Review of Kant and the Moral Argument

Objectives:
1. To review Kant’s ethical theory to ensure that students understand the theory and its implications.

Learning strategy
1. What makes an action moral? Brainstorm
2. What makes an action moral?
   a. Kant’s starting point: human freedom and rationality; we can all choose how to behave
      i. Kant’s example
   b. Morality is based on reason
      i. What is the more sensible course of action problem?
   c. What makes an action good? If it is motivated by the Good Will (it is done for the right reasons).
      i. What is the morally right approach to making a decision exercise?
   d. Are the following actions wrong? Are they always wrong? Can these actions be justified in any circumstance?
      i. Murder
      ii. Rape
      iii. Genocide
   e. If something is right or wrong according to reason, anyone who reasons about the issue should also be able to work out what is right or wrong. Therefore, actions are good or bad universally.
   f. Sum up the characteristics of Kant’s approach to moral decision making.
3. What is our moral duty? Categorical Imperatives:
   a. An action which corresponds with the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative
   b. Go through the three formulations
   c. Consider which actions go against them:
      i. Rape
      ii. Stealing
      iii. Lying
      iv. Doing charity work
4. Hypothetical Imperatives
   a. Some rules seem to apply universally, but actually are limited to a particular situation. These are called Hypothetical Imperatives
   b. Structure of Hypothetical Imperatives
5. Testing whether a moral rule is a Categorical Imperative
   a. Kant suggests two tests:
      i. Contradiction in the Law of Nature
      ii. Contradiction in the will
6. Contradiction in the Law of Nature
   a. Look at the following rules. Are they logical? What would the consequences be if these rules were followed universally?
      i. Tell the truth only when it suits you.
      ii. Make promises but never keep them.
   b. A rule which is illogical and could not be applied universally is called a contradiction in the law of nature.
7. Contradiction in the will
   a. Look at the following rule. Is it logical? What would be the consequences if this rule was followed universally? Would it be logical to ‘will’ (want) the situation that would result from this rule?
      i. Only help yourself.
8. Strengths and weakness of Kant (students come up with them).
9. Apply Kant to a dilemma (Palmer exercises 4 and 5).
10. Kant’s moral argument review:
    a. Complete the PowerPoint review.
    b. Then complete the review handout.
Kantian Ethics

Objective:
1. To review Kant’s ethical theory to ensure that you understand the theory and how to apply it

Using this handout:
In order to understand Kant’s theory you need to work your way through the exercises on this handout as well as reading the notes.

Starter
1. How, if at all, are you different from any other animal? (Think monkey, rat, worm, whale, snake, crocodile)
2. What makes an action moral? List any ideas you can think of:

Human freedom and rationality
1. According to Kant, human beings have a choice about how they behave; they are rational and have free will
2. Kant gives 2 examples:
   a. The king threatens a man with death unless he will lie and say that a person the king dislikes has plotted against the king.
   b. A man considers raping a woman he lusts for. However, outside the man can see a gallows on which he would be hung if he commits his act of lust.

What conclusion does Kant reach from these examples?

3. Kant calls freedom a ‘postulate of pure practical reason’ because pure reason has a practical application to our actions and without freedom there is no moral responsibility

Morality is based on reason
1. Kant argues that the morality of an action can be known through reason. E.g. are any of the following actions irrational? Are they immoral?
According to Kant, an action is immoral if it goes against reason, or prevents another person acting according to reason.

a. E.g. is murder wrong?
   i. Kant says yes.
      1. For Kant the wrongness of murder comes from the fact that you are exploiting the person to get your own way over them and secondly from the fact that you are preventing them acting freely and rationally.

b. Kant says that stealing is immoral. Why would he say it is wrong?

What would you say is the highest good? I.e. what is the supreme principle of morality?

‘What is the supreme principle of Morality’?

Kant wrote a whole book ‘the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals’ (1783) to answer this question. He aimed to find a principle of morality that encapsulated what is the highest good – the thing that is good in itself. He calls this thing the Summum Bonum

The Summum Bonum – or - The Good Will
1. Kant suggests that the only action that is truly good is the one that is in accordance with the Good Will. Meaning that the action is done because it is good to do in itself, not because of any consequence of doing the action.
2. Acting out of Good Will means that you do actions because they are right to do, not because of your feelings, inclinations or
wishes. Acting out of Good Will means that you do an action because it is your duty to do it.

3. Kant gives the example of a shopkeeper to illustrate this point
4. Kant used the phrase Autonomous Will to refer to when the Will is motivated by reason alone. In this case it is called the Good Will.
5. The term Heteronomous Will refers to when the will is motivated by other factors such as emotion. In this case actions are not carried out solely because they are right to do but also because of other factors like emotion, inclination, bias or prejudice. All of these things do not have a rational basis.

Consider the following statements. Which ones are examples of the Good Will at work? Give reasons to support your answers:

1. It is my duty to preserve my life even though I find it unbearable
2. It is my duty to punish my child
3. It is my duty as a parent to send my child to a good school
4. It is my duty as a motorist to obey the traffic lights
5. It is a duty as a Nazi to kill Jews

Universal rules
1. Because rationality is the basis of moral law according to Kant, he concludes that rules (he calls rules Maxims) must be universalizable.
2. By this Kant means that a moral rule is rational and therefore applies universally, because any rational person thinking about the issue would reach the same conclusion.

Universal rules
Consider global warming:

1. What is it?
2. Should something be done about it?
3. Is it a moral duty to do something about it?

Are the following actions wrong? Are they always wrong? Can these actions be justified in any circumstance?

1. Murder
2. Rape
3. Genocide

Kant on morality: key points so far:

1.
2.
3.
4.
What is your moral duty?

- Kant calls a person’s moral duty an *imperative*.
- Kant distinguishes two types of *imperative*:

**Types of Imperatives**

1. **Hypothetical Imperatives**
   - c. Some rules seem to apply universally, but actually are limited to a particular situation. These are called Hypothetical Imperatives
     - i. If you want to be healthy do exercise
     - ii. If you want to go to university work hard at school
   - d. Hypothetical imperatives refer to rules which achieve an instrumental good i.e. an instruction that tells you what to do to achieve some specified result.
   - e. Hypothetical imperatives do not have to be followed as they do not have universal scope.

2. **Categorical Imperatives**
   - a. Categorical Imperatives refer to moral rules which it is always your duty to do or follow universally.

**The three formulations of the Categorical Imperative**

The key idea of the Categorical imperative is that it your duty to act rationally and this includes treating all rational beings equally.

Kant put forward three formulations of the Categorical Imperative; they each make this point.

For an action to be moral it should be in accordance with the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative:

**Learn the formulations:**

1. ‘Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law [of nature].’
2. ‘Act in such a way that you always treat humanity whether in your own person, or that of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.’
3. ‘Every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxims always a law making member of the universal kingdom of ends.’

**Testing whether a moral rule is a Categorical Imperative**

Kant suggests two tests:

**Test 1: Contradiction in the Law of Nature**

A rule which is illogical and could not be applied universally is called a contradiction in the law of nature.
Look at the following rules. Are they logical? What would the consequences be if these rules were followed universally?
1. Tell the truth only when it suits you
2. Make promises but never keep them

Test 2: Contradiction in the will
A rule which it is logical to universalise but no one could logically will the situation which would result from the universalising of the rule.

Consider the rule: *Only help yourself*
1. Is it logical?
2. What would be the consequences if this rule was followed universally?
3. Would it be logical to ‘will’ (want) the situation that would result from this rule?
4. Are the following imperatives universalizable?
   a. Never speak until you are spoken to
   b. Sell all you have and give it to the poor
   c. Never have unprotected sexual intercourse to prevent overpopulation
   d. Help yourself
   e. Lie when it suits you
   f. Jump the queue
   g. Let poor people help themselves

Strengths of Kant’s theory: | Weaknesses of Kant’s theory
Kant’s Ethics and the Moral Argument

Kant rejects Divine Command Theory

Why? (think about morality deriving from reason)

Is doing one’s duty enough?

Kant states that we fulfil our duty by obeying the moral law and achieving the highest good (the Summum Bonum)

A modification to the Summum Bonum

In his later *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant points out that the Summum Bonum is also involves the *Bonum Consummatum* – by which Kant meant actually achieving the good.

This can be explained with an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If a person attempts to do their moral duty (act according to the <em>Good Will</em>) how would the person feel if they did not act according to the good will?</th>
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Unhappy and unfulfilled

This leads Kant to say that the *completed good* involves not just the achievement of the *Summum Bonum* but also that the achievement of the *Summum Bonum* results in a state of happiness and fulfilment.

**i.e. virtue and happiness go together.**

From this Kant concludes that doing your duty is not just about achieving the highest good but it also involves the fact that that doing your duty results in you having a state of happiness and fulfilment that would accompany the achievement of the highest good.
Is the Summum Bonum achievable?
Kant argued very clearly that moral rule can only apply to us and be meaningful to us if it is achievable. E.g. It is only meaningful to say *Do not murder* is a moral rule if we really can live our lives without murdering.

• However, Kant was well aware that many people try to live morally good lives, according to reason and yet there lives are miserable. For example, evil people often appear to profit while good people suffer.
• Kant argued that if this situation was permanent, morality would be meaningless, because moral goodness would not be achievable.
• Therefore, Kant argues that for morality to be meaningful the *highest good* (i.e. unity of duty and happiness) must be achievable.

How does Kant solve this problem?
1. Kant postulates the existence of God as a practical necessity.
2. If God exists, the unity of moral goodness and happiness is possible in the afterlife, if not in this life.

So, in the end - Kant’s moral argument:

The problem: How do you solve the following problem?
*Premise 1:* Moral people have duty to achieve the highest good
*Premise 2:* It must be possible to achieve the highest good if you are obliged to achieve it to be morally good
*Premise 3:* It cannot be guaranteed that a human being can achieve the highest good
*Conclusion:*

Kant’s moral argument could be stated as follows:
1. Moral action is about doing one’s duty
2. The reason to do one’s duty is to achieve the *Summum Bonum* (the highest good)
3. However, in the world people can do their duty and yet still not achieve happiness because of corruption and wickedness in the world.
4. If the highest good is not achievable, what is the point of aiming to achieve it?
5. Therefore, the highest good must be achievable
6. What could make the highest good achievable?
7. Answer: God
8. Conclusion: Therefore, we should postulate the existence of God.