Freud presents a challenge to Kant’s Moral Argument because he offers an alternative to Kant’s God hypothesis.

Freud was influential in arguing that our moral beliefs and behaviour are influenced by psychological factors, such as our upbringing and past experiences, rather than by God. Although raised Jewish, Freud was an atheist. He accepted that we have a conscience which tells us what we ought to do, but for Freud, conscience is the product of the unconscious mind or superego, not the voice of God.

**Id, Ego and Superego**

As a baby we have basic needs that we seek to satisfy – ‘I want food’, ‘I want sleep’, ‘I want to go poo-poo’ (sounds like an A Level Philosophy lesson!) These basic, primitive and unconscious needs are the *id*.

As we gradually develop self-awareness and our sense of who we are, we realise that we cannot always get what we want. This awareness grows into adulthood and works with our reason. This is our *ego*.

Our parents, teachers, police and other authority figures tell us what is right and wrong. This process is repeated frequently and we gain praise for doing what is ‘right’ and get punished for doing what is ‘wrong’. Eventually we internalise this, as a result of the constant exposure to these values and the reinforcement by reward and punishment. This internalised sense of right and wrong becomes our moral code, which Freud called the *superego*. The superego is the legacy of parental policing.
and limiting of infant behaviour. It is the last part of us to develop. The superego is part of our unconscious and can be seen as having two parts: the ego-ideal (praises us for good actions) and the conscience (makes us feel guilty when we do bad things).

The id is .................................................................

The ego is .................................................................

The superego is .............................................................

Freud saw the superego as a kind of moral policeman that functions independently of our desires and sometimes may even be at odds with what is rational. When we act in accordance with the superego we feel virtuous and when we disobey it we feel guilty.

One way of looking at this is that for a Freudian, you are a more or less successful moral being because of the quality of the psychological bullying skills that your parents employed! (If in doubt, always blame the parents)

This does of course mean that the formation of human conscience is so arbitrary as to be almost unique, variations in moral sensibility are almost inevitable due to the variations in parenting.

Freud also analyses the development of the superego in terms of the Oedipus Complex. Based on the Greek tragedy Oedipus Rex by Sophocles, where Oedipus mistakenly kills his father and marries his mother. Freud believed that during our early years (ages 3-5) the infant experiences hatred and jealousy towards different parents and from this period develops guilt and repressed feelings which becomes a feature of the superego.
Freud and Kant on Morality

Kant
Morality for Kant is something that everyone can understand by use of their reason. All reasonable people can see that they have a duty to act for the good. They can then work out the correct actions by using reason and the Categorical Imperatives. The duties, the goodwill and the summum bonum are all absolutes for Kant. We may quibble about the details, but ultimately we all agree that certain things are wrong. Equally we tend to agree that we have duties towards others.

Freud
Freud, in contrast, sees morality as a result of upbringing and the experiences that each individual person has during this period. There is no duty or goodwill to influence us with Freud. However, there is a constant conflict in the conscious ego between the subconscious id (primitive selfish desires) and the subconscious superego (parental and societal demands). When the ego internalises this conflict it calls it conscience. For Freud, there are no absolutes, there are relative pressures and unnecessary guilt.

So is Freud's explanation for morality better than Kant's?
- Freud removes the need for God - which is a complex (and possibly self-contradictory) concept.
- But Freud's id, ego and superego are also complex (perhaps unnecessarily so) concepts.
- Removes the need for the idea of God as a judge
- But creates the superego as a sort of internal judge
• Freud’s theory is based on some empirical data.
• However, much of Freud’s theory is speculation and the data sample was very specialised - almost exclusively upper-class women living in the 1900s, a time when the role of women was clearly defined and sexuality was strictly controlled. Most of Freud’s work, while recognised as ground-breaking, has now been rejected by modern psychology.

How good is Kant’s argument?
Kant’s theory is based on reason and experience - reason that the good should be rewarded and experience that they are not.

Kant seems correct in saying that we are all aware of right and wrong, even if we sometimes disagree about some specifics.

But,
Could this be better explained by socialisation? Cultural relativism, which sees morality varying between cultures, would explain why in some parts of the world cannibalism was seen as normal and not in other parts of the world. Kant would seem to struggle with explaining this.

Kant seems correct in saying that we do perceive moral obligations.

But,
Could this also be better explained by reference to social relationships and the expectations of others? Evolution may better explain why we feel obligations - it helps us survive as a species. Humans developed as social animals because they survive better in social groups than as individuals, and feelings of moral obligation help bond the social groups.

Scholars such as Richard Swinburne argue that even if Kant’s moral argument does not conclusively prove God’s existence, it adds to the body of ‘evidence’, creating a cumulative proof - a proof based on the adding of successive pieces of evidence. Some use the analogy of a series of leaky buckets put one inside another, creating a sound bucket.

But,
A series of leaky buckets still leaks! Add a series of failed proofs and you get lots of failure, not a success!
Explain Freud’s challenge to Kant’s Moral Argument

Assess Freud’s and Kant’s Arguments