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Kant and the Demandingness of the Virtue of Beneficence¹

Abstract

We discuss Kant's conception of beneficence against the background of the overdemandingness debate. We argue that Kant's conception of beneficence constitutes a sweet spot between overdemandingness and undemandingness. To this end we defend four key claims that together constitute a novel interpretation of Kant's account of beneficence: 1) for the same reason that we are obligated to be beneficent to others we are permitted to be beneficent to ourselves; 2) we can prioritise our own ends; 3) it is more virtuous to do more rather than less when it comes to helping others; and 4) indifference to others is vicious. Finally, we explain how this represents a system of duties that gives our personal ends a moral standing without unacceptably moralising them.

1. Introduction

According to the *overdemandingness objection*, we should be critical of an ethical theory that imposes demands that go beyond what can reasonably be expected of moral agents. At the other end of the spectrum, the much less discussed *undemandingness objection* states that we should be critical of an ethical theory that fails to impose demands that require moral agents to sacrifice *enough* for morality. The latter problem becomes apparent in cases of easy rescue, where it is intuitive that we must save another person, but where an ethical theory fails to show that this is obligatory. The sweet spot seems to be a moderately demanding ethical theory that requires us to make sacrifices, but not to an unreasonable degree. Is there any such moral theory? One such theory, at least for the central cases of duties to rescue and help others, might be Kant's. However, there is a lack of consensus in the literature about the demandingness of

Kantian beneficence. To address this, we make four key claims that together constitute a novel interpretation of Kant's account of beneficence: 1) for the same reason that we are obligated to be beneficent to others we are permitted to be beneficent to ourselves; 2) we can prioritise our own ends; 3) it is more virtuous to do more rather than less when it comes to helping others; and 4) indifference to others is vicious. The upshot of these four claims is a moderately demanding Kantian account of the virtue of beneficence.

2. Background

The overdemandingness objection started as a critical reaction to Singer's (1972) influential "Famine, Affluence and Morality". There Singer aims to show that we have very stringent duties towards victims of emergencies anywhere on the globe. Singer does not generalise his account to a requirement that we maximally promote the overall good and he intends to work from premises that non-Consequentialists can accept. Nonetheless, his argument is commonly considered a paradigm of Consequentialism and overdemandingness "is often claimed to be" Consequentialism's "chief flaw" (Sobel 2007, p.1). Recently, philosophers have extended this discussion beyond Act-Consequentialism to include the potential overdemandingness of Rule-Consequentialism (Carter 2009), forms of Consequentialism with absolute constraints (Hooker 2009), Contractualism (Ashford 2003) and virtue ethics (Swanton 2009).

There are several reasons why overdemanding ethical theories are problematic. These include that overdemanding ethical theories might violate a general rational principle, namely that Ought Implies Can. Agents cannot be obligated to act beyond what they can do. Furthermore, overdemanding ethical theories might be counterproductive in that they could result in agents abandoning morality altogether or feeling justified in their moral complacency. These are not problems specific to Kant, or issues that Kant would accept as problems.

However, there are at least two overdemandingness worries that are important for Kantians to face. The first is the concern that overdemanding ethical theories are unfair if they require agents to do more because others do little (or nothing) to help. The second is the worry that central elements of a good life could become compromised. This is not a matter of self-interest in a narrow sense, but rather expresses the worry that certain key elements of a good life might lose their status as central parts of a good life either because we cannot pursue them at all since we are always helping others or because we can only pursue them once they have a moral status within our system of duties and they are obligatory to pursue. Both Kantianism and Consequentialism have been criticised along these lines by Wolf (1982) and Williams (1985) for being overly detached from our moral experiences and from what gives our lives meaning. Modern ethical theories, according to these critics, threaten to neglect or diminish the importance of personal ground projects, goals and values and the weight of personal non-moral reasons. This is particularly problematic for an ethical theory, such as Kant's, that is attractive to many people precisely because of the central role it gives autonomy.

Kant himself acknowledges overdemandingness as a problem at several places. In the *Second Critique*, Kant criticises the Stoics for “straining the moral capacities of a *human being* ... far beyond all the limits of his nature” (KpV 5:127). The Stoic conception of virtue is unfit for human beings, since the ideal Stoic agent, the sage, is presented as a “divinity”, an entity “independent of nature” for whom happiness is of no special relevance (KpV 5:126-27). In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant warns of the “fantastically virtuous” character who is “too virtuous” and thinks that duty has to be considered in every decision. This would turn virtue into a “tyranny” (MS 6:409). Kant thinks that a moral theory can be criticised if, due to an unrealistic conception of human capabilities, it prescribes that finite human beings achieve an impossible ideal, or requires humans to give their own happiness no special relevance or to exhaust themselves thinking constantly about morally insignificant matters as if they

constituted genuine moral quandaries. Finally, a very demanding reading of beneficence calls into question whether Kant's ethics really systematises the common rational cognition of duty, as he claims it does (GMS 4:392), since an overly demanding account of beneficence would seem to clash with our intuitions in many cases.²

Given the importance of this problem for Kant, it is remarkable that there is so little consensus concerning the demandingness of Kant's ethics. Van Ackeren and Sticker (2014) criticise Kant's ethics for its overdemandingness regarding perfect duties, but they later argue (Sticker and van Ackeren 2018) that Kant's ethics is not overdemanding regarding imperfect duties to others. Several other authors, such as Pinheiro Walla (2015), Vogt (2008), and Ighneski (2008), have also presented readings of imperfect duties to others according to which Kant's ethics can avoid overdemandingness problems, since the most vexing moral demands to others are moderated by indirect duties to preserve one's own happiness, moral duties to oneself (such as self-perfection), or autonomy. O'Neill (1993, 459) also believes that the demands of Kantian ethics are moderate, due to Kant's distinction between perfect and imperfect duties. The former only rules out specific courses of action, while the latter admits of latitude. This rendering of imperfect duties is indebted to Hill (1992, chapter 8), according to whom we always retain the freedom not to help others on any particular occasion, provided we help on other occasions.³ Such renderings of imperfect duties led Stohr (2011, p.46) to worry that Utilitarians could criticise Kantians for being "not adequately demanding when it comes to beneficence". This undemandingness worry constitutes the flip-side to the overdemandingness problem, which usually receives the lion's share of attention. In contrast to Stohr's worry, Timmermann (2018) endorses a very demanding conception of Kant's ethics, but he argues that this is nothing that should worry Kantians. Likewise, Herman (2001) advocates a version of Kantian ethics that imposes stringent demands on agent's, particularly to victims in emergencies. Finally, Mulgan (2001, pp.5-6) agrees that Kant's ethics is very demanding, but he considers this a problem for

Kantians. Kant's ethics is thus interpreted variously as moderately demanding, very demanding and too undemanding, and this is sometimes seen as a feature to be promoted or a problem to be concerned about. Clearly, there is little consensus in the literature about the demandingness of Kantian beneficence.

One current approach for showing that morality is only moderately demanding is what Sticker and van Ackeren (2018) label the "argument from the system of duties". The main idea of this approach is that morality is moderately demanding, not because non-moral goods sometimes trump morality, but because morality moderates itself. This strategy, which we develop further here, is prominent among Kantians, since Kant's ethics seems to constitute a system of duties which can keep one another in check. However, the idea that duties to self, indirect duties to preserve one's own happiness, and special obligations to loved ones might substantially moderate the demandingness of our duties to needy strangers has been vigorously criticised by Sticker and van Ackeren (2018). They argue that other duties, such as indirect duties and imperfect duties to self are not normatively stringent enough to overrule beneficence in cases where someone else's life is at stake, and stringent perfect duties, such as duties to one's children, only require a minimum and leave plenty of resources to be sacrificed for beneficence towards strangers. These other duties cannot, they argue, sufficiently moderate the demandingness of beneficence in a world where many strangers need rescuing. Furthermore, all strategies that fall under the system of duties approach seem to constitute objectionable forms of moralism since, as Baron and Seymour Famhy (2009, p.222) and Sticker and van Ackeren (2018) argue, they can only account for our personal projects as direct or indirect *moral duties* to self or others. This is an extension of Wolf's and Williams's worry that central elements of a good life become compromised if we can only enjoy them if they are morally obligatory or have at least some moral status that makes them acceptable within a system of duties.

In the current paper we present a version of the argument from the system of duties that does not fall prey to these objections. We will do that by focusing not, as previous attempts have done, on how *other* direct or indirect duties moderate beneficence, but rather on how beneficence internally moderates *itself* by allowing for *self*-beneficence. For that reason, we will bracket discussion of duties other than beneficence that might be able to moderate beneficence. We also focus on Kant's notion of *virtue*, which is largely overlooked in the overdemandingness debate.⁴ Finally, our discussion will be concerned mainly with actions and maxims and not motivations, since our focus is on normative ethics and not moral worth (and only the latter depends on right motivation).

“Beneficence” in our discussion has a technical meaning broader than our everyday use which refers to charitable donations, but not to cases of easy rescue such as pulling drowning children out of ponds. We understand beneficence to be a duty to help other finite agents who have needs and ends that they cannot always satisfy on their own and who might even be in situations of mortal danger. Several authors, such as Herman (1984) and Murphy (1993, p.292), distinguish between a mundane duty of beneficence and a duty which focuses on emergency cases. Hill (2002) gestures toward a similar move, arguing that the general duty of beneficence shouldn't be made to handle all cases in which helping is required. A key issue for understanding what kind of duty easy rescue cases are is whether immediacy or distance between the agent and the victim of an emergency matters and can change the type of duty we are dealing with. Whilst many standard Consequentialists would deny this, it is often seen as one of the attractive features of Kantian ethics that it promises to respect our intuition that emergencies in my vicinity have a different moral status from emergencies far away, even if I could help the victims of both (Herman 2001). Since this is a substantive and contentious issue, we cannot discuss it further here, and we will instead proceed on the assumption that easy rescue cases should be treated as beneficence in the broad Kantian sense.⁵

Before we begin, a methodological note is in order. Our argument will draw on all of Kant's critical works on ethics. It is important to bear in mind that these works have different functions. Some (i.e. GMS and KpV) aim to find and vindicate the supreme principle of morality and provide a metaphysical and moral-psychological foundation for morality. Later works (i.e. MS) apply these abstract principles to finite rational agents to ground specific duties. In order to obtain a full and correct understanding we occasionally read some of the earlier critical texts in light of later texts. This is justified by our philosophical interest in showing that we can obtain a feasible and philosophically interesting middle-ground conception of beneficence out of Kant's works. Nonetheless, we primarily focus on *The Metaphysics of Morals* account, given that it is in this text that we find Kant's most detailed discussion of beneficence.

3. Beneficence in the *Groundwork* and second *Critique*

Kant discusses beneficence in both *Groundwork* I and II and briefly in the second *Critique*. However, Kant is not trying to give a detailed and precise account of beneficence (or any other duty) in these earlier texts, since this is the function of the later *Metaphysics of Morals*. We should thus not expect a definite account of beneficence in these earlier texts. Moreover, there are several differences that seem to emerge in these texts regarding beneficence. We focus here on four of these differences. While it might be possible to reconcile these differences to develop a unified account of beneficence, we shall not attempt to do that here since this would not provide any clear benefit to the account we develop here.⁶ Instead, we intend merely to extract several important points from Kant's earlier formulations of beneficence to help enrich the more in-depth discussion of beneficence that we find in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Whether these earlier accounts can be made either internally consistent or consistent with the latter account of beneficence are issues beyond the scope of our discussion.

Firstly, Kant seems to give differing accounts of the *scope* of beneficence. In *Groundwork I*, Kant spells out the scope of the duty of beneficence narrowly in terms of helping others in distress [“fremde Noth”] and helping those who suffer from distress [“Nothleidenden”] (GMS 4:398-9). In contrast, in *Groundwork II* Kant claims that the scope of beneficence includes offering “assistance in distress” [“Wohlbefinden oder seinem Beistande in der Noth”], but also promoting the “well-being” of others more generally (GMS 4:423).⁷ Beneficence in *Groundwork II* appears to be broader in scope, as it includes assistance in life threatening emergencies, as well as helping those who are already well-off to accomplish mundane tasks. This broad scope is confirmed, as we shall see, by Kant’s Formula of Humanity (FH) rendering of beneficence.

Secondly, it is unclear how *demanding* beneficence is in this text. Kant introduces his discussion of beneficence in *Groundwork I* as follows: “To be beneficent where one can is one’s duty” (GMS 4:398). This can be read in two ways: 1) We have to help as much as we can by maximising our helping of others; 2) We have to help wherever we can, but this help can be quite minimal each time and so we are not required to maximise our helping of others.⁸ However, as we mentioned above, in the *Groundwork* Kant intends to seek out and vindicate the supreme principle of morality, not present a developed principle of beneficence. Specifically, Kant’s *Groundwork I* discussion of beneficence is focused on the importance of right motivation, while his argument in *Groundwork II*, in terms of the Formula of Universal Law (FUL) and the Formula of the Law of Nature (FLN),⁹ is directed against someone who thinks that it is sufficient not to violate anyone’s rights. But while we can conceive of a world in which it is a universal law of nature that there are no rights violations and no helping of others (a *no help* maxim), we cannot will such a world without contradiction. This is because “many cases can yet come to pass in which one needs the love and compassion of others” and

by “a law of nature sprung from his own will he would rob himself of all hope of the assistance he wishes for himself” (GMS 4:423).

Kant’s argument here only rules out a *no help* maxim that would rob an agent of *all* hope of assistance. This is quite weak. Consider the *minimal help* maxim: “No rights violations and I will help others once in my entire life”. If that were a law of nature, people in distress would have *some* hope that they would be helped. So there doesn’t seem to be any contradiction of will in a *minimal help* maxim, which makes such a maxim permissible to act on.¹⁰ There is also no contradiction in willing a maxim of *maximal help* (“No rights violations and help others as much as I possibly can”). This emphasises the point that the FUL/FLN is standardly read as merely ruling out maxims, rather than requiring that we adopt specific maxims (Allison 2011, pp.177-80). While I am forbidden from willing *no help* maxims, the FUL/FLN permits me to adopt an enormous range of maxims, from *minimal help* to *maximal help* maxims. This leaves the demandingness of beneficence, in terms of the FUL/FLN, unclear.

Thirdly, when Kant shifts to other formulations of the Categorical Imperative, another picture of beneficence emerges (see Noggle 2009, p.6).¹¹ In his discussion of FH in *Groundwork* II (GMS 4:430), Kant again argues against someone who thinks that it is morally sufficient to refrain from rights violations while never helping anyone. While this would not involve “intentionally detracting anything from” humanity, this would only amount to a “negative and not positive agreement with humanity, as an end in itself”. To achieve that positive agreement, everyone must “also try, as far as he can, to advance the ends of others. For if that representation is to have its *full* effect in me, the ends of a subject that is an end in itself must, as much as possible, also be my ends”. This formulation expands the scope of beneficence to *all ends*, rather than restricting it to relieving distress (Baron and Fahmy 2009, p.216). It also constitutes a more demanding conception of beneficence, compared to the

FUL/FLN account, on two grounds. First, agents are positively required to *adopt a specific end*, rather than merely forbidden from adopting a *no help* maxim. Second, an agent has to “try, as far as he can, to advance the ends of others” and do “as much as possible” in this regard. This initially looks extremely demanding if we understand it to mean that we must do as much as we can in furthering *any* end, no matter how trivial, that other agents have. However, Kant says that we must do as much as we can in furthering the ends of others if their moral status as ends in themselves is to have “its *full* effect” on me (GMS 4:430). Kant’s introduction of a scalar term here (i.e. the effect can be more or less) is important, as it points toward the scalar account of virtue that we find in *The Metaphysics of Morals*.

While Kant does not explicitly illustrate how duties such as beneficence follow from the third formulation of the Categorical Imperative, the Formula of the Realm of Ends (FRE), his account of this formula remains important for our interpretation as it illustrates Kant’s notion of ends.¹² The FRE states the imperative that we must “act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible realm of ends” (GMS 4:439). Kant understands the realm of ends to be a “systematic union”, under a law that echoes the FH, composed of “a whole both of rational beings as ends in themselves and of the ends of his own that each may set himself” (GMS, 4:433). The realm of ends, as Allison (2011, p.242) notes, thus “includes two radically different types of ends”: all existent persons, as ends in themselves, and all the lawful or permissible self-given ends of those persons.¹³ The former types of ends, Kant tells us, have dignity or an unconditional and incomparable worth, whereas the latter types of ends have a price (GMS: 4:434-36).¹⁴ While rational agents are members of the realm of ends because of the dignity that their capacities for morality endow them with, the other ends that make up the realm result from rational agents *setting* themselves those ends (Formosa 2017). This again suggests, although not conclusively, that the scope of beneficence includes *all permissible ends* set by *all* rational agents, not merely those in distress, given that all

permissible ends (along with all end setters) are part of the realm of ends. Further, since *all* rational agents includes *ourselves*, our ends along with the ends of all others are *part* of the *project of morality* to try to realise the realm of ends. We will return to this claim in the next sections.

Fourthly, we seem to get a slightly different rendering of beneficence, albeit in passing, in the second *Critique*. There Kant grounds our duty to help others by arguing that we would not assent to an order in which everyone “looked with complete indifference on the distress of others” (KpV 5:69). Kant here limits the scope of beneficence to avoiding *indifference* to those in *distress*. Further, in this passage Kant does not explicitly indicate that beneficence, at least when restricted in scope to avoiding indifference to distress, is less stringent than perfect duties.¹⁵ However, it is unclear how demanding this duty is, since it is unclear what would constitute indifference to distress, which is an issue that we return to below. In a second earlier passage (KpV 5:34-35), Kant confirms the idea that beneficence incorporates our own ends. He argues that “in the case of finite beings” we can attribute to each the maxim to pursue their own happiness, and that this maxim “can become an *objective* practical law only if I include in it the happiness of others”. This passage prefigures a later one in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, where Kant again emphasises that to obtain the requisite universality both our own ends (or happiness) and the ends (or happiness) of all others must be taken into moral account and included in our maxims.

4. Beneficence in *The Metaphysics of Morals*

Kant discusses beneficence, benevolence, promoting the ends and happiness of others, and loving human beings at several places in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (MS 6:387-88, 393-94, 401-02, 450-54).¹⁶ These discussions are not all obviously equivalent. For example, Kant

makes an important distinction between benevolence [Wohlwollen], which is “satisfaction in the happiness (well-being) of others”, and beneficence [Wohlthun], which is “the maxim of making others’ happiness one’s end” (MS 6:452). However, Kant is not always consistent in his usage of these terms. For example, in a key passage where he discusses benevolence, he writes that “it is quite obvious that what is meant here is not merely benevolence in *wishes* [...] what is meant is, rather, active practical benevolence [Wohlwollen] (beneficence) [Wohlthun], making the well-being and happiness of others my *end*” (MS 6:452). This suggests that Kant sometimes uses benevolence (or practical benevolence) as equivalent to beneficence and sometimes not. More specifically, benevolence in wishing is different from beneficence, whereas practical benevolence is equivalent to beneficence.¹⁷

The equivalency of practical benevolence and beneficence makes conceptual sense. If I am to genuinely wish others well, that requires that I *do* something (i.e. make the ends of some others my own) to make that wish a reality. However, the idea that genuinely wishing others well requires that I do something for them might be seen as in tension with Kant’s important distinction between mere wishing and willing (e.g. GMS 4:394), according to which mere wishing might not imply that agents also will the means necessary to bring about the object of their wish (see also GMS 4:417-8). It is important that Kant distinguishes benevolence (Wohlwollen) from “well-liking” or “delight” (Wohlgefallen) (MS 6:450, 452). Delight seems to amount to mere wishing and is thus different from benevolence: “merely benevolence [Wohlwollen] in *wishes*, which is, strictly speaking, only taking delight [Wohlgefallen] in the well-being of every other and does not require me to contribute to it” (MS 6:452). It thus seems that insofar as Kant’s distinctions are consistent, Wohlgefallen is merely a form of wishing that has no practical dimension, whereas Wohlwollen is (usually) not mere wishing but practical, in which case it amounts to beneficence (Wohlthun).¹⁸

However, there remains an important difference between mere benevolence in wishes (or well-liking) and beneficence (or practical benevolence) insofar as we can simultaneously wish everyone well, but we cannot, insofar as this would require concrete actions, simultaneously will the ends of everyone. We cannot do the latter because we cannot know everyone's ends and we have limited resources with which to promote them, and the ends of others can also be mutually exclusive or in competition.¹⁹ But this is the wrong way to think about what it means to make everyone's ends our own. As Herman (2001, p.240) puts it, to "have an obligatory end is to be committed to a set of considerations as always deliberatively salient; they will not always direct one to action". This suggests there are two senses in which we can make the ends of others our own. First, in the sense that we see the achievement of those ends as good or valuable; they are our ends as we regard their achievement as having deliberative salience for us. Second, in the sense that we actually do something towards the achievement of those ends; they are our ends as we will the means towards their fulfilment and they move us to action. While we can make everyone's ends our own in the first sense, insofar as we can regard everyone achieving their own (permissible) ends as valuable and as part of the realm of ends, we cannot make everyone's ends our own in the second sense, insofar as we cannot concretely do something towards *everyone* fulfilling *all* their ends. This means that we must prioritise which valuable ends (including our own) we actively seek to fulfil. We take up the issue of prioritisation below.

The first key feature of Kant's account is that although beneficence falls under duties of virtue *to others*, Kant includes *ourselves* as *part* of the discussion of this duty. He does this by drawing on the contradiction in will test and arguing that since I "want everyone else to be benevolent toward me", I ought to be benevolent toward everyone else. However, since "all others with the exception of myself would not be all", it follows that "the law" that makes "benevolence a duty will include myself, as an object of benevolence" (MS 6:451).²⁰ Since

Kant here explicitly talks about a moral duty [Pflichtgesetz], benevolence here is not just a mere wishing but something that must practically translate into actions and thus amounts to beneficence. This doesn't just mean that *others* should help *me*. It also means that *I* can be beneficent to *myself*. However, this doesn't entail that I am *obligated* to further my own ends. Kant rejects that there is an "*obligation* to attend to my *own* (natural) happiness" (MS 6:388) because our own ends are already our own ends, and without the possibility of constraint, obligation or duty is not possible for Kant (MS 6:386).²¹ Nonetheless, beneficence does not only *obligate* you to be part of a community of "mutual benevolence" [wechselseitigen Wohlwollens] (i.e. others aid you and you aid others), it also "*permits* self-benevolence [selbst wohlzuwollen]²² on the condition of your being benevolent to every other as well; for it is only in this way that your maxim (beneficence [Wohlthuns]) qualifies for a giving of universal law" (MS 6:451).

According to these passages, promoting our own ends is part of being beneficent. This makes sense as our ends have a moral status insofar as they are part of the realm of ends. For Kant, by *making* permissible ends our own, we introduce them into the realm of ends and thereby give *all* rational agents reason to help us to further them.²³ Our own ends are as much part of this realm as the ends of any other rational being. The duty of beneficence is the duty to regard the achievement of these ends as valuable in order to respond appropriately to the dignity of all rational agents and to do something to promote the fulfilment of some of those ends. We can thus understand beneficence as requiring that all permissible ends of all rational agents, as ends that make up the realm of ends, be our ends, in the sense of regarding the fulfilment of all those ends as having deliberative salience for us.²⁴ However, for some of those ends, namely our own, no constraint is necessary and therefore pursuing the fulfilment of such ends is permissible but not obligatory, whereas in the case of the ends of others the potential for both constraint and obligation exists.

That my own ends matter morally for Kant should not surprise us, since we find this idea throughout his critical works, although usually framed in terms of indirect duty (GMS 4:399) rather than self-beneficence. For example, in the second *Critique* Kant remarks that it can “be a duty to attend to one’s happiness”, since lack of happiness “contains temptations to transgress one’s duty” (KpV 5:93). While we do not have a direct duty to pursue our happiness, our happiness is not morally indifferent,²⁵ and there are duties related to the pursuit of our own happiness, such as preserving our moral integrity (MS 6:388). Our moral integrity is a duty *because* we don’t necessarily make it our own end, and *constraint* can be required in the pursuit of that end. Our own happiness is not like that, since our ends are already *our* ends. Our own happiness is thus a “*permitted* means, since no one else has a right to require of me that I sacrifice my ends if these are not immoral” (MS 6:388).

However, one might worry that if beneficence only allows that my own ends are to factor into my moral deliberations alongside the ends of all others and I cannot give my own ends any special consideration, then this might not be sufficient to create any meaningful limit on how beneficent we should be to others. Kantian beneficence could then still be as demanding as traditional forms of Utilitarianism. For Utilitarians, my own happiness matters, but not more than anyone else’s. Utilitarianism is thus potentially extremely demanding, and Kantian beneficence might be similarly demanding if I am merely one among 7 billion whose ends matter equally. To avoid overdemandingness arising here, we need a prerogative to prioritise our own ends when it comes to choosing *which* valuable ends to fulfil.

Kant addresses this by arguing that “in benevolence I am closest to myself” and that “I am closer to myself (even in terms of duty [selbst der Pflicht nach]) than to any other” (MS 6:451). This closeness to myself is not something that moral agents are to overcome, but something that deserves a moral status (“even in terms of duty”). While I can wish everyone

equally well, in practice I must prioritise ends, and Kant argues that “without violating the universality of the maxim, [I can] vary the degree generally in accordance with the different objects of my love (one of whom [i.e. myself] concerns me more closely than another)” (MS 6:451). Whilst these statements are strictly speaking about benevolence, Kant clarifies in the same paragraph that “it is quite obvious that what is meant here is not merely benevolence in *wishes* [...] what is meant is, rather, active practical benevolence (beneficence), making the well-being and happiness of others my *end*” (MS 6:452). Not only is considering our own ends *part* of being beneficent, but we can, when it comes to practical deliberation about how to be beneficent, *prioritise* our own ends over the ends of others, with the proviso that we are not indifferent to others (see section 6).²⁶ Kant’s argument here is no aberration as he repeatedly applies the notion that different forms of closeness matter morally and can and should impact our moral deliberation. For example, Kant acknowledges that there are duties of gratitude to those who have benefited us in the past (MS 6:454-6), such as forbears. He also mentions the relation to one’s spouse (MS 6:422), children (MS 6:280, 422), political authorities and fellow citizens (MS 6:422), parents (MS 6:390), friends (MS 6:469) and others we are close to (MS 6:451-2) as relationships that create special moral obligations. For Kant, unlike Utilitarians, there is no obligation to treat all ends impartially in practice.

This point is important for understanding what Kant means by characterising beneficence as a “*wide*” duty that includes “latitude for doing more or less” and where “no specific limits can be assigned to what should be done” (MS 6:393). Kant explains: “a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another (e.g., love of one’s neighbour in general by love of one’s parents), by which in fact the field for the practice of virtue is widened” (MS 6:390). This passage is central to the debate around the demandingness of Kantian beneficence and our reading can avoid the problems associated with other interpretations.

The rigorist interpretation of this passage holds that “one may permissibly decline to perform an action that promotes an obligatory end only for the sake of performing another action that is also” required by duty (Baron and Fahmy 2009, p.220). Timmerman (2005) defends a version of the rigorist interpretation, according to which it is *never* morally permissible to pursue our own ends when we could be pursuing obligatory ends instead. Imperfect duties, if they apply to a specific situation, “command with the force of practical necessity and silence the claim of inclinations” (Timmermann 2013, p.46).²⁷ This implies that we must always be helping others or perfecting ourselves *whenever* we can (which is almost *all* of the time). This looks very demanding as it leaves no room for the pursuit of our own morally permissible ends. In contrast the non-rigorist or latitudinist interpretation holds that we can sometimes permissibly pursue our happiness even when we could be helping others (or perfecting ourselves). The most prominent defender of this interpretation is Hill (2002, p.207). This looks too undemanding as it would seem to allow us to prioritise our own trivial ends over rescuing others (for a response see Hill 2002, pp.201-43).

In terms of the debate between latitudinarians and rigorist, our account does not fall straightforwardly into either camp. We are not saying that you can (latitudinist) or cannot (rigorist) make an exception to duty for the sake of happiness. Instead, we are saying that you don’t *need* to make an exception since your own permissible ends already sit *within* the system of morality and beneficence. This means that, *as part of the project of morality* to try to realise the realm of ends, we are *permitted* to pursue our own permissible ends *for the same reason* that we are *obligated* to make the ends of all other rational agents our own, namely because this is the appropriate response to the dignity of rational agents. Further, in being beneficent we can prioritise our own ends and the ends of those near and dear, and leaving a place for our own permissible ends within the system of morality in this way helps to ensure that beneficence does not become too demanding. We thus can agree with Timmermann’s strong prioritising of

morality, expressed in the notion that duty can silence all non-moral goods, while arriving at a very different normative upshot, namely, a conception according to which many personal pursuits constitute permissible activities with a moral standing that is not silenced by opportunities to benefit others or perfect ourselves. But while this prevents our account from being too demanding, does it also make it too undemanding? To start answering that question, we first need to turn to virtue.

5. Virtue and Beneficence in *The Metaphysics of Morals*

In section 31 of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, the role of virtue becomes more important in Kant's account of beneficence. There Kant says that beneficence is a *meritorious* duty, since we don't strictly *owe* it to others to help them (as we could always help others instead) and we put others under obligation to us when we are beneficent toward them. While we should not help others so much that we ourselves need others to provide for us (MS 6:454), someone who is "rich" since he has means "in excess of his own needs [Bedürfnis]" should "hardly even regard beneficence as a meritorious duty" (MS 6:453). The rich should try to give in secret or pretend that beneficence is owed, rather than meritorious, to help avoid undermining the self-respect of those in distress which could result in the vice of ingratitude. This leads Kant to note that "the virtue is greater when the benefactor's means are limited" (MS 6:453). Since the virtue is *greater* when our means for helping are less, this implies that we should conceptualise beneficence as a virtue which comes in degrees.

Kant specifies the link between virtue and wide duties (such as beneficence) as follows: "The wider the duty, therefore, the more imperfect is a man's obligation to action; as he, nevertheless, brings closer to narrow duty (duties of right) the maxim of complying with wide duty (in his disposition), so much the more perfect is his virtuous action" (MS 6:390). This

reference to degrees of virtuous action (“more perfect”) is then immediately explained. Fulfilment of duties of virtue deserve “*merit (meritum)*” and the “strength of one's resolution” is “called *virtue*”, but failure to fulfil them only constitutes “*culpability (demeritum)*” if the “subject should make it his principle not to comply with such duties”. Only in the latter case do we have “*vice*” rather than “mere *want of virtue*” (MS 6:390).

The concept of virtue introduces a scalar notion into the fulfilment of duty. The closer one brings his maxim of complying with wide duty in his disposition to narrow duties, the “more perfect is his virtuous action”. The more one helps others, the greater the merit and the more virtuous one is. The less one helps, the less merit and virtue one has, without being vicious (unless one is indifferent). This allows us to say that it is *more virtuous* or *more meritorious* to do more than the minimum of not being indifferent to others up to the maximum of becoming in need of help yourself. In other words, sacrificing lots to help others is *better* (in the sense of more meritorious) than doing less, but it is *not required* (as it is not culpably vicious).

But do we need to *maximise* virtue by becoming as virtuous as we possibly can? This question is central for the discussion of Kantian beneficence in the context of the overdemandingness debate, since one of the central reasons why forms of Consequentialism are extremely demanding is that they require that an agent does the very best she can do (McElwee 2016). If we were required to maximise our virtue, then it would not merely be *better* (in the sense of more meritorious) but *required* (in the sense that it would be wrong not to) that we seek to make our wide duties as close as possible to narrow duties. However, the recent literature on Kantian virtue focuses on *what* Kantian virtue is, *how* we develop it, and how Kant's concept of virtue compares with ancient alternatives, mainly Aristotle and the Stoics (e.g. Sherman 1997, Baxley 2010). The question of whether we must *maximise* virtue does not seem to have explicitly arisen in the Kantian literature.²⁸

For Kant, there is virtue as a singular ideal of character and there are several virtues (or duties of virtue), such as beneficence and gratitude, that express that underlying good character. Virtue in the singular has three components (Formosa 2017; see also Baxley 2010): 1) the duty of apathy, or the duty to rid ourselves of affects and passions; 2) the duty to seek a good disposition and thereby overcome our radical evil; and 3) the duty to love morality, in part by developing pro-moral emotions and desires, such as love for others. We can see how this applies to the virtue of beneficence. First, we should seek to rid ourselves of affects and passions, such as envy, greed, and selfishness, which can interfere with our pursuit of beneficence. Second, we should seek to replace our deepest disposition to sometimes place self-love above morality by undertaking a revolution at the root of our character. If we do that, when there is a conflict between morality and self-love, we will always be disposed to do what morality requires because morality requires it. Third, part of loving morality is doing our duty gladly, and that involves becoming the sort of person who *wants* to and *enjoys* helping others, in other words, someone who *loves* and *respects* others (Fahmy 2010). The way to become that sort of person is, in part, to fulfil the duty of beneficence by helping others, which in turn (provided you don't suffer too much ingratitude) will develop love for others in you (MS 6:402).

None of these three components of virtue seem to require maximising. According to Kant's rigorism, a good disposition is either present or absent (Formosa 2007), and so talk of maximising makes no sense here. Regarding avoiding apathy and loving morality, Kant is clear that these are not activities we must be doing every minute of the day or to some maximal extent. Again, maximising makes little sense here. Nonetheless, the more virtuous we are, the more we will want to help others, and so the more meritorious our actions will be since we will have become the sort of person who deeply cares about others. Helping others will become central to who we are, and so we will *seek out* occasions to help others, and *willingly* or *gladly*

sacrifice some of our welfare to aid them. As we become more virtuous, the strictness of wide duties to love others will approach the strictness of narrow duties to respect them, even though there is no *requirement* to maximise this strictness (in the sense of it being vicious or wrong to fall short of the maximum). Further, even the most virtuous agent is permitted to pursue her own ends. Nonetheless, as we seek to overcome our radical evil, rid ourselves of envy and greed, and adopt a fundamental commitment to morality over self-love, we will become the sort of person who prioritises helping others. The virtue of beneficence thus constitutes both a very demanding *ideal* to strive for, and a less demanding, but very stringent, *requirement* that we not be vicious.²⁹

6. How Demanding is Kantian Beneficence?

There are two key features of the Kantian view developed here that make it a moderately demanding conception of beneficence. First, it holds that it is better, in the sense of more virtuous, to help others as much as we can (as long as we can still support ourselves), but it is not morally wrong or vicious to fail to reach this maximum amount of helping. Second, it holds that in seeking to be beneficent, we can prioritise our own ends and the ends of those near and dear. Together these two features ensure that the view is moderately demanding as it implies that we do not have to give up our own permissible ends, devote all our time and resources to helping others, or treat the ends of distant strangers the same as our own ends or the ends of family and friends. However, Kantian views such as this face two key worries. First, that they do not ask enough of us, either in the sense that we aren't required to sacrifice enough in helping others in general – call this *general undemandingness* – or in the sense that it lacks the resources to morally condemn agents for failing to help on certain concrete occasions, such as when walking past a drowning child – call this *specific undemandingness*. Second, that in moderating

the demands of morality by incorporating our own ends into the moral domain we wrongly *moralise* our non-moral projects.

Regarding the undemandingness worries, Kant says that since benevolence applies to all humans it is “greatest in its *extent*, but the smallest in its *degree*” because the “interest” I am required to take in others “is as slight as an interest can be. I am only not indifferent [gleichgültig] with regard to” others (MS 6:451). Kant shortly after stresses that this is not only a requirement of benevolence (in wishes), but also, and especially, of “practical benevolence (beneficence)” (MS 6:452). In addition, we have already seen that Kant thinks that beneficence requires us not to be indifferent (KpV 5:69). Avoiding being indifferent to others, or having the vice of indifference, effectively constitutes a baseline to beneficence under which we may not fall. Kant suggests elsewhere that one thing that certainly counts as being indifferent to others is the “*culpability (demeritum)*” of making it your “principle not to comply with” your “duties” to be beneficent (MS 6:390). While this suggest that *only* adopting non-beneficence as a principle counts as culpability (i.e., a *no help* maxim), the FH’s positive requirement to make others’ ends our own shows that, if we want to avoid a violation of duty, we must do more than merely avoid making non-compliance a principle. We must make the ends of others our own, not only by taking the ends of all others to have deliberative salience for us, but also by concretely furthering the ends of some others, whether through helping or rescuing them, on at least some occasions. Failure to do this is behaviour that falls below the baseline of beneficence and amounts to vicious indifference.

Indifference acts as a baseline requirement below which we should not use scalar talk (“we are less virtuous”) but binary concepts (“we are vicious, and our behaviour is wrong”). Of course, for Kant we are *all* morally flawed as we are all radically evil because at its deepest root our commitment to morality is less than unconditional (Formosa 2007). But while we all have less than fully perfected virtue due to our radical evil, individually we can have higher

and lower degrees of the virtue of beneficence without suffering from the vice of indifference, provided that we take the ends of all others to have deliberative salience *and* we do something to help fulfil the ends of some others on some occasions. In contrast, someone who falls below this baseline requirement lacks *any amount* of the virtue of beneficence and instead exemplifies the vice of indifference.

We can use the requirement of avoiding indifference to address the *general undemandingness* worry that we aren't required to sacrifice enough in total. In the aggregate, while the demands that avoiding indifference requires is hardly exact, it does require that we make some *real* sacrifices in helping others. For example, we would rightly doubt that someone who never or only very rarely helped others *really* is committed to avoiding indifference and has made this her end. Rather, we would more likely think that she is lying or engaging in self-deception when she claims that she is not indifferent to the plight of others, since avoiding indifference requires some real sacrifice in a world full of very needy people that we could each easily save. Even if it is unspecified exactly how much we must do, this creates a substantive baseline to our aggregate helping of others below which it is not merely lacking in virtue but viciously indifferent to fall. Above this baseline, the more we help others, the more virtuous we are.

However, this might still be too weak when we address the *specific undemandingness* worry, which arises in concrete cases of easy rescue: can I omit to save *this* child drowning in the shallow pond, if I sometimes make sacrifices to help others? Hooker (2000, p.161), for instance, objects to the "imperfect duties view", as it "leaves too much room here for arbitrary choice". A similar worry is raised by Stohr (2011). Both Hooker and Stohr have in mind Hill's latitudinarian view, according to which we have the "freedom to choose to do x or not on a given occasion, as one pleases, even though one knows that x is the sort of act that falls under

the principle [e.g. of beneficence], provided that one is ready to perform acts of that sort on some other occasions” (Hill 1992, p.155).

On our view, it would be wrong to fail to save the drowning child if this amounted to indifference. I am indifferent if I fail either to regard the (permissible) ends of all others as having deliberative salience or to adopt the end of furthering the ends of others by helping some others, especially if these others are in distress and in danger of having all their ends frustrated through an easily prevented death. After all, if you care about others achieving their ends *in general* and give this consideration appropriate deliberative salience, then you ought to *really care* and *prioritise* ensuring that others don't have *all* their ends *permanently* frustrated through a failure to perform an easy rescue.³⁰ However, meeting this requirement might still seem too minimal, since it could be that I make genuine sacrifices in helping others (I have ruined my clothes many times saving children from shallow ponds in the past), but at *this* time I decide to pursue my personal ends instead of saving the child, even though I took the child's ends as salient when deliberating. It is unclear why a failure to help here or there when you could, in the context of a pattern of making sacrifices to help others, should amount to vicious indifference, since previous acts of helping seem to show that you are not really *indifferent* to others. In that context, failure to rescue in such cases *might* not be vicious or wrong (although we say more on this below).³¹

While being unable to unequivocally condemn every single failure to rescue might be seen as a cost of our view,³² it is important to keep in mind that this cost has paid for a theory that can avoid overdemandingness worries, which are themselves very significant worries given that we live in a world full of unmet needs, emergencies and occasions to help others. There is simply no cost-free solution here. Further, we are not saying that anyone who fails to help drowning children does no wrong. In many cases, failure to help constitutes vicious

indifference and will therefore be wrong. What we are interested in is mapping out the middle ground of someone who does their fair share to help others, and who might even go beyond their fair share on certain occasions, and of whom we think, on reflection, that they are not doing wrong, even if we accept that they could do more and be better.

For those who are not convinced yet that the costs of our view are acceptable and that we can adequately answer the *specific undemandingness* worry, we have three further responses concerning how, on our reading, Kantians can and should handle shallow pond cases. Firstly, we should bear in mind that the Shallow Pond case as introduced by Singer (1972) is aimed at motivating a broadly speaking Consequentialist rescue principle. It is not clear that non-Consequentialist ethical theories must give this case the same prominence. In contrast, Kant's ethics puts perfect duties and corresponding rights first. Kant would therefore remind us that focusing on shallow pond cases can obscure that often the real villain is the person who in the pursuit of her personal goals *throws* others into the shallow pond (literally as well as figuratively) or who substantially benefits from a situation in which people drown in shallow ponds and who has an interest in maintaining this situation.³³ She treats others as mere means and violates their rights, and this is far more contemptuous than failing to save someone who has no right to her help. Kant even suggests that a world in which no one helped others but always respected others' rights would "still [be] better than when everyone chatters about compassion and benevolence, even develops the zeal to perform such actions occasionally, but also cheats wherever he can, sells out the right of human beings, or infringes it in some other way" (GMS 4:423).

Moreover, other Kantian theorists are not necessarily in a better position to account for the drowning child case than we are. For instance, on Pogge's (1998) account, we have stringent duties to the victims of (structural) injustice if we benefit from and uphold this

injustice. But this does not seem to be the situation in the pond case. We are not benefiting from the child's predicament, and he is in the pond because of an accident and not structural injustice, and thus the stringent duties of justice do not apply.³⁴ The most promising Kantian proposal to show that we must save the drowning child might be Herman's (1984) duties of aid. For Herman, duties to aid others specifically apply to emergency cases, which we have on top of duties of beneficence which apply to more mundane cases, and duties of aid are much more stringent than duties of beneficence. But the main cost of Herman's view is that her account, once more, raises the worry of overdemandingness, since her duties of aid might be as demanding as Singer's rescue principle.³⁵

Secondly, we should be reluctant to judge others' characters based on just a few points of data, such as a person who walks past a shallow pond with someone in distress in it. For all we know, this person might be a committed humanitarian who is enjoying her first day off from doing charity work in years. We cannot simply infer from one action or inaction an underlying principle of indifference, as much will depend on the case and the person. While those who fail to save in shallow pond cases at the very least owe us an explanation, their omission need not *necessarily* constitute vicious indifference. However, while our committed humanitarian might not be vicious when she fails to stop and help, given her otherwise impressive commitment to helping others, the same is not true of many others. Absent such a record of helping others, failure to help in drowning child cases amounts to vicious indifference and is therefore wrong. Kant, on our reading, acknowledges and can account for the intricacies of real-life cases in which various different explanations for one action are often available and we should thus be careful not to infer too much from a single (in)action without knowing underlying patterns and principles.

Thirdly, even if an agent's failure to help on some salient occasions does not constitute culpable indifference (as in the case of our otherwise committed humanitarian), we can still *morally criticise* such agents insofar as they could have been more virtuous, even if they are not vicious. Agents who remain above the baseline of non-indifference, but only *just* above it, might easily fall below it. Both the humanitarian whose donations improve many lives but who still does less than she could and who is not fully virtuous, and the person who saves a drowning child on Monday but not on Tuesday since he already got his clothes wet the day before (and who overall exhibits a sufficient commitment to beneficence), do not do wrong and are not vicious but could do more. Yet, criticism is much more warranted in the latter case, since the agent's failure to help either constitutes culpable indifference (in which case his action is wrong) or verges very close to it, so that we would rightly demand an explanation for the potential indifference expressed in his omission.³⁶ In contrast, while the less-than-perfect humanitarian may not have reached the fullest heights of perfected virtue, she is very far from being indifferent, and while there are grounds for moral *self*-improvement, there are little grounds for *others* to criticise her. The reason for this is that, despite the common misconception of his ethics as judgemental, outside of rights violations Kant emphasises critical *self*-evaluation, as opposed to criticising *others* (Wood 1999, pp.134-9). If agents do not violate perfect duties and if they are neither vicious nor borderline vicious, then there is very little that it would be appropriate to say to them in the way of moral criticism. Since we are *all* radically imperfect on Kant's view, we should (generally) focus on our own moral self-improvement and reassessing our own priorities.

The final worry that we need to address is that of *over-moralising* the non-moral. This worry arises since, according to our conception, beneficence extends to our own aims. However, Kant is clear that "meritorious" duties are those that "put others under obligation" (MS 6:448). But you cannot put yourself under an obligation to be grateful to yourself by being

self-beneficent. Kant is also clear that meritoriousness is only relevant where *duty* is at stake and not the merely permissible. Thus, furthering your own ends is neither meritorious nor virtuous, even if it is part of realising the realm of ends. We cannot increase our virtue by spending resources on our personal projects, even though this is in principle permissible.

Nonetheless, one might still share Williams' (1985, p.50) concern that the idea that duties to self could make a moral system less intrusive is an attempt to "launder the currency of desire". The same could be said about our argument concerning beneficence, as Kant only accepts our personal projects insofar as they fit into the morality system that is the realm of ends. But this is only moralistic in the sense that morality *permits* the pursuit of our ends and caring that our personal pursuits are not immoral hardly seems overly moralistic. Indeed, we could push back and say that any system of morality that failed to give our ends and core projects any moral standing would be an overly narrow moral theory that threatens to alienate agents from morality.

Sticker and van Ackeren (2018) follow Williams in the criticism of the moralising aspect of the system of duties approach, but they focus their criticism on the supposed moderating power of self-perfection, indirect duties, and special obligations to loved ones. If promoting our own ends were a (direct or indirect) moral *duty* to oneself or loved ones, then this would indeed depart from how we normally think of many of the pursuits that make our life worth living and fail to make sense of the fact that we can give up or neglect as we please these pursuits without doing anything morally wrong. But on our reading, we avoid this problem as our own ends are morally *permissible*, not morally obligatory, and they become morally important *because* we *care* about them and adopt them as our own. Our proposal can thereby escape the criticisms levelled against other system of duties approaches.

7. Conclusion

According to our novel reading, Kant has a moderately demanding conception of beneficence. On this view, the permissible ends of all self-legislating agents, including our own personal ends, have deliberative salience in moral deliberation. If we promote others' ends for the right reasons, then we do our duty and act meritoriously and virtuously. But if we promote our own ends, then although this is morally permissible (if we are not indifferent to others), it is not a matter of duty and is neutral in terms of merit and virtuousness. Further, we are closer to ourselves than to (most) other people and this makes it morally permissible for us to prioritise our own ends (provided we are not indifferent to others), even though, from an impartial perspective, they are not more or less valuable than the permissible ends of others. However, the more we help others and the more we become the sort of person who loves to help others, the more virtuous we become. Even so, we do not have to be maximally virtuous within a Kantian framework, though there is of course a sense in which more virtue is better than less virtue. We do, however, have an obligation not to be indifferent to others, and this requires a commitment to helping others that constitutes a baseline below which it is wrong to fall.

This Kantian conception of beneficence can enrich current debates about demandingness, since it makes an agent's personal projects, and the fact that partiality towards self and others are important ethical concerns, part of a principled account of beneficence. It provides a baseline under which we are not allowed to fall and thus sets limits. Furthermore, it can explain both why it is good to do more in helping others but also why it is legitimate to make room for one's personal projects within an ethical life. It makes concern for oneself part of beneficence and morality, without being overly moralistic. In this way, this account promises to avoid both overdemandingness and undemandingness objections.

All references to Kant's works are cited by the volume and page number of the Academy Edition, *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften* (1900-). English quotations, with occasional modifications, are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (1992-). For abbreviations of Kant's works, we use the standard list of sigla from *Kant-Studien*.

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² See Sticker (2017) for a critical discussion of Kant's claims that he starts his ethical theory from the common rational cognition of duty and Sticker (forthcoming) for discussion of this methodological commitment in the context of the demandingness debate.

³ Although Hill (2002, p.212) later clarifies his view, claiming that this is true only of the general duty of beneficence, and that the categorical imperative might require that we help on certain occasions.

⁴ See, however, Swanton (2009) and Cullity (1994).

⁵ Even if easy rescue cases in my vicinity are subject to a separate and more stringent duty, Kantian ethics still faces the question of how to show that we absolutely must help in these cases, even if we have helped before in similar cases. Treating easy rescue as different from beneficence does not *per se* solve the problem of specific undemandingness (see section 6), unless we can show that easy rescue cases generate *perfect* duties. It is, however, difficult to see how that could be done within a Kantian framework.

⁶ For instance, see Rinne (2018, chapter 4) for a unified account of our imperfect duties to help others.

⁷ It matters how we translate the German “Noth” here. In the *Cambridge Edition* Gregor usually translates this as “need” (p.572) and sometimes as “distress” (p.264). We will use “distress” as this makes it clear that “Noth” does not refer to any trivial need while it is more inclusive than “emergency” as it includes on-going hardships. For discussion, see Moran (2017) and Sticker (forthcoming).

⁸ The second reading has recently been defended by van Ackeren and Sticker (2018).

⁹ We treat these two formulas as equivalent for our purposes – for discussion see Formosa (2017).

¹⁰ If you think there *is* a contradiction in will here, then increase the minimal amount of helping until there is no longer a contradiction, such as a maxim of “helping others once a month”.

¹¹ One might object that since the FH and FLN/FUL are supposed to be equivalent, one can’t be more demanding than the other (see Formosa 2017). However, we are agnostic here about this equivalency and instead simply look at what the two principles say about beneficence.

¹² We discuss the FRE here only insofar as this formula reveals something about the status and nature of the kinds of ends that beneficence might pertain to. This leaves open many other important questions, such as how to derive concrete duties, including the duty of beneficence, from the idea of a realm of ends. See Flikschuh (2009) for more discussion.

¹³ For further defence of the claim that self-given or personal ends are part of the realm of ends, see Formosa (2017). Only morally permissible ends form part of the realm of ends, since in that realm all rational beings stand “under the *law* that each of them is to treat himself and all others *never merely as means* but always *at the same time as ends in themselves*” (GMS 4:433). Our will is only legislative for others when we meet this universal requirement.

¹⁴ “In the realm of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*”. It is rational agents who are “capable of morality” that have dignity, whereas the ends which rational agents adopt that are “related to general human inclinations” have a price. But *both* dignity *and* price ends are “in” the realm of ends (GMS 4:434-35).

¹⁵ Stohr (2011, p.62) has developed a conception of Kantian beneficence where the command to not be indifferent to others is in stringency akin to perfect duties: “although we are not always required to help, we are always required not to be indifferent”.

¹⁶ Amongst Kant’s discussions of beneficence, his discussion of love of human beings [Menschenliebe] as an aesthetic predisposition has a special status (MS 6:401-2) since love of human beings, alongside three other predispositions, constitutes a condition for the receptivity to duty. To sidestep any additional complications that Kant’s notion of aesthetic predispositions raises, we will focus on Kant’s other discussions of beneficence. See Rinne (2018, chapter 4.2.1) and Thorndike (2018, chapter 3) for discussion.

¹⁷ To give another example, Kant (MS 6:450-1) writes of a “maxim of *benevolence*” and “the duty of mutual *benevolence*” but then goes on to say that “it is only in this way that your maxim (of *beneficence*) qualifies for a giving of universal law” [our italics], again suggesting the equivalency of benevolence and beneficence in some contexts.

¹⁸ It should be noted that one problem for understanding these connections is that translating “Wohlgefallen” as “delight” (as Gregor does in the *Cambridge Edition*) obscures that Wohltun, Wohlwollen and Wohlgefallen are all concerned with *Wohl* (i.e. weal or well-being) and represent different attitudes to the same thing.

¹⁹ Whether we ought to aim at only adopting ends that can harmonise with the ends of all others is a further issue which we won’t explore here, but for discussion see Wood (1999, p.270).

²⁰ While this point is also noted by Hill (2002, p.224), he makes little use of it in his account of beneficence.

²¹ See also: “A command that everyone should seek to make himself happy would be foolish, for one never commands of someone what he unavoidably wants already” (KpV 5:37). While this is clearly Kant’s view, it is not without problems, since some agents (because of depression or a lack of self-esteem) might be inclined to benefit certain others over themselves (Formosa 2017).

²² Or “*permits* you to be benevolent to yourself” as Gregor translates it in the *Cambridge Edition*.

²³ Kant is anti-paternalistic: we do not get to decide what ends others have (MS 6:454), even if those ends seem pointless to us, such as the person whose end it is to count blades of grass or to read the information on a box of cereal (see Noggle 2009, p.8). But Kant is also clear that, unless the other person has a right to my help, I don’t *have* to help if I doubt that promoting an end will make that person happy (MS 6:388). Further, someone who devotes themselves to counting blades of grass might be “insane”, and we *can* be paternalistic to the insane (and children) – see MS 6:454. But if someone is sane and makes something their end, then if we are to respect them

as an agent, we must treat their ends as part of the realm of ends. But we need not *prioritise* helping them to achieve an end that seems pointless.

²⁴ Though, of course, these ends do not have *overriding* normative force, since it would be clearly overdemanding and practically impossible to have to promote concretely every single permissible end that agents have adopted. There is also a sense in which I would treat myself merely as a means if I were to work full time to promote the ends or welfare of others.

²⁵ More evidence for the moral status of my own happiness is to be found in Kant's conception of the highest good, which combines my own happiness in proportion to my moral goodness (KpV 5:110-1). The idea here is that my own happiness, under certain conditions, is *morally* good, even though I do not have a *duty* to pursue it.

²⁶ While Sticker and van Ackeren (2018, section 5) critically discuss the potential of special obligations to make beneficence less demanding, they do not discuss that, for Kant, there is within beneficence itself a special relationship towards *oneself*. Thorndike (2018, chapter 3) has recently developed a framework for understanding role obligations as part of a system of duties. However, any space for an agent's own personal projects (as opposed to those of loved ones) is conspicuously absent from this account. It is thus a desideratum to explore this aspect of Kant's conception of beneficence.

²⁷ Timmermann (2018) argues that the promotion of obligatory ends can only be restricted by "weightier moral considerations", namely, perfect duties, and "sheer physical impossibility". These restrictions do not make space for agents' personal projects, though.

²⁸ Obviously, the question of whether we need to maximise virtue is not only relevant for duties we have to others, but also for duties to *self*. It should be noted that Kant's own claims about whether (moral) *self-perfection* is something we are to pursue as much as we can are ambiguous. On the one hand, as a wide duty, we would expect that self-perfection admits of latitude and Kant claims that it is open to an agent's individual choice "*how far one should go in cultivating one's capacities*" and that developing talents is "a matter for [the agent] to decide as he chooses" (GMS 4:392). On the other hand, agents are supposedly required "to strive with all one's might that the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty" (GMS 4:393). Kant's claims about the stringency of self-perfection in general are not conclusive and in what follows we will therefore focus on Kant's more specific discussion of three central components of virtue to better understand the demandingness of virtue.

²⁹ For more on the distinction between *ideals* and *requirements*, see Hill (2002, p.224). Fahmy (2010, p.318) likewise notes that since virtue involves affective states "our duty can be only to *strive* for it".

³⁰ This sort of reasoning helps to make sense of Kant's focus on *distress* in his discussion of indifference in the second *Critique* (see section 3 above).

³¹ For further discussion of repeat drowning child cases, see Timmerman (2015).

³² However, our intuitions about such cases might not be as clear cut as they initially seem. For instance Cullity (1994), who attempts to reformulate Singer's arguments in a way that is more amenable to virtue ethics and common sense, points out that one of the weaknesses of Singer's argument is that we could run his argument the other way around: we are sure that we do not do wrong by not helping the distant poor, distance is morally irrelevant, and thus we are not doing wrong by not helping the drowning child.

³³ Philosophers, such as Pogge (1998), argue that the international global order that rich states uphold and enforce and from which the citizens of rich states benefit, helps to effectively *make* the poor poor. This is akin to throwing the poor into the pond or at least to benefiting from the fact that they struggle for survival in the pond. See also Kant's occasional remarks that the citizens of wealthy nations might have *perfect* duties of justice to the globally poor because they benefit from the unjust global order (KpV 5:155, MS 6:453-4).

³⁴ As a matter of fact, we live in a world where individual agents do evil things, but also a world where accidents happen and lives are in jeopardy without any wrongdoing. We need a moral theory that can tell us how to respond to both phenomena. While this is correct, we should keep in mind that both phenomena are morally quite different. The latter might be a tragedy, whereas the former requires a very different moral assessment and framework. For instance, there might be duties of restitution that wrongdoers and even consumers have that are not present in the case of mere accidents. It is a virtue of Kant's theory that he can distinguish cases of emergency based on the reasons that created it, and that it is not only the bare fact of emergency itself that matters in these cases. One reason why this distinction matters is because there are arguably many more cases of acute need due to injustice, then because of accidents. Kantians might therefore argue that it is the shallow pond case as laid out by Singer that obscures the facts of global injustice. We are grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing us on this.

³⁵ Herman addresses the overdemandingness problem by stressing that obligatory ends, in particular self-perfection, "bring a wide range of ordinary human concerns inside morality" (Herman 2011, p.100). This runs into the problem of moralisation of the non-moral, which we address below. Furthermore, she thinks that Kant's notion of "true needs", which she takes to be the needs "whose satisfaction is a necessary condition for the exercise of rationality", can limit how much or what an agent can be required to sacrifice (Herman 1984, p.597). Kant's brief remarks about true needs would require a separate discussion, as they are often cited as evidence that Kant's ethics does not demand that agents make great personal sacrifices for others. We shall not discuss the notion of

true needs here, as Sticker and van Ackeren (2018, section 4) and Sticker (forthcoming) have plausibly criticised appeals to true needs in the context of a system of duties argument because there are no objective standards for what true needs are and it is unclear why these needs deserve a special status. What matters for the purpose of our discussion is that Herman acknowledges that overdemandingness is a problem. She even claims that “[i]t is generally agreed that there is a duty of easy rescue”, but that “a slippery slope threatens” (Herman 2001, p.228). Once we approach our duty towards others from cases of easy rescue, it is difficult to avoid generating very stringent duties towards the globally poor, which could lead us to think that an agent is “to be regarded as a warehouse of potentially distributable skills and possessions” (ibid., p.241). Our proposal addresses this worry.

³⁶ That it is morally dangerous to be above but close to the baseline is not something Kant explicitly says, but it is plausible to assume. Kant himself sometimes proposes a much stronger principle of safety, according to which “we *ought to venture nothing where there is danger that it might be wrong*” (RGV 6:185, see also MpVT 8:267-8).

In Formosa, P. and Sticker, M., "Kant and the demandingness of the virtue of beneficence", *European Journal of Philosophy*, ejop.12455, April 25 2019, the following was published on page 2:

- Passage 1) Both Kantianism and Consequentialism have been criticised along these lines by Wolf (1982) and Williams (1985) for being overly detached from our moral experiences and from what gives our lives meaning. Modern ethical theories, according to these critics, threaten to neglect or diminish the importance of personal ground projects, goals and values, and the weight of personal non-moral reasons.
- Passage 2) Kant himself acknowledges overdemandingness as a problem at several places. In the second Critique, Kant criticises the Stoics for "straining the moral capacities of a human being ... far beyond all the limits of his nature" (KpV 5:127). The Stoic conception of virtue is unfit for human beings, since the ideal Stoic agent, the sage, is presented as a "divinity," an entity "independent of nature" for whom happiness is of no special relevance (KpV 5:126–127). In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant warns of the "fantastically virtuous" character who is "too virtuous" and thinks that duty has to be considered in every decision. This would turn virtue into a "tyranny" (MS 6:409). Kant thinks that a moral theory can be criticised if, due to an unrealistic conception of human capabilities, it prescribes that finite human beings achieve an impossible ideal or requires humans to give their own happiness no special relevance or to exhaust themselves thinking constantly about morally insignificant matters as if they constituted genuine moral quandaries.

These sections were incorrectly referenced and formatted, and should have read:

- Passage 1) Both Kantianism and Consequentialism have been criticised along these lines by Wolf (1982) and Williams (1985) "for being overly detached from our moral experiences and from what gives our lives meaning" (van Ackeren & Sticker, 2018, 375). "Modern ethical theories," according to these critics, "threaten to neglect or diminish the importance of personal ground projects, goals and values, ... [and] the weight of personal non-moral reasons" (van Ackeren & Sticker, 2018, 375).
- Passage 2) Kant himself acknowledges overdemandingness as a problem at several places. In the second Critique,
 "Kant criticises the Stoics for 'straining the moral capacities of a human being ... far beyond all the limits of his nature' (KpV 5:127). The Stoic conception of virtue is unfit for human beings, since the ideal Stoic agent, the sage, is presented as a 'divinity,' an entity 'independent of nature' for whom happiness is of no special relevance (KpV 5:126–127). In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant warns of the 'fantastically virtuous' character who is 'too virtuous' and thinks that duty has to be considered in every decision. This would turn virtue into a 'tyranny' (MS 6:409). Kant thinks that a moral theory can be criticised if, due to an unrealistic conception of human capabilities, it prescribes that finite human beings achieve an impossible ideal." (van Ackeren & Sticker, 2018, 373).

We apologize for these errors.

REFERENCE

- van Ackeren, M., & Sticker, M. (2018). Kant and the Problem of Demandingness: Introduction. *Kantian Review*, 23(3), 373–378. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1369415418000195>