

Kant vs. singer

Profession, Singers



November 29, 2012 Singer VS. Kant Duty can be defined in numerous ways but what is difficult to know is what our moral obligations are? Immanuel Kant and Peter Singer have attempted to find a more simple, rational, and supreme rule for what our duty is. Singer makes the distinction between charity and duty. He attempts to show that we, in affluent countries such as the United States, have a moral obligation to give far more than we actually do in international aid for famine relief, disaster relief and much more.

According to the reading, Singer believes we need to drastically change our way of life in order to help others. He is making the argument that “ if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it (231). ” And he defines “ bad” as “ suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care (231). ” The example he offers is a situation in which a little girl is drowning in a shallow pond. One can easily rescue her, but doing so would wreck one’s new fifty-dollar shoes.

Singer believes that morally, one needs to go in and save the girl. Anybody who would walk by and refuse to save her would be considered a horrible person. Then, he continues and introduces a different moral situation. A little girl is starving in a poor country. One can easily spend fifty dollars to save her life, but then one cannot use that money to purchase a new pair of shoes. Again, one is faced with a choice; do you save the little girl or buy new shoes? He believes that there is no moral difference between these two cases.

In conclusion, he is saying that as a moral obligation, you should save the little girl in Africa instead of buying the new pair of shoes. People in affluent

countries can prevent people dying from starvation by giving more money to famine relief without sacrificing anything morally significant. Therefore, they should. He believes that no matter how close or how far someone is, if you know you can prevent bad without sacrifice, it is your moral obligation to do so. Sometimes, the excuse people use for not donating to charity is that they don't have much money right now but when they do, they will.

Plus, they acknowledge the fact that there are other people who do have extra money at the time, so it is their responsibility. On the other hand, they also know that a lot of these people have the money but choose not to help. And the fact that they don't help does not justify a person with less means not to help. In the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant is looking to find an understanding of morality that can be drawn from first principles rather than from empirical experience, which is knowledge that we gain from experiences.

Morality needs to be established in pure reason and not gained from human experiences, but applicable to any and all rational beings. He is attempting to come up with a rational supreme principle of morality. He begins by addressing the idea of duty. Kant says that the only quality that is actually good is good will. Any other quality can be accompanied by bad will. And good will is not good because of what it achieves, it is good for the reason to do it. He argues that reason must be meant to help us develop a good will.

The purpose of having a good will is not to do good things, it is good in itself. And a person's will is only good if they are motivated by duty, not any selfish wants. The idea of a good will is supposed to be the idea of one who only makes decisions that she holds to be morally worthy, taking moral

considerations to guide their behavior. Kant believes that the fundamental principle of our moral duties is a categorical imperative. A categorical imperative is a command that expresses a general, unavoidable requirement of the moral law.

Its three forms have universalizability, respect, and autonomy. Together they establish an action that would be considered “good” only if we can will everyone to do it, it enables us to treat other people as ends and not as the means to our own selfish ends, and it allows us to see other persons as mutual law-makers in an ideal ‘realm of ends.’ Kant believes that the difference between being motivated by a sense of duty in the ordinary sense and being motivated in his sense was that he thinks that motivation by duty is motivation by our respect for whatever law it is that makes our action a duty.

Our respect for the laws that guide is qualified in the sense that we pick which is more or less important and which has more value. In contrasting and comparing Kant’s and Singer’s argument, I have come to the conclusion that Kant’s argument is more realistic than Singer’s. Singer is expecting everyone to accept the fact that helping others, whether they are close or far, is one’s duty and one must act upon it. He is being too optimistic to think that humans will give away what is not necessary and help the people who are starving instead. His argument is weak because it is achievable. Singer is asking us to sacrifice too much and this makes it unattainable. Kant on the other hand is acknowledging that the human species is rational and is always progressing towards the good. He believes that it is one’s duty to raise ourselves from the unpolished state of our nature and move forward towards humanity. He also knows that our actions will be based on pure reason. And

he knows that the motivation for duty consists on the bare respect for lawfulness. These laws he speaks about are established by the city or the state and they're a guide for our moral compass. His expectation of us is much more attainable and real.