CVSP 203 – QII

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Take Home Exam

1. Bentham believes that human beings are ruled by two sovereign masters; pain and pleasure. They way human beings act are based on the sole goal of gaining pleasure and reducing pain. It is these two goals that define all our actions and thoughts. Since Bentham is a utilitarian, human beings ought to act for the good, or seek pleasure, for the whole of society. Because he believes that all human beings are members comprising one of whole member, that of society. So when human beings act, they ought to act not just for themselves, but for the whole of society. But a whole of society can be happy, or attain full happiness if the members are not happy, therefore, individuals should act in accordance to themselves and attain happiness, or reduce pain, as their overall goal. Therefore, what we ought to do are like prescriptions, and what we should do are the predictors that determine our overall actions, our ideas, feelings, thoughts and conscience. It our goal to reach happiness, and not pain, means that we are afraid of pain, that is why we averse from it. Like Hobbes, who believes that human beings are afraid of living in a state of nature where it is full of fear, death, violence and malice, we escape this state and follow the rules made by a sovereign that we should self-preserve ourselves and take heed to not harm any other human beings. Both Bentham and Hobbes agree that human behavior is reduced to desires as their ends. Kant idea on the behavior of human beings, and their ends, is completely different to that of Bentham and Hobbes. Bentham and Hobbes do not define the means by which the ends should be reached, but Kant does. According to Kant, we should use our means as ends in themselves, and we should act with the idea that our actions and our maxim, which is our motive, could be turned into a universal law. The categorical imperative is where our actions must conform to a requirement of universal law, and we should and ought to act as if our actions would establish its maxim as a universal law of nature. Any actions that are based on physical needs, which are our wants and desires, is a hypothetical imperative. For Kant, that is wrong, because when if our actions are only because we want to gain something, be it the satisfaction that we did something good, or for our own personal gain, that is wrong. Because these desires show greed and selfishness. For Kant, it is an issue of morality. When we act, it should not be for the sole reason of gaining something, but for doing something good in and of itself.
2. Locke argues that no man has complete power and dominion over another. All men have equal rights, advantages and the like with respect to one another. And since no man has power or dominion over another, means that they also do not have the power to destroy, ruin or punish another, because they do not have the right to. They have to preserve themselves, and everything else around them, because if they have no power to destroy another man’s life, then they also do not have the power to destroy their own life. The only exception to the rule is that man is allowed to punish a transgressor or a thieve that threatens this self-preservation. Kant also says that men become in a state of war with each other when a party has an overall goal to take over complete power over another man, or a group of men. When such a threat exists, the men fighting against this, which in the state of natural law is completely acceptable, and all others who join him, have the right to eliminate this threat. Just like life is important and equal, so is everything provided in nature. Everything in nature was provided in abundance and for all man to have and use equally. Everything is provided in common for all man, the only exception being when man annexes his labor into what is common, the mix between the labor and the common ceases to be common anymore, and therefore is no longer available to the other common man, but becomes the property of he who annexed his labor in it. Kant has a strong argument when it comes to the equality of all men, and how no one has right over another. It is a strong argument because, if we take human nature and date it back to the time of Adam and Eve, none was above another. If that was how human nature began, that is how it should continue to be. Kant’s strongest argument is that of the importance of self-preservation and equality among men. His argument starts to become weak when discussing the nature of property and war. If all men are equally entitled to property, as long as their labor was annexed into it, then all men will seek to work for this property. Men, by nature, are known to be greedy and selfish, and nothing is enough, therefore the more land and property they acquire, the more they will want and need. Taking this into consideration, and putting aside the fact that Kant said that everything was provided in nature in abundance for all man in common, Kant also said that any labor annexed into it becomes the property of that man because he himself, is labor. As a result, if this is the law, what the certainty that not all men will begin putting the lowest form of labor into anything to make it his? Yes, there is an abundance of everything in nature for man to use to live happily. But that does not mean that all men are rational beings and their thoughts would be for the other commoners, on the contrary, in terms of survival, men need land, crops, vegetation, water and all the likes to survive. As a result, man will not take into consideration survival day by day, but rather think for the future and for always, and therefore, enough is never enough. When that is the case, all man will begin working to make everything that is naturally provided and turn it into their own property. When everything becomes the property of someone, and nothing in nature is available anymore, then men will begin to fight with each other for more property. When this fight begins, all men enter a state of war with one another, and, based on Kant’s state of natural law, all men have equal right to punish, and kill, if necessary, the threat. As a result, the state of natural law will cease to exist, and all man will live in a state of war, which will then become the state of nature. Kant’s weakness is that in his argument, he failed to see where reason and rationality stand within the common man. Unlike Hobbes, who did, and said that the natural state of man is filled with fear and death and violence, but it is the fear that makes man want to escape this state, and through reason, they see the way out. Kant’s view of the state of nature and natural law is completely devoid of reality.
3. Kant might believe that culture/religion and Enlightenment are contrary to each other because to Kant, Enlightenment means freeing oneself from the shackles of immaturity. Immaturity, according to Kant, is when one does not act out what they know and believe, but rather gives no second thoughts to the works of life around them, and also lets everyone else do his work for him. For example, we have people to do our taxes for us, we have people who collect our bills for us, we have people who work to take and bring our post for us, we have teachers who teach us, pastors who tell us what our religion is, people who define our law and our conduct, how we should and shouldn’t act, what is right and what is wrong. For Kant, if one accepts these, it is wrong, because to be enlightened means removing oneself from the rules and questioning them. Why is this like this, and that like that? Why do this and not do that? Why are the laws like this and not like that? An Enlightened person is one who can deviate from the norm, not become a rebel, but rather, ask and challenge everything that we might find wrong in our system. The reason why Enlightenment might contradict religion and/or culture is because in religion, those who follow a higher being and a divine law, have to follow it without question, because after all, the divine law is what comprises of our beliefs and our religion. For Kant, though, he doesn’t want one to not have a religion to believe, on the contrary, but once in a while look outside the box and question why it is the way it is and is there anything that isn’t right about it. Because we are beings who can think, and it is wrong to not use that brain and put it into action. Kant says that a pastor giving a lecture cannot question his teachings, but in his private room, or as a scholar, as opposed to a pastor, can question what he is preaching. A policeman cannot break the laws because it is his duty to follow them and execute them when necessary, but off-duty, and as a scholar, he can question the system and the law. Kant’s rule on Enlightenment is the same as Frederick II, who said, “argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!” Because there is nothing wrong in obeying, but there is something wrong in simply obeying without some knowledge of why we are obeying, and for what. Religion is completely the opposite of Enlightenment, because for the religious, there is a guide that must be followed, and it is a guide that cannot be questioned because there are specific rules and obligations one must follow, without question. Take for example the religion of Islam, one must pray five times a day, fast daily for the entire month of Ramadan, give a small percentage of the monthly income to the poor, sexual acts before marriage is forbidden, women should be covered, men and women cannot have physical contact, and much more. Muslims follow these rules without question, because even if they wanted to question the rules behind this religion, there will be no concrete answer because it is the highest priests in the religion who answer the questions, and there answers are usually referenced to the Holy Book, the Qura’an, meaning that there will always be one answer, do as you are told. As for culture, it has no definition of what it is, but the basics of culture is comprised of traditions, language, religion, and rules and laws. In order to be part of a culture, one must conform to everything that forms this culture, and without question. Because anything that is different from that culture, will no longer be that culture, but another culture. In some retrospect, I believe that this is true, that religion and culture are obstacles and can hinder the way to Enlightenment. But then again, as a believer in Islam, I have a different meaning of what enlightenment is. For Kant, the enlightenment he speaks about has nothing to do with the being in question, but only what resides within the knowledge and the brain of that being. Religion is an important aspect in one’s life. Through religion, one is not completely hindered from Enlightenment, on the contrary, because behind religion, there is a higher form of enlightenment which Kant does not mention, and that the spiritual enlightenment. Through religion, we all ask the million dollar question; why are we in this life, in this world, what is our purpose, and what for, to simply die? What of the after-life? These answers cannot be attained by sitting in a council or in a meeting with hundreds of scholars who will sit and analyze. No, the answer is in your belief and the religion. Our purpose of life is to make the best out of it, but by doing so without deviating from the right path. Be good, stay good, respect and protect all that matters and has an importance in this life. Gain knowledge, but use if for good. And as for the afterlife, it is the reward for all the hardships that one will suffer in this life, but it all depends on how one handles the way he deals with all the hardships that has been thrown their way.
4. My maxim would be that, all knowledge attained should be used for the purpose of doing good, bettering life, and for the self-preservation of one’s life and others alike. Kant believes that if a maxim is used and the ends which we reach were based on some physical need or desire, then it is not a categorical imperative, but a hypothetical one. I think my maxim would fail Kant’s test of the categorical imperative because the ends of my maxim are not just to improve the level and standard of living of all human beings, but my own as well. Take for example a complete stranger who jumps into the ocean to save a drowning kid. The stranger jumped in instinctively, in order to save a life. Some might say that this act is selfless, and therefore, this act will pass Kant’s test of the categorical imperative. But that is wrong, because after the stranger saves the kid, the stranger will feel good about himself, and that would mean that even if the stranger had no motive behind his action consciously, he did subconsciously. And that feeling he gets after saving the kid will make him fail Kant’s test. But the reason I chose this maxim is because the ends are good in itself, but the overall result will be that of satisfaction. Even though it will fail the categorical imperative because I believe no maxim or action can be purely for the sole reason simply doing it. Which stranger would save a kid and then feel bad about it? The act of saving the drowning kid is good in itself, but the ends? No matter how good an act it, there is always a reason for it. What was the reason behind the stranger jumping in to save the kid? To save a life. It is an important motive, and a good one, but that motive is not good in itself because there was a reason why that stranger valued someone’s life that much. There is no motive that is caused without a prior motive.