

Kant, the practical postulates and Clifford's principle

In this paper I argue that there are grounds for thinking that Kant would have sided with Clifford rather than with James (notwithstanding the practical postulates). Accordingly, the paper is divided into three sections. In section one, I review Kant's argument for the practical postulates. In section two, I appeal to moral encroachment theories of justification to show that the practical postulates might be consistent with Clifford's principle. In the third and final section, I turn to Kant's stance on lying and self-deception to explain why I think Kant might have upheld Clifford's principle.

Section one. Kant's argument for the practical postulates.

Kant's argument for the practical postulates can be found in all three of his *Critiques* as well as in many of his other published and unpublished works.¹ I shall use Kant's 1788 exposition from the *Critique of practical reason* to explain the basic idea behind the argument while gesturing toward some of the important differences between this version of the argument and versions of the argument found in Kant's other works.

There are two basic premises in Kant's argument as I shall reconstruct it here:

1. There are no theoretical grounds for or against belief in freedom, God or immortality of the soul.
2. There are practical grounds for belief in freedom, God and immortality of the soul.
3. Therefore, agents ought to believe in freedom, God and immortality of the soul.

This argument schema can be found, for example, in the following passage:

...a need of pure practical reason is based on a *duty*, that of making something (the highest good) the object of my will so as to promote it with all my powers; and thus I must suppose its possibility and so too the conditions for this, namely God, freedom, and immortality, because I cannot prove these by my speculative reason, although I can also not refute them. (5:142)²

In this passage, Kant argues that the practical postulates are based on (a) the fact that the faculty of pure practical reason has a basis for belief in God, freedom and immortality (*viz.*, duty) and on (b) the fact that the faculty of speculative reason cannot prove or refute this belief.

However, the two-premise argument I have reconstructed above is missing a premise. The missing premise is as follows: if there are no theoretical grounds against belief in X and there are practical grounds for belief in X, then agents ought to believe in X even if

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there are no theoretical grounds for belief in X. This premise might be taken to be directly opposed to and thus inconsistent with Clifford's principle. I shall return to this below (when I argue otherwise). For now, I want to explain in more detail Kant's commitment to premises 1 and 2.

Kant takes the work for premise 1 to have been done in the *Critique of pure reason*. For example, in the Paralogisms chapter, Kant takes himself to have shown that the doctrine of rational psychology, which purports to give insight into the nature of the soul, is based on faulty reasoning.³ Similarly, in the Antinomy chapter, Kant takes himself to have shown that when speculative reason takes on ideas about freedom, it winds up in an antinomy.⁴ Finally, in the Ideal chapter, Kant takes himself to have shown that the traditional arguments for the existence of God do not work.⁵

Kant reminds us of all of this in the following passage from the *Critique of practical reason*, in which he tells us that consideration of the concepts in the practical postulates using solely the faculty of speculative reason leads to insoluble problems:

...it leads to 1: the problem in the solution of which speculative reason could do nothing but commit *paralogisms* (namely, the problem of immorality)...2. It leads to the concept [namely, freedom] with regard to which speculative reason contained nothing but an *antinomy*...3. As for that which speculative reason had to think but to leave undetermined as mere transcendental *ideal*, the *theological* concept of the original being, it [viz., practical reason] furnishes significance to this (for practical purposes, i.e., as a condition of the possibility of the object of a will determined by that law), as the supreme principle of the highest good in an intelligible world... (5:133)

There is one last point I would like to make about this before turning to Kant's commitment to the second premise of my reconstruction of the practical postulates argument: notwithstanding his claim that speculative reason cannot prove God, freedom or immortality of the soul, Kant does think that speculative reason can go some way toward grounding belief in God. This is evident in the following excerpt:

Since we can know only a small part of this world and can still less compare it with all possible worlds, we can well infer from its order, purposiveness, and magnitude a *wise, beneficent, powerful*, and so forth author of it, but not his *omniscience, all-beneficence, omnipotence*, and so forth. (5:139)

In this passage, Kant claims that the physicotheological argument licenses an inference to the existence of a wise, beneficent and powerful creator. The point he wants to make, however, is that this argument falls short of licensing an inference to the existence of an omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent creator.⁶ The rationality of belief in *that* kind of creator, according to Kant, is warranted only

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by appeal to practical reason and, in particular, the argument of the practical postulates. Nonetheless, from this it may be seen that Kant's commitment to the first premise above is more complicated than might appear at first blush: Kant thinks that speculative reason does give grounds for belief in a God, just not an omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent one.⁷ I turn now to Kant's commitment to the second premise of my reconstruction above: that there are practical grounds for belief in freedom, God and immortality.

Kant's argument for this second premise can be reconstructed as follows:

- A. There is a duty to promote the highest good.
- B. We can promote the highest good if but only if we are free, God exists and we have immortal souls.
- C. If there is a duty to X and it is possible to X if but only if Y is true, then there are practical grounds for belief in Y.
- D. Therefore, there are practical grounds for belief in freedom, God and immortality of the soul.

I shall discuss each of the premises of this subargument, briefly, in turn.

According to Kant, the highest good is a world in which happiness is in accordance with virtue.⁸ That is, the highest good is a world in which wicked agents are unhappy and virtuous agents are happy. A world in which wicked agents go unpunished and virtuous agents are unhappy would not satisfy this description.

There is some ambiguity in Kant's texts about the exact nature of the highest good. For instance, one might wonder whether the highest good requires not only proportionality between happiness and virtue but also that all agents actually be virtuous: it seems *prima facie* plausible that a world in which all agents are supremely virtuous and enjoy a corresponding state of beatitude would be better than one in which some agents are wicked and unhappy.⁹ Moreover, Kant does not spend much time explaining why the Categorical Imperative requires agents to promote the highest good. He seems to be more concerned with distinguishing his conception of the highest good from the conceptions he attributes to other schools of thought.¹⁰ However, there is no question but that Kant thinks there is a duty to promote the highest good: "It is a priori (morally) necessary to produce the highest good through the freedom of the will" (5:113).

Kant defends premise B in different ways in his different texts. But in the *Critique of practical reason*, his argument is that freedom is necessary for agents to act morally; immortality is necessary for agents to attain perfect virtue; and God is necessary to explain the conjunction of happiness with virtue. Kant summarizes this in the following passage:

These postulates are those of *immortality*, of *freedom* considered positively (as the causality of a being insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world), and of the *existence of God*. The *first* flows from the practically necessary condition of a duration befitting the complete fulfillment of the moral law; the *second* from the necessary

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presupposition of independence from the sensible world and of the capacity to determine one's will by the law of an intelligible world, that is, the law of freedom; the *third* from the necessity of the condition for such an intelligible world to be the highest good, through the presupposition of the highest independent good, that is, of the existence of God. (5:132)

There are many ways in which one might object to these claims. For instance, even if one concedes that realizing the highest good requires freedom, immortality and God, one might argue that merely promoting the highest good does not.¹¹ The fact that the connections Kant makes between the highest good and freedom, immortality and God are unstable (different in different texts) might indicate that Kant was uncomfortable with his argument on this front.¹² However, this is not important for current purposes.

Kant's commitment to premise C is revealed in the following excerpt:

It is a duty to realize the highest good to the utmost of our capacity; therefore it must be possible; hence it is also unavoidable for every rational being in the world to assume what is necessary for its objective possibility. (5:144n)

Notice that in order to motivate his argument for premise C, Kant appeals to the principle that ought implies can (OIC): Kant claims that because there is a duty to realize the highest good, it must be possible to do so.¹³ I shall return to this in the next section of this paper. For now, the point is that Kant thinks that because the highest good can be realized only if we are free and immortal and if God exists, the fact that there is a duty to promote the highest good entails that there are practical grounds for belief in these things. In other words, the duty to promote the highest good renders belief in God, immortality and freedom rational:

...since the promotion of the highest good, and therefore the supposition of its possibility, is *objectively* necessary...it follows that the principle that determines our judgment about it...is yet, as the means of promoting what is *objectively* (practically) necessary, the ground of a maxim of assent for moral purposes, that is, a *pure practical rational belief*. (5:145-6)

I turn now to section two, in which I confront an objection that is often made to arguments like Kant's argument for the practical postulates.¹⁴

Section two. Kant's views on evidence.

As reconstructed in the previous section, Kant's argument for the practical postulates seems to run directly afoul of Clifford's principle: Kant seems to be arguing that agents are not merely permitted but are positively morally required to believe various things despite not having sufficient evidence for those beliefs. Formulated as such, however, Kant's argument seems to face an obvious objection: agents are not able to believe at will and, thus, it is not clear whether agents are able voluntarily to carry out the duties that issue from the practical postulates. This is problematic in itself, and the problem is made even more pressing given that (as seen above) Kant appeals to OIC in the course of the argument of the practical postulates.

That this problem misses the heart of Kant's argument for the practical postulates is suggested by the following passage from the *Critique of practical reason*:

It might almost seem as if this rational belief is here announced as itself a *command*, namely to assume the highest good as possible. But a belief that is commanded is an absurdity. (5:144)

In this passage Kant argues that the conclusion of the practical postulates is not a command to believe in God, immortality and freedom, for a belief that is commanded is an absurdity. Presumably Kant's reason for saying this is that a belief is not under voluntary control and, thus, a belief that is commanded would violate OIC.

Kant expands on this idea in the succeeding pages, as the following excerpt shows:

Now, since the promotion of the highest good, and therefore the supposition of its possibility, is *objectively* necessary (though only as a consequence of practical reason), while at the same time the manner, the way in which we would think it as possible rests with out choice, in which a free interest of practical reason decides for the assumption of a wise author of the world [i.e., it's not just a happy coincidence, it was brought about by a wise author], it follows that the principle that determines our judgment about it, though it is *subjective* as a need, is yet, as the means of promoting what is *objectively* (practically) necessary, the ground of a maxim of assent for moral purposes, that is, a *pure practical rational belief*. This, then, is not commanded but—being a voluntary determination of our judgment, conducive to the moral (commanded) purpose and moreover harmonizing with the theoretical need of reason to assume that existence and to make it the basis of the further use of reason... (5:145-6)

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In this paragraph, Kant repeats the claim that the practical postulates do not command belief. His idea is, rather, that the practical postulates call forth "a voluntary determination of our judgment." Similarly, in the *Critique of the power of judgment* Kant argues as follows:

This proof [viz., the argument of the practical postulates]... is not meant to say that it is just as necessary to assume the existence of God as it is to acknowledge the validity of the moral law, hence that whoever cannot convince himself of the former can judge himself to be free from the obligations of the latter. No! All that would have to be surrendered in that case would be the aim of realizing the final **end** in the world (a happiness of rational beings harmoniously coinciding with conformity to the moral law, as the highest and best thing in the world) by conformity to the moral law. (5:452)

Kant remarks here that someone who is not able to convince him/herself of the existence of God would not have to give up on the moral law as a source of all duty: s/he (merely) would have to conclude that s/he had been mistaken about a single duty, the duty to promote the highest good. From this it may be seen that the practical postulates are not about whether we ought to *make* ourselves believe in God, freedom and immortality. Rather, the practical postulates are about whether we would be rational in so believing.

This is why I think the practical postulates are consistent with Clifford's principle, at least on some readings of this principle. Clifford's principle says that it would be wrong to believe without sufficient evidence. But Kant's doctrine of the practical postulates is not saying that we ought to believe despite insufficient evidence: it is saying that there is sufficient evidence. It is just that this evidence comes from practical reason. In what follows, I shall appeal to the moral encroachment theories of justification developed recently by pragmatists to make sense of Kant's practical postulates.

There are at least two ways in which the practical postulates might be said to garner sufficient evidence. One way is by lowering the standards for what counts as justification.¹⁵ This can be illustrated with betting. What counts as sufficient evidence that one's opponent has a bad hand in a low stakes poker game might not be accepted as such in a game in which the stakes are considerably higher. Kant uses a similar example in the *Critique of pure reason*:

Often someone pronounces his propositions with such confident and inflexible defiance that he seems to have entirely laid aside concern for error. A bet disconcerts him. Sometimes he reveals that he is persuaded enough for one ducat but not for ten. For he would happily bet one, but at ten he suddenly becomes aware of what he had not previously noticed, namely that it is quite possible that he has erred. (A824-A825/B852-B853)¹⁶

Applying this to the practical postulates, the idea would be that because there is a duty to promote the highest good and this duty can

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be fulfilled if but only if one believes in God, immortality and freedom, the standards of evidence are lower (perhaps much lower) than they would be if one did not have such a duty or if this duty could be fulfilled in some other way.

However, by itself this is open to objection even from within the doctrine of the practical postulates: a key premise in the argument for the practical postulates is that there are no theoretical grounds for or against belief in freedom, God or immortality of the soul. Thus, unless the standards of evidence are lowered to (or below) 50% probability, lowering the standards of evidence will not suffice for Kant.¹⁷ Of course, there are those who might accept beliefs as justified provided that the balance of evidence does not tell against them even if the balance of evidence is not in their favor.¹⁸ This might be called permissive (as opposed to positive) justification.¹⁹ Perhaps this is what Kant means in speaking (in the second block quote reproduced in this section) of the belief accorded by the practical postulates as "voluntary." But some might find this difficult to reconcile with Kant's claim (in the third block quote reproduced in this section) that someone who cannot bring him/herself to believe in the practical postulates should give up on the duty to promote the highest good. Can Kant get more mileage from the practical postulates than lowered standards of evidence?

One way in which Kant could get more is by dropping the strict claim about there being no theoretical evidence either way with regard to the practical postulates. Indeed, as already noted above, Kant's commitment to this premise is more complicated than might appear at first blush. Kant thinks that the physicotheoretical argument does provide some evidence for the existence of God. Perhaps Kant could argue that although this evidence would not be sufficient for the standards of evidence that would obtain absent a duty to promote the highest good, given that there is such a duty, the physicotheological argument goes through. Perhaps theoretically sufficient grounds for inferring the existence of a wise, beneficent and powerful creator when conjoined with a duty to promote the highest good license an inference to the existence of an omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent creator. Perhaps this is what Kant is referring to (in the second block quote reproduced in this section) when he speaks of the practical postulates as "harmonizing with the theoretical need of reason."

Then again, perhaps not. One major challenge to this idea is that it simply does not fit well with the text. While Kant perhaps *could* argue this way, in the *Critique of practical reason* Kant alludes to the physicotheological argument only to show its shortcomings, not to appeal to it as the subpar knight-errant justifier that makes the grade once but only once the standards have been lowered by the duty to promote the highest good. So perhaps it is time to examine the second way in which the practical postulates might be said to garner sufficient evidence alluded to above.

The second way is that morality might provide evidence on its own. That is, the fact that there is a duty to promote the highest good and the fact that this duty can be fulfilled if but only if there is a God, immortality and freedom might be taken, by themselves, to increase the evidence for these things above 50%. If there are

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powerful (independent) arguments for accepting the commands of morality and OIC, these arguments might translate into evidence for the practical postulates.

It might be objected that this does sound like a violation of Clifford's principle. This need not be bad in itself, but my goal was to show that the practical postulates are consistent with this principle, so this would be bad for me. I concede that on one way of reading Clifford's principle and on one way of interpreting what I said in the previous paragraph, this would render Clifford's principle inconsistent with the practical postulates. In particular, if (1) Clifford's principle is taken to be a moral injunction ("it is always morally wrong to believe without sufficient evidence") and if (2) the idea advanced in the previous paragraph is taken as saying that in cases in which there is insufficient evidence to decide either way but there are moral reasons that bear on a case, these moral reasons might stack up in favor of belief, then there is an inconsistency.

But this would be a misinterpretation of the idea I was advancing in the previous paragraph.²⁰ Moreover, it would not fit well with Kant's claims, discussed at the beginning of this section, about the practical postulates not generating a command to believe. The idea I was advancing in the paragraph above is that Kant might think that truth-conducive evidence can come from morality itself.

However, this idea faces its own textual challenges (including Kant's strict separation of the faculties of practical and speculative reason in his discussion of the practical postulates). And although these two strategies (lowering standards and increasing evidence) need not be mutually exclusive, it seems to me that the first (lowering standards) is a more promising route toward understanding the practical postulates (exegetically) than the second. Perhaps this (*viz.*, the idea that the standards of evidence are lowered by the presence of a duty) helps to explain Kant's insistence (briefly discussed above) in the *Critique of the power of judgment* that the practical postulates receive a "desired confirmation" in physical teleology. Perhaps it also helps to explain the following passage from the "Fragment of a moral catechism" which Kant includes for illustrative purposes in the *Doctrine of method* of his 1797 *Metaphysics of morals*:

Teacher: Has reason, in fact, any grounds of its own for assuming the existence of such a power, which apportions happiness in accordance with a human being's merit or guilt, a power ordering the whole of nature and governing the world with supreme wisdom? that is, any grounds for believing in God?

Pupil: Yes. For we see in the works of nature, which we can judge, a wisdom so widespread and profound that we can explain it to ourselves only by the inexpressibly great art of a creator of the world. And with regard to the moral order, which is the highest adornment of the world, we have reason to expect a no less wise regime, such that if we do not make ourselves *unworthy of happiness*, by violating our duty, we can also hope to *share in happiness*. (6:482)

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Notice that a version of the physicotheological argument receives pride of place in the pupil's response to the teacher's question about grounds for assuming the existence of a God who "apportions happiness in accordance with a human being's merit or guilt," the God of the *Critique of practical reason* practical postulates. Of course, there might be any number of explanations for putting this response into the mouth of a pupil in a fragment of a moral catechism. But the point is that one might be that the argument of the practical postulates does not generate evidence on its own: it lowers the standard of evidence. If the standard is still above 50%, then independent evidence is still needed (even though that independent evidence might not be sufficient on its own).

Section three. Why I think Kant might have upheld Clifford's principle.

I would like to discuss two positive pieces of evidence in favor of my thesis. The first is Kant's attitude toward lying to others.

Kant's views about lying to others are set out in the following passage from the *Metaphysics of morals*:

The greatest violation of a human being's duty to himself regarded merely as a moral being...is the contrary of truthfulness, *lying*...In the doctrine of right an intentional untruth is called a lie only if it violates another's right; but in ethics...it is clear of itself that no intentional untruth in the expression of one's thoughts can refuse this harsh name. (6:429)

This passage provides good grounds for ascribing to Kant the view that lying to others is never permissible. However, Kant goes on immediately to pose the following casuistical questions:

Can an untruth from mere politeness (e.g., the "your obedient servant" at the end of a letter) be considered a lie? No one is deceived by it.—An author asks one of his readers "How do you like my work." One could merely seem to give an answer, by joking about the impropriety of such a question. But who has his wit always ready? The author will take the slightest hesitation in answering as an insult. May one, then, say what is expected of one? (6:431)

As Wood points out, these questions "are intended...as invitations to the reader's reflections and exercises in judgment" (Wood, 2007, 252). This suggests that Kant might have been willing to allow some exceptions to the duty not to lie to others.

However, there is no similarly suggestive text in the *Metaphysics of morals* regarding exceptions to the duty not to lie to oneself, and

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this leads me to the second piece of evidence I would like to consider in favor of my thesis: Kant's attitude regarding the permissibility of self-deception.²¹ Kant sets out his views about self-deception in the following passage from the *Metaphysics of morals*:

Insincerity is mere lack of *conscientiousness*, that is, of purity in one's professions before one's inner judge, who is thought of as another person when conscientiousness is taken quite strictly; then if someone, from self-love, takes a wish for the deed because he has a really good end in mind, his inner lie, although it is indeed contrary to his duty to himself, gets the name of a frailty, as when a lover's wish to find only good qualities in his beloved blinds him to her obvious faults.—But such insincerity in his declarations, which a human being perpetrates upon himself, still deserves the strongest censure, since it is from such a rotten spot (falsity, which seems to be rooted in human nature itself) that the ill of untruthfulness spreads into his relations with other human beings as well, once the highest principle of truthfulness has been violated. (6:430-1)

Notice that in this passage, Kant suggests that lying to others stems, ultimately, from self-deception. Notice also that Kant says that self-deception "deserves the strongest censure," and it does so even when it is done for "a really good end." Kant's attitude toward self-deception is unambiguous and unequivocal: it might be difficult to explain how self-deception is possible, but it is "easy to show that the human being is actually guilty of many inner lies," and all such lies are wrong (6:430).

Now my aim here is not to defend Kant's views on lying. That said, I also do not want to disparage Kant's views on lying. My aim here, rather, is to use these views to show that Kant might have upheld Clifford's principle. But it might be wondered: how can the connection between the duty not to lie and Clifford's principle be forged? In fact, Kant explains how this connection can be made himself:

Someone tells an inner lie, for example, if he professes belief in a future judge of the world, although he really finds no such belief within himself but persuades himself that it could do no harm and might even be useful to profess in his thoughts to one who scrutinizes hearts a belief in such a judge, in order to win his favor in case he should exist. (6:430)

Persuading oneself to profess belief in God in one's inner thoughts, not because one believes it or because there is evidence for it but because "it could do no harm and might even be useful," is an inner lie according to Kant and deserves, again, the strongest censure. Moreover, although this might not have been what Kant had in mind in gesturing toward the way in which lying to oneself can spread into one's relations with others (Kant seems to have thought that self-

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deception has a general corrupting effect on one's moral character), it is easy to see how self-deception can lead to the deception of others: in order to maintain the self-deception, one will have to lie to others, too.²²

The conclusion I want to draw is this: given how censorious Kant is of lying to others and to oneself, it seems to me *prima facie* implausible that Kant would have taken a permissive view of eliciting belief in oneself or in others on insufficient evidence. Moreover, I have argued that the best evidence that Kant would have eschewed Clifford's principle, Kant's doctrine of the practical postulates, is actually consistent with Clifford's principle. Thus, it seems to me plausible to assert that Kant might have upheld Clifford's principle.²³

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¹ For an excellent discussion of the practical postulates (to which I am much indebted), see (Wood, 1970).

² All quotations from Kant are taken from the Cambridge blue series translations. All citations are given in accordance with the standard Academy pagination.

³ For a helpful discussion of Kant's Paralogisms, see, e.g., (Ameriks, 2000).

⁴ For a helpful discussion of Kant's Antinomies, see, e.g., (Guyer, 1987, esp. chapter 18). For a helpful discussion of the third Antinomy in particular (the antinomy alluded to in the main text above), see, e.g., (Allison, 1990, esp. chapter 1).

⁵ For an excellent treatment of Kant's arguments in the Ideal chapter, see, e.g., (Wood, 1978).

⁶ Kant's more charitable attitude toward the physicotheological argument is evident also in the *Critique of pure reason*, where he remarks that this argument "always deserves to be named with respect" (A623/B651) and that "we have nothing to object against the rationality and utility of this procedure, but rather recommend and encourage it" (A624/B652).

⁷ In the *Critique of pure reason* Kant suggests that because physicotheology cannot warrant belief in a *supreme* deity, "it cannot be sufficient for a principle of theology, which is supposed to constitute in turn the foundation of religion" (A628/B656). This raises interesting questions about Kant's ideas about the nature of religion, but none that can be pursued here.

⁸ There is a lot of dispute about how Kant conceives of the highest good. In saying that the highest good requires happiness to be in accordance with virtue, I am disagreeing with, among others, Reath, who claims that "the proportionality of virtue and happiness is not essential to the doctrine [of the Highest Good]" (Reath, 1988, 594). Reath's argues for this claim on the grounds that (a) Kant has more than one conception of the highest good; (b) on one conception of the highest good, Kant conceives of it as a union of universal happiness with the strictest morality; (c) conceiving of the highest good in this way is to take there to be a subordination relation between virtue and happiness (happiness is subordinate to virtue); therefore, (d) to conceive of the highest good in this way is not to take there to be a proportionality between virtue and happiness:

On the most natural reading, a "union of universal happiness with the strictest morality," or "happiness conditioned by morality" is not a proportionality of virtue and happiness. It implies no necessary connection between virtue and happiness, but instead describes the Highest Good as a union of two distinct ends, one of which is subordinate to the other. The first would be the moral perfection of all individuals, and the second the satisfaction of their permissible ends. (Reath, 1988, 605)

The main problem with Reath's argument, I think, is in (d). The problem is not merely that (d) does not follow from {(a), (b), (c)}; the problem is that (d) is inconsistent with this set. If all agents are perfectly virtuous and perfectly happy, then the happiness of each agent is proportional to his/her virtue. I think that there also are problems with Reath's account of happiness in this passage and with his claims about "necessary connection," and I think that (a) might need some clarification (with regard to how clear Kant was on the differences between his conceptions of the highest good), but further exploration of these issues is beyond the scope of the present investigation.

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⁹ In chapter II of the *Dialectic of pure practical reason*, Kant distinguishes between the supreme good and the complete good. As he defines these terms, the supreme good is an unconditioned good, a good that is "not subordinate to any other" (5:110). Kant argues that virtue is therefore the supreme good. The complete good, by way of contrast, is "that whole which is not part of a still greater whole of the same kind" (5:110). Kant says that when he refers to the highest good, he is using this term to refer to a complete good, not a supreme good, and "for this, *happiness* is also required" (5:110).

This suggests that Kant would take the highest good to refer to a world in which all agents are supremely virtuous and enjoy a corresponding state of beatitude. This is supported, for example, by passages in the *Critique of the power of judgment* where Kant speaks of the highest good as "the combination of universal happiness with the most lawful morality" (5:453).

However, Kant also speaks of the highest good merely as "happiness in precise proportion to virtue" (5:115). I shall not attempt to resolve this issue here. (I should point out that Andrews Reath appeals to the passage quoted in the previous paragraph from the *Critique of the power of judgment* to show something else about Kant's conception of the highest good. See the previous footnote for discussion of where I part ways with him on this score.)

¹⁰ Especially the Epicureans and the Stoics:

The Stoic maintained that virtue is the *whole highest good*, and happiness only the consciousness of this possession as belonging to the state of the subject. The Epicurean maintained that happiness is the *whole highest good*, and virtue only the form of the maxim for seeking to obtain it, namely, the rational use of means to it. (5:112)

¹¹ I owe this point (and much else besides) to Paul Guyer, to whom I would like to express my utmost thanks and gratitude for many illuminating discussions of the topics in this paper (and others).

¹² For example, in his 1793 *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason* Kant seems to repudiate his earlier line of reasoning about immortality from the *Critique of practical reason*: "notwithstanding his permanent deficiency, a human being can still expect to be *generally* well-pleasing to God, at whatever point in time his existence be cut short" (6:67).

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¹³ There is some dispute in the secondary literature regarding how Kant understands OIC. Stern argues that Kant was committed to a weaker version of OIC than is usually ascribed to him (or appealed to in modern discussions) (Stern, 2004). According to Stern, Kant was committed to something like "ought conversationally implicates can" rather than "ought logically implies can." The difference between these two lies in their implications for the truth conditions of (I) A ought to D and (II) A can D. If ought conversationally implicates can and (II) is false, then (I) can be true, but it would violate a conversational norm to assert it. If ought logically implies can and (II) is false, then (I) is false. By way of contrast, Timmermann argues that Kant was committed to a stronger version of OIC than is usually ascribed to him (or appealed to in modern discussions) (Timmermann, 2003). According to Timmermann, Kant was committed to "ought logically implies can" and "ought." To put this another way, Timmermann thinks that Kant appeals to OIC only in cases when it is clear that there is a duty to do the thing in question (to infer that the agent is able to), whereas in modern discussions OIC is generally appealed to only in cases when it is clear that an agent is unable to do the thing in question (to infer that the agent does not have a duty to do so).

I think that both Stern and Timmermann are mistaken. Although their mistakes are different, both mistakes can be substantiated with a single piece of text:

I explained morals provisionally as the introduction to a science that teaches, not how we are to become happy, but how we are to become worthy of happiness. In doing so I did not fail to remark that the human being is not thereby required to *renounce* his natural end, happiness, when it is a matter of complying with his duty; for that he cannot do... (8:278)

In this passage (taken from Kant's 1793 *On the common saying: that may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice*), Kant appeals to OIC in its contrapositive form: he infers from the claim that agents cannot renounce their happiness to the claim that they have no duty to do so. I do not want to endorse (or dispute) Kant's claim that agents cannot renounce their happiness; the point I want to make is that Kant's appeal to OIC in its contrapositive form undermines both Stern's and Timmermann's positions. It undermines Stern's position because Kant could not infer that a claim like (I) is false from the fact that a claim like (II) is false if he was committed merely to "ought conversationally implicates can." It undermines Timmermann's position because Kant is invoking OIC in a context in which he takes there to be prior knowledge of an (in)ability rather than of a duty.

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¹⁴ There is a striking difference between Kant and Martin Luther that emerges from consideration of Kant's argument for the practical postulates. Luther, like Kant, thought that agents cannot fulfill their duties without God. Luther seems to have thought that this is true of pretty much all duties, whereas Kant thought it is true only of duties bound up with the highest good. Moreover, Luther and Kant had different reasons for thinking that agents cannot fulfill their duties without God. As seen above, in the *Critique of practical reason* Kant argues that God is needed to explain the connection between happiness and virtue in the highest good. Luther's reasoning, by way of contrast, seems to have rested on ideas about human corruption.

It might be argued that Kant's ideas about a necessary propensity to evil and about divine grace (articulated in his 1793 *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason*) bear some affinity to Luther's ideas about human corruption, original sin and divine aid. But these topics are too complicated for me to pursue them here (for helpful discussion, see, e.g., (Wood, 1970, esp. chapter 6 and 246n)). The difference between Kant and Luther that I would like to draw attention to briefly in this note is how all of this connects to OIC.

As noted in the penultimate paragraph of section one of this paper, Kant's argument for the practical postulates rests on OIC. This can be explained as follows: Kant has a prior commitment to (i) OIC, (ii) the duty to promote the highest good and (iii) the idea that we can fulfill this duty only if God exists. From this he infers that we are warranted in believing in God. Luther, in contradistinction to Kant, has a prior commitment to the existence of duties that cannot be fulfilled without divine intercession and aid, and he infers from this that ought does not imply can.

It might be objected that Luther's inference is incoherent: because Luther maintains that God exists, Luther should concede that it is possible for us to fulfill our duties. Moreover, it is no use for Luther to respond that if God did not exist, these duties would be unfulfillable: God seems to be the source of these duties on Luther's account, so if God did not exist, the duties would not, either.

But Luther, I suspect, would argue that although God can aid us and thereby enable us to fulfill our duties, these duties are still binding even if (for whatever reason) God decides not to aid us. Thus, Luther would conclude, ought does not imply can, after all. There still might be room for objection here by focusing on the meaning of "can" in OIC. For instance, given his other commitments, Luther ought to concede that God can decide to aid us even if God does not do so. However, I do not want to get into the details of Luther's theological commitments. I also do not want to debate the correct way to understand the ability in OIC or whether OIC is true (for helpful discussion of both of these points, see, e.g., (Vranas, 2007)). The point I want to draw attention to is, again, the asymmetry between Kant and Luther on this score. Call duties that cannot be fulfilled without God G-duties. The point for current purposes is that Kant appeals to OIC and G-duties to infer the existence of God whereas Luther appeals to G-duties (and the existence of God) to infer that OIC is false. Further discussion of Luther's commitments on this score are beyond the scope of the present paper; the interested reader should consult (Pigden, 1990) or (Martin, 2009), on which the account of Luther given here draws heavily.

¹⁵ Pace refers to this as the "moral encroachment theory of justification." The account I give here is much indebted to the clarity of his exposition of this theory in (Pace, 2011).

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¹⁶ Chignell gives the following gloss of this passage:

...thrust into a situation where he has to wager a great deal on the issue, a subject will likely reflect on whether his objective grounds for the assent are really sufficient or not. And this reconsideration may lead him to realize that the assent should at most be an opinion. (Chignell, 2007, 333)

I agree with Chignell that part of what Kant is trying to illustrate with this passage is that betting can reveal what kind of assent is in question. The first sentence of the paragraph from which the passage to which this footnote is appended is excerpted is: "The usual touchstone of whether what someone asserts is mere persuasion or at least subjective conviction, i.e., firm belief, is **betting**" (A824/B852). But I think that this tells only half the story. The other half is that the betting example is supposed to illustrate that what Kant calls pragmatic belief comes in degrees (presumably in accordance with the standards of justification in a given case). This is revealed in the final sentence of the paragraph from which the passage to which this footnote is appended is excerpted: "Thus pragmatic belief has a degree, which can be large or small according to the difference of the interest that is at stake" (A825/B853).

¹⁷ Pace makes a similar point:

...even if there turn out to be significant moral advantages for theistic belief, the revised Jamesian argument that we have advanced will not be strong enough to show that theism is epistemically justified for people who have enough evidence that God exists or whose evidence does not at least make God's existence more likely than not. (Pace, 2011, 263)

¹⁸ Indeed, it is perhaps worth noting that Chignell seems to read Kant along these lines. As evidence for this, consider Chignell's account of the kind of belief at stake in the practical postulates:

Moral Belief: S is permitted to form a Moral Belief that *p* if and only if

- (a) S has an "absolutely necessary" moral end *e*,
- (b) a necessary condition of S's attaining *e* is S's having a firm assent that *p*, and
- (c) *p* is a logically possible proposition for or against which S cannot have sufficient objective grounds. (Chignell, 2007, 356)

Note that in condition (c), it is required merely that *p* be logically possible and that S cannot have sufficient objective grounds against *p*. This suggests that according to Chignell's reading, moral belief can be warranted even when there is some evidence against *p* (provided that there is not sufficient evidence to rule it out). From this it may be inferred that according to Chignell's reading the standards of justification associated with moral belief are lowered below (perhaps well below) 50%.

¹⁹ I take this terminology from (Sayre-McCord, 1996).

²⁰ Of course, it also might be a misinterpretation of Clifford's principle. Pace suggests that it would render Clifford's principle less plausible (Pace, 2011, 242-243). However, I am not going to engage with these issues here.

²¹ Wood makes this point about the asymmetry between Kant's treatment of self-deception and deception of others (with regard, e.g., to the seemingly mitigating effects of the casuistical questions) at (Wood, 2007, 257-8). Perhaps this is the appropriate place for me to note that my understanding of Kant's views on lying (and much else besides) are heavily indebted to Wood.

²² I owe this point to conversation with Wood.

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²³ I would like to thank Chris Skrownowski for invaluable comments on an earlier (and significantly worse) draft of this paper. I also would like to thank the participants of the 14th meeting of the Eastern Study Group of the North American Kant Society, and especially David Sussman and Joseph Trullinger, for their very helpful feedback on the ideas I develop in this paper.