

Ethics essay kant

Philosophy



Ethics Essay — Kant Explain Kant's reasons for using the categorical imperatives. (25 marks) Kant's moral philosophy is deontological; it rests on the notion of duty or obligation from the Greek word ' Deon'. The argument is that we should conduct our affairs out of strict duty to the moral law. Kant wrote three major works on moral philosophy: Fundamental principles of the metaphysics of moral, Critique of practical reason and the metaphysics of morals. Kant formulated the categorical imperative in three different ways: The first (universal law formulation) " Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" In other words whatever moral law (maxim) you chose to adopt, would it make rational sense for everyone to adopt it as well? If so, then let that moral law guide whatever course of action is open to you. The second (humanity or end in itself formulation) " Act in such a way that you always treat humanity whether in your own person or in the person of any other never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end" In other words treat people with respect that, as people they deserve. Moreover treat yourself with the same respect as you would treat others. The third (kingdom of ends formulation) combines the two " All the maxims as proceeding from our own (hypothetical) making of law ought to harmonise with a possible kingdom of ends" In other words we should regard ourselves as members of one community and that all members of that community are deserving of respect as free, rational individuals. A categorical imperative is a command which is absolute and unconditional, it must be obeyed. It has internal value which means that we must dutifully obey it simply because it will bring fame, fortune, good reputation or a happy life, but simply because by reason alone we see it to be universally valid, logical and non-contradictory. It is

characterised by the word 'ought'. So for example 'you ought to obey the categorical imperative because it is the moral law' Kant argues this point by saying 'if it is conceived as a good itself and consequently as being a necessarily the principle of a will which of itself conforms to reason, then it is categorical. It is a law which must be obeyed, it must be followed. Kant believed that the highest good for humanity, was to live according to the categorical imperative and that this was to do only those things which everyone else could and should logically do, 'Act as if the maxim of your action was to become through your will a universal law of nature'. Some people may say that there is nothing wrong if someone tells a lie, for example telling x you don't know where y is but in fact y is hiding from x. Kant would argue that telling lies creates problems, because in order for a liar to be believed they operate on the basis that people are telling the truth most of the times. However if everyone were always telling lies when they wanted to, then logically we would end up where people would never know if someone was lying to them or not. This would mean that no one could actually tell lies, as other people would have no reason to believe them. Kant stated that the act of lying is logically irrational. Therefore Kant's reasons for using the categorical imperative is to act in only ways in which we would be happy for other to, and underpinning the three laws. In terms of Kant's categorical imperative the most logical and rational thing we can do in terms of acting correctly is to think about how our actions will affect those around us and to only do those things that will not infringe on other people's rights to live their own life. Kant reasons for using the categorical imperative can be explained if you ask yourself one questions 'what would happen if everyone did this?' and if we conclude from this that what we are about to

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do is not going to infringe on the liberty of others to freely live their life, and it something that everyone else can logically do then we have a duty to do it. If not, or if we are doing something for a personal or emotional gain, then we ought not to do it. This is why Kant said that the categorical imperative will never lead us to do something that we ought not to. Ought to implies can, can implies we should do it. For example this is why Kant would be against abortion as, if everyone had an abortion then eventually there will be no babies. Kant's reasons for using the categorical imperative is simply for all humanity to do good by themselves and by everyone else, trying to make the world good, it is our duty to do good, to strive for the good.