

3.

Kant's moral theory is often deemed to be detached from the 'real world' or is deemed to inhuman and cold. These objections often do not hold up and come largely from emotive reactions to the ideas rather than criticisms of the arguments Kant presented

An essential part of Kant's theory was that is deontological, meaning that it disregarded consequences as something that was worthy of moral significance. This is something that is often deemed as making it out of touch with the 'real world' as in the 'real world' consequences do matter significantly and hence are of moral value. However, there are numerous issues with treating consequences of moral weight. This is easily described in a scenario: imagine there are two individuals who both plan on committing a mass killing at their local town hall with their motivation stemming from hate of some kind. Both individuals travel to their respective town halls to commit their crimes. One gunman is successful in killing numerous people before being arrested, however, when the other arrives he fails to kill anyone and is promptly stopped. If we are counting consequences into the equation when judging the morality of these events then it would seem that the former shooter committed an act which was more immoral than the action of the other individual. Yet this does not seem to be particularly fair, since they both aimed to commit an awful crime and did so with the same will, it was only due to chance that one was more successful in their violent act. As a result of this I find the objection to Kant's dismissal of consequences to not be very convincing

Kant instead argued that an action can only be considered morally praiseworthy if it is in accordance with the good will, the good will being that the action is taken exclusively because it is the individuals moral duty to do so. Many people might describe this as 'cold' as we might think of a generally good person acting out of kindness or love to those around them. However, Kant would reply to this by saying that those who act, even in an action which is moral, for any other reason than simply because it is moral cannot be considered

morally praiseworthy as all their other motivations have no intrinsic moral quality to them. Furthermore, notions of love or kindness could result in individuals acting in ways which which are not, under Kant's system of ethics, moral. Such as lying to a protect a loved one

Another key part of Kant's theory is the idea of people being autonomous rational actors. What this means is that to Kant, all individuals have free will and the capacity to use reason, this was very important to his theory

This is because of the idea of the categorical imperative. This idea states that in every situation there is only one moral action, which we can arrive at by reasoning. As a result, if there is only one true moral outcome, then we must will all people to act in accordance with that maxim. This in turn means that the world we will to happen must be logically functional and must not contradict the good will

To understand this process it is useful to develop a maxim. We could take one such as 'I ought to lie whenever it is convenient to me'. After we have created a maxim the next stage is to universalise it, after which such a maxim could read 'Everyone ought to lie whenever it is convenient to them'. After such a point it becomes important to check for a contradiction in conception

A contradiction in conception occurs when the world we would will to exist if we will everyone to act as we did in a scenario is logically impossible. The maxim 'Everyone ought to lie whenever it is convenient to them' generates such a contradiction in conception. This is because the ability to lie is contingent on the truth existing. However, if everyone were to lie whenever it is convenient to them then a) people would no longer be able to know the truth on anything and b) no one would believe anyone when they made a statement because everyone lies so frequently. So, if no one believes lies and the truth no longer is existent in public discussion, then the ability to lie becomes impossible as it is contingent on truth and lies being able to be separated. However, if they cannot be because everyone is lying then the mere act of lying becomes impossible. As a result of this, or any, contradiction in conception we have a perfect duty not to do whatever generates the contradiction in conception, in this case lying. This is because it cannot be moral, as morality is derived from reason, as if everyone were to do it that scenario would be logically impossible

The style objection brought up in the question might be brought up here with exclamations of the theory being detached from reality as in reality not everyone will follow your maxim and that to not act in a certain way because of a hypothetical logical world is absurd. However, I don't view this criticism to be particularly substantive. It misses the point of what Kant as argues up until now, he doesn't propose that we shouldn't lie because if everyone were to lie the consequences would be disastrous. Kant was fully aware that not everyone in the world would start lying all the time or even follow his theory at all, furthermore, the characterization of any contradiction in conception as a consequence is a misunderstanding of the theory. Kant's theory is rooted purely in our will, and how logical consistent our will is. If our will, when universalized, because of the contradiction in conception, is found to be logically impossible then we cannot will it. It is not about the consequences of our actions but rather the logical consistency of our will. Some may describe this as being cold or cruel

but I fundamentally disagree with the notion that something has to be warm and joyful to be correct or agreeable

Another criticism lofted against the contraction in conception and universalization of is that the system can be 'gamed' to create technically universal maxims which avoid the scrutiny Kant aims for. Technically such maxims as ' , sitting in this philosophy exam in 2019 ought to cheat in paper 2' is technically a universal maxim and one which does not generate a contradiction in conception as there is no logical flaw with it being implemented universally. People call this out as a significant flaw as it means that, even though they are clearly opposed to the direction that Kant wishes to go down, they still technically pass under his system. However, I don't view this criticism as too damaging either. Since, Kant is not concerned with consequences, I don't think it matters if some people could use his theory wrongly to justify immoral actions. This is because these individuals would clearly not be acting in accordance with the good will as they are instead trying to manipulate Kant's conceptions of duty and morality to fit their needs. If someone was genuinely trying to follow the good will then they would be taking the theory as it was meant to be interpreted, those who might not are not acting in accordance of the good will anyway and as a result their actions could not be considered morally praiseworthy

After the contradiction in conception the next key stage in Kant's theory is checking for a contradiction in the will. After such a maxim such as 'everyone ought to care for those around them' has been found to have no logical contradiction in its universalization the next important step is to see if it would generate a contradiction of the good will. If it were to do so then it would be treated as an imperfect duty, something which we should do sometimes, only when it does not contradict the good will

The first type of instance this might occur in would be if this maxim contradicted a perfect duty. With the maxim given about helping people this could be seen. Imagine someone had asked for your help, and when you obliged they asked you to lie to someone to help them out. Since we have a perfect duty not to lie, this would contradict our perfect duty and as a result could not be willed. Hence, we can see that duties such as helping others or yourself could only be done insofar as they do not contradict a perfect duty

Another scenario in which we would not fulfil an imperfect duty is if it would result in us failing to treat someone as an autonomous rational agent, or to act in a way which would limit their capacity to do so. This is important to Kant as, if we were to universalized the ability to treat people not as autonomous rational actors, then we would will a world in which all of us would be reduced in our capacity as rational autonomous agents which would thereby impede on our ability to make moral decisions as reason is essential to the categorical imperative. These type of scenarios could occur when a maxim would breach the consent of an individual, deceive them or exploit them due to circumstance or character. This could be seen if we forced someone to help or we exploited someone's emotions to make them help us

Even those steeped in knowledge of the 'real world' wouldn't allow for decisions to be made which impede on an individual's ability to make choices and act as an individual agent so I do not feel this criticism holds much water here

However, those who might be agreeable to the statement in the question might generally find Kant's theory to be detached from real life as it is seemingly impossible to fully engage with. Even if we could achieve a state of mind where we are only led by the good will rather than our emotions. It would still be nearly impossible for us to make effective moral decisions as a lot of the time as we do not have the time or resources to reason and debate extensively on how we should act. Nonetheless, while I am sympathetic to this sentiment I do not think it to be an effective rebuttal. Just because a moral theory is hard to follow, doesn't mean it isn't correct. Furthermore, it seems that any moral theory which an individual could follow accurately 100% of the time and lead a good life by its standard would almost certainly be insufficient in explaining morality

Overall, I view the criticism proposed in the question to be not hugely fair or reasonable as a response to Kant's theory. It seems to be rooted in consequentialist and emotive driven ideas which failed to properly characterize or understand his theory on his terms and as a result failed to give an adequate criticism