treat humans as ends in themselves. The Moral law here is that you can never use human beings for another purpose. Every human is rational and should be granted unique treatment. This therefore disagrees with Utilitarianism whereby you can sacrifice the few for the greater good of the greater number. Kant argues here that we have a duty to develop our own perfection.

The third principle is that you should act as if you live in a kingdom of ends. He sums it up in the statement “ so act as if you were through your maxim a law making member of a kingdom of ends. You could not create a maxim ‘ I may lie as all others lie’ this would lead to an intolerable society.

As discussed, Kant believes that there is an objective moral law and we know this through reason. In Kant’s theory he argues that moral statements are A-priori synthetic, whereby moral knowledge is gained from reasons and not sense experience. However differing from a –posteriori synthetic, these may be right or wrong, which makes moral statements A-Priori Synthetic.

Superb – you got the A half way through this. You really have been doing your homework. Well done. This is great stuff. Well done!!!!