

## Candidate 4 evidence

### Kantianism Essay

I do not believe that Kantianism provides a successful response to this scenario, due to the problems with formulating maxims, the problem of conflicting duties, the problem with consequences, and the fact that motives other than duty are ignored.

Kantianism is a **deontological** moral theory, with the word '*deon*' meaning duty or obligation. It claims that everything we need to know about morality can be known *a priori*- before we experience it. This is known as the **sovereignty of reason**- we do not need to know what consequences come after our actions, because as long as we fulfil our moral duty, we have done the right thing. Kantianism believes that **duty** is the most morally valid motive for completing moral actions, as we cannot control our internal feelings such as love, compassion and bravery, and it is thus believed that we cannot fault or praise someone for something outwith their control. The **Universal Law Formulation** is Kant's idea that any action we describe as a duty must be able to be universalised- apply to everyone equally, regardless of circumstance. Some duties are **Perfect Duties**, meaning we must never break them. For example, Never Kill is a **Perfect Duty**. This is because its opposite, "Always Kill" is completely illogical, and a world where everyone followed the rule would be impossible to live in, as everyone would be dead quickly. This is called a **Contradiction in Conception**, where a maxim is fundamentally impossible to be followed by every person. If a maxim is logically possible but a rational person would not want to live in a world where we always have to abide by it, this is called a **Contradiction in Will**. This means that although the maxim is feasible to do, you would not want to do it all the time. An example of this is "Develop Your Talents". It would not be reasonable for us to always have to develop our talents, but it is still a morally good thing to do, making it an **Imperfect Duty**- something to be done when we are able to. Kantianism also believes that we should treat every single person as their own rational, autonomous being, by treating them as an **end-in-themselves**, rather than simply a means to an end without their permission. An example of treating someone as a means to an end is asking them to donate to charity while secretly pocketing the money yourself- this does not respect their ability to make fully formed decisions on their own behalf, with all of the facts.

*"You are hiding a group of innocent people in your home during a time of political turmoil. A malicious authority knocks on your door and asks if you are sheltering anyone. You know that if you tell the truth, the lives of those you are protecting will be in immediate danger, and they will likely face severe consequences."*

A Kantian would start off this scenario by deciding two possible choices they could make here. For example, this could be "Lie to the Authority" and "Do Not Lie to the Authority". They would then look to see what maxims (rules) we could uncover from each one. In this case, it could be "Always Lie" and "Never Lie". They would then see if either maxim could be universalised. The maxim "Always Lie" fails the Contradiction in

Conception, due to the fact that a world where everyone lied would result in a breakdown of knowledge and is logically impossible. Therefore, its opposite, "Never Lie" would become a Perfect Duty, a rule we must always follow. They would then apply the End-In-Itself Formulation, to ensure that everyone is being treated as a rational being, autonomous and fully informed while making their decisions. In this case, lying to the authority is treating them as a means-to-an-end, because you are not respecting their right to decide with the full knowledge. Therefore, a Kantian would advise us to "Do Not Lie to the Authority", as doing so would break a Perfect Duty, and would be treating the authority as a means-to-an-end, rather than an end-in-itself.

One problem with Kantianism is the problem with consequences. Although he claims that we can know *a priori* whether or not an action is moral, it goes against our intuition to simply ignore the consequences that arise from our actions. For example, in this scenario, telling the truth can lead to bad consequences for not only us, but also the innocent people we are hiding in our house. Another example of this could be not stealing for our starving child because it is wrong, but the consequences of that are the child is taken away from us. A Kantian would reply that not focusing on consequences allows us to be moral no matter what happens, as consequences are outwith our control. However, I believe this is unsuccessful as it is still something we humans do instinctively in our everyday lives, so to go against this is to go against our natural grain.

Another problem with Kantianism is the problem with motives. Kant tells us that the only morally valid action is acting out of duty, when there are other, stronger motivators, such as love and bravery. Kant would tell us in this scenario that doing our duty of telling the authority is more morally correct than doing it out of compassion, even if the two actions and consequences have the same end result. Some Kantians would argue that this allows us to be rational and not punish people based on uncontrollable factors, but I disagree, as in our court system, we use these emotions to determine whether or not someone is more or less guilty of the crime of murder, by determining the degree to which they wanted to do it. We cannot always act from duty, as that would create a cold, calculative world.

A third problem for Kant is the problem of conflicting Duties. Although Kant tells us that Perfect Duties should be carried out over Imperfect Duties, he never advises us on what to do if two Perfect Duties or two Imperfect Duties conflict. For example, in this scenario, it could be argued that the maxims of "Do Not Lie" and "Do Not Kill" are conflicting if you know the authority will execute these people, and we are not told which one takes priority over the other. Another example of this is the Imperfect Duties "Develop Your Talents" and "Help Others". If we are given the option to study for an exam or volunteer at a soup kitchen, Kant never tells us which one is more morally valid. Kant could reply that Perfect Duties never conflict, but these previous examples disprove that.

A final problem for Kantianism is the problem with formulating maxims. Based on my end goal, I can twist the choice of actions to reflect Maxims that allow me to commit whatever choice I want to. For example, in this scenario, I could change it to "Always Hurt Others" and "Never Hurt Others", and therefore would be advised to do something completely different, merely in the way I've worded it. A Kantian could reply that you will know whether maxims are correct or not if you apply them correctly, but Kant never clarifies whether or not this course of action is still as valid as the other one, especially due to the completely opposite advice we are now given using his method.

In conclusion, Kantianism gives an unsuccessful response in this scenario, due to the different ways maxims can be worded to benefit our goals, the fact that we as humans still have to think about consequences despite our moral duties, the fact that we are asked to be cold and calculating when it comes to doing the morally correct thing, despite emotions being an essential part of what makes us human, and the lack of advice on what to do if two duties conflict in a moral dilemma.