



Kant on the Normativity of Obligatory Ends

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Abstract

I propose a novel way to understand the stringency of Kant’s conception of beneficence. This novel understanding can ground our intuition that we do not have to forego (almost) all pursuit of our personal ends. I argue that we should understand the application of imperfect duties to specific cases according to the framework set by the adoption and promotion of ends. Agents have other ends than obligatory ones and they must weigh obligatory ends against these other ends. Obligatory ends are special among ends only insofar as their adoption is not optional. My reading of the normative status of imperfect duties affords a way of thinking about beneficence modelled on the everyday ways in which agents pursue their personal projects and weigh different ends against each other. This establishes a middle-ground between an extremely demanding conception of beneficence and an overly latitudinarian one. Furthermore, it helps us understand why we do not have to be maximally beneficent and why there is a bias towards the near in our thinking about rescue cases.

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A central desideratum of normative ethics is understanding how much we ought to do for those whose lives we could significantly improve. If an agent had to do as much as she possibly could, she would have to sacrifice many of the goods that make her own life worth living. This raises the question of whether there is a non-ad hoc rationale underlying the intuition that, even in a world in which more people require help than any one individual can give, our individual duty to help is not all-consuming, and that we do not have to abandon (almost) all pursuit of personal ends to help others. In the current paper, I propose a Kantian response. I argue that obligatory and personal ends have largely the same status within our deliberation and that it is a matter of instrumental rationality which ends to prioritize in specific situations. Understanding obligatory ends along those lines will reveal a way of thinking about the stringency of beneficence in line with our intuitions about the limits of beneficence and will provide rationales for why acts of beneficence are required in some cases, but not in others.

Whilst recently there have been a number of very illuminating Kantian discussions of latitude, duties of virtue and love, and (over)demandingness, I think the normativity of obligatory ends in Kant is not yet understood well enough. This is largely because the prevailing opinion within Kant scholarship has it that obligatory ends enjoy deliberative priority over personal ends. This view, I believe, gives obligatory ends an outsized status and makes it difficult to accommodate limits of beneficence. Moreover, Kant's explicit statement that the application of obligatory ends to specific cases is not a matter of morality but of prudence (VI:433fn.) has not yet been sufficiently appreciated.

I begin by discussing Kantian approaches to imperfect duties, which either stress the latitude of imperfect duty but cannot explain why we sometimes must help others, or stress the authority of obligatory ends, but struggle to explain how the promotion of obligatory ends can ever be limited by personal ends (Sect. 1). I then argue that the key to a plausible understanding of obligatory ends is that questions about their applications to specific cases are not settled by the authority of duty. Instead, they are a question of what it means to have an end (Sect. 2). The promotion of obligatory ends should be modelled on the framework of instrumental rationality that pertains to promotion of all ends, with the sole exception that obligatory ends are ends that we *must* have (Sect. 3). Conceiving of obligatory ends as ends can help us block a maximization requirement and allows for certain forms of partiality (Sect. 4). Finally, I elaborate on the normative upshots of my proposal, especially with regards to luxury spending and the ethical significance of distance (Sect. 5).

Before we begin, two preliminary remarks are in order.

Firstly, I am ultimately interested in developing a philosophically appealing and non-ad hoc explanation for why agents are not morally required to do as much for others as they can.¹ My investigation will focus on the overall framework of Kant's

¹ There is a substantive debate about how to understand the "can" here, i.e., whether this should be interpreted as nomological, psychological or other forms of possibility (see van Ackeren, Kühler 2016). Kant famously holds a version of Ought Implies Can (VI:49fn., VIII:276.37–277.3, 287.35–8), according to which agents can do everything that is morally required of them (Timmermann 2003). This is so because morality requires omissions (perfect duties) and adoption of ends (imperfect duties), which is simply a matter of choice and not constrained by external factors. Difficult questions arise when it comes to the

theory and the structure of obligatory ends, rather than on specific remarks Kant makes about the demandingness of beneficence. These remarks are not always in line with his overall theory or follow from his principles. I will address specific passages that seem to count against my interpretation at the end of Sect. 2. The upshot of my discussion will be an account of the stringency of beneficence that is faithful to Kant's overall framework and many of his explicit statements about beneficence and obligatory ends. Moreover, I do believe that this proposal also constitutes an attractive way of thinking about the stringency of beneficence.

Secondly, we should bear in mind that Kant's conception of beneficence is broader than our everyday notion, as it extends to acts of charity as we usually understand them as well as to some cases of (easy) rescue from mortal danger.² In what follows, I will assume that at least some cases of (easy) rescue fall under beneficence, namely, those cases in which the agent has not caused a patient's predicament and does not benefit from it. In these cases, failure to help does not constitute a form of acting on a maxim the universalization of which would yield a contradiction in conception, and it is not a form of treating someone as a mere means. In other words it is not a violation of perfect duty but a matter of imperfect duty. Of course, some rescue cases might be understood best as falling under perfect duty, as Kant himself indicates (V:155.fn., VI:453.1–33, 454.22–8).³ Once we take perfect duties into account morality might become significantly more demanding. I take it that this is as it should be, since limits of beneficence cannot excuse rights violations or injustice.

1 Latitude and the Authority of Duty

Imperfect duties for Kant require that agents incorporate certain ends, beneficence and self-perfection, into their maxims.⁴ They famously admit of "latitude" (VI:390.6–7)⁵ in determining concrete actions that further obligatory ends. Latitude certainly pertains to instrumental questions, such as what the means are to

application of obligatory ends to specific cases that come with constraints such as an agent's material resources, time, other commitments, attention, etc. For present purposes, I suggest that we understand "can" broadly as what it is possible for an agent to give and do without lowering their wellbeing to the level of the worst off. This might require that agents sacrifice all of their spare resources including time, i.e., everything that they do not absolutely need to avoid extreme hardship. A prominent position that affirms that agents in fact can and should sacrifice as much is Singer's (1972) strong rescue principle.

² See Formosa and Sticker (2019: 627–8) for discussion.

³ These are, for instance, cases in which I am involved in bringing about the predicament of the person I am to rescue or potentially cases of remedial duties pertaining to historical or ongoing injustices. I will briefly come back to these cases in my conclusion.

⁴ In what follows, I will usually speak of *ends* rather than maxims, since Kant himself tends to phrase his notion of imperfect duties in terms of obligatory ends (VI:380.19–381.3, 382.17–27). I here follow Nyholm (2015: 296) who argues that we should understand an end as "something we use as the basis for our choice of principles" (see also IV:427.19–24). Ends are more basic than principles or maxims. When I do speak of "maxims" I mean specific ways to implement an end such as "maximal beneficence", "helping one's parents", or principled non-implementation ("never helping").

⁵ I quote Kant according to the standard Academy Edition (volume:page.line). Translations from the Groundwork are from Timmermann (2011). Other works by Kant are quoted, with occasional modifications, from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant edited by Paul Guyer and Allan Wood.

promote ends. Kant's brief discussion of latitude in the *Groundwork* leaves open whether latitude also extends to *how much* we must do to pursue obligatory ends, i.e., whether the promotion of obligatory ends admits of exceptions for the sake of inclinations (IV:421.fn.). If it did, then agents could, at least sometimes, morally and rationally prioritize the promotion of personal ends over the promotion of obligatory ends. Later, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant seems to deny that this is possible, as the only thing that can outweigh an imperfect duty is another duty of higher stringency (VI:390.9–14).⁶ This textual tension is representative of an important philosophical problem: How much are we morally required to promote obligatory ends and what, if anything, can justify less than maximal promotion of an obligatory end?

One prominent Kantian answer to this question is latitudinarianism as advocated by Hill (1992: ch.8): We should understand the latitude of imperfect duty, for instance, as 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” (155). Beneficence thus only requires that we *sometimes* help and only to *some extent* (see 149–51). We are free to decide how much we do, as long as we do not make it our principle to never promote obligatory ends.⁷

There are at least two problems with this latitudinarian reading. Firstly, Hill's proposal is counterintuitive in some cases: If I could easily save a child drowning in a nearby shallow pond then, intuitively, I must do so. I cannot instead appeal to the fact that I have already done *something* in the past, and refrain from helping now.⁸ Secondly, on a standard Kantian framework it seems ad hoc to claim that morally we ought to help, but that we are permitted to instead choose options that lack moral goodness. If morality is of the utmost authority, then we need a convincing story about why it is permissible to do less good than we could. Simply asserting that imperfect duty admits of latitude will not suffice.

The second problem is particularly significant, as it functions as a rationale for positions on the opposite end of the demandingness spectrum. These rigoristic positions require somewhat more elaboration as they seem to be at odds with some widely acknowledged features of imperfect duty, such as that they admit of latitude. Kant maintains that inclinations, when they clash with duty, “reduce below zero” in their worth (IV:396.8), and duty presents us with a law “before which all

⁶ “Duty of higher stringency” certainly refers to perfect duties, but also to certain cases that fall under the same imperfect duty. I will discuss this further at the end of Sect. 2.

⁷ This does not mean that all imperfect duties to others are potentially only minimally demanding. Hill acknowledges that *duties of respect* are “narrow” in comparison to duties of love (VI:449.31–450.2, Hill 1992: 155). Hill (2018: 22–3) also stresses that there could be Kantian grounds other than beneficence for helping (e.g. concerns pertaining to human dignity). I will come back to this briefly in my conclusion. See also Baron (1995, ch.3) who argues that different imperfect duties allow for different degrees of latitude.

⁸ See Hooker (2000: 161) who worries that “[t]he imperfect duties view” as interpreted by Hill “leaves too much room here for arbitrary choice”.

inclinations are silenced” (V:86.28-9).⁹ Timmermann (2007: 19) dubs this very strong priority of duty over everything else “*silencing*”. When morality and inclinations collide, an agent has *no* reason whatsoever to violate her duty (the reasons that speak in favour of inclinations are silenced). This strong priority of duty also extends to imperfect duties: they too “command with the force of practical necessity and silence the claim of inclinations” if they apply to a specific situation (Timmermann 2013: 46fn.33). It is only “weightier moral considerations”, and “sheer physical impossibility” that can rationally limit the promotion of obligatory ends (Timmermann 2018: 383). Thus, whenever we could benefit others (or perfect ourselves) without violating perfect duties no other option is rational.

Timmermann is here drawing on a structural feature of Kant’s ethics; a feature which puts pressure on all forms of latitudinarianism. Alice Pinheiro (2015: 738) has presented this structural feature in exemplary clarity when she charges Timmermann’s rigoristic interpretation with a “*lexical asymmetry problem*”. If we accept that moral goodness is infinitely precious then “how can my happiness, which is merely *permitted*, ever compete with what is *morally necessary*? In other words, how can we ever find space for the ‘merely permitted’, when we could be realizing moral goodness?” (Pinheiro 2015: 738). If moral value is of a higher kind, or if moral reasons override or silence other reasons then it seems that it could never be rational to pursue one’s merely personal ends, if one could further obligatory ends instead.¹⁰

It is indeed a widespread tacit assumption even of positions that are not ostensibly rigoristic and not committed to silencing that obligatory ends enjoy a special authority. In many of her papers, Barbara Herman presents an insightful and nuanced conception of obligatory ends and their role for deliberation and agency. She emphasizes that morality should not dominate our lives such that we cannot permissibly and rationally pursue personal projects (Herman 2007: 278). She even thinks that treating beneficence as an end “makes some sense of our bias toward the local in beneficence,” (Herman 2001: 229). I fully agree with this (see my Sect. 4),

⁹ See also IV:396.8, 400.25-31, V:74.1-5, 74.19-21, 80.24-5, 88.18-9, 93.14-5, VI:49.13, VIII:481.31-36. See Van Ackeren, Sticker (2018a) for discussion of these passages.

¹⁰ Audi (2004: 94–5) reminds us that beneficence raises challenges not only for Kant. Any theory that acknowledges beneficence as a duty must explain why beneficence does not require sacrifice of all personal pursuits and maybe even of other duties. The problem is, however, especially pronounced on Kant’s conception since he emphasizes the unconditional authority of morality. Moreover, Kant’s conception of *imperfect duties to self* might yield similar problems to beneficence. Biss (2017 and 2019) stresses that development of virtue is not optional but mandated by the Kantian imperfect duty of *self-perfection*. I hope to show that it is at least a substantive philosophical and textual issue what type of priority (if any) the promotion of obligatory ends, including self-perfection, enjoys over other ends. It is not clear that self-perfection must have a special status among one’s ends. Biss (2017: 627) worries that to “adopt a policy of limiting our fulfilment of imperfect duties based on prudential interests [...] implies irresolute commitment to the ends associated with specific imperfect duties and is thus incompatible with adoption of the end of moral perfection”. However, we might likewise worry that preferring obligatory over personal ends would imply irresolute commitment to the latter. We would thus need an argument for why limiting the promotion specifically of *obligatory* ends implies irresolute commitment. Otherwise, it is difficult to envisage that agents could have a plurality of ends that are sometimes in tension with each other (and thus their respective promotion must sometimes be limited) and that agents still remain resolutely committed to. Yet, this does seem possible.

but I worry that her conception of how obligatory ends inform our deliberation cannot make good on this. Herman bridges the gap between personal and obligatory ends by assigning special authority to the latter. They structure our pursuit of all ends, or they “jointly constitute the material final end of human action: that is, they are ends for the sake of which we are to act *and* in light of which other ends are to be chosen” (239). As such they introduce a “deliberative unity” (Herman 2007: 278) and set a “complete framework within which we are to adopt discretionary ends and activities” (Herman 2011a: 113). According to Herman, obligatory ends are the ends of all rational actions. They constitute a standard of correct willing or the correct premises of practical reasoning. This does not mean that we will everything directly because of these ends, but rather that they function as final ends or ultimate justification for why we pursue personal ends (Herman 2007: ch.11). Herman certainly wants to resist rigorism but she does so at the expense of according an outsized role to obligatory ends that makes it difficult to accommodate the *sui generis* value of non-moral ends and the role these play for many agents who frequently choose these ends for their own sake not for moral reasons.¹¹ This, once more, raises the question of whether it can still be permissible to pursue personal ends, at least if they are not chosen for the sake of obligatory ends.

The view that Kantian beneficence does not require us to maximally promote others’ happiness or ends is widely accepted and one of the reasons why many ethicists find Kantian ethics appealing. Yet, providing a principled rationale for resisting a requirement to pursue obligatory ends further than is compatible with commitment to personal ends is difficult on a framework that accords supreme authority to duty or a special status to obligatory ends. Timmermann himself is aware that it “does not bode well for an ethical theory [...] if it strains human nature unduly” (Timmermann 2018: 379).¹² This raises the question of how we can justify our intuition that we do not have to abandon (almost) all pursuit of personal ends. In what follows, I will argue that in their *application* to concrete cases imperfect duties do not enjoy priority over personal ends, since the imperfect duty of beneficence is the duty to *adopt an end*. This will help us to develop a middle-ground between latitudinarians and rigorists and it will allow us to explain that and why we must help others and sometimes have no choice but to help as well as why we nevertheless do not have to dedicate all our spare resources and efforts to beneficence.¹³

¹¹ This point is inspired by Wolf’s (1982) critical discussion of moral sainthood. Wolf famously argues that a well-rounded human life requires projects and character traits not chosen for moral reasons.

¹² In fact, Kant himself levels a version of the overdemandingness objections against the Stoics and the “fantastically virtuous who allows nothing to be morally indifferent” and who turns “the government of virtue into tyranny” (VI:409.13-9). See Timmermann (2018: Sect. 2), Van Ackeren, Sticker (2018b: 373), Sticker (2021: Sect. 2).

¹³ Most recently Sensen (2022) has presented a conception according to which duties to help are not optional in certain emergency cases, yet, obligatory ends are not endlessly demanding. However, to reach these conclusions Sensen has to avail himself of a number of contentious assumptions, such as introducing mid-level moral rules partly determined by contingent anthropological factors and reducing the role of the Categorical Imperative to a prohibition against making exceptions to these rules. I think we can have the plausible upshots of Sensen’s account without his underlying revisionary commitments. The same holds for Audi’s (2004: ch.3) attempt to moderate Kantian beneficence through principles imported from Russian Intuitionism.

2 The Normativity of Obligatory Ends

I will now argue that imperfect duty requires that we adopt certain ends, but once we have done this, the authority of imperfect duty is satisfied. The question of when and how much to promote these (and all other) ends is a matter of instrumental rationality and is not within the scope of the authority of duty.

Let us begin by taking a closer look at the passages in which Kant claims supreme and unconditional authority for duty. It is significant that in these passages Kant chiefly has in mind *perfect* duties.¹⁴ For instance, in the Catechism of the *Metaphysics of Morals* where Kant claims (through the mouth of a pupil) that “in the face of” duty “all my inclinations must be silent” (VI:481.31-36), this duty is the perfect duty not to lie (VI:481.28-30). Other concrete examples for duties in conflict with self-love are also of the perfect duty not to bear false testimony (V:30, 155-6) and, once more, not to lie (V:92–3). Perfect duties require that we omit certain types of actions. However, this model of the authority of duty does not translate easily to the application of imperfect duty to concrete cases, as this application, usually, requires positive action to further certain ends we adopted.

There certainly is a duty to adopt obligatory ends. Moreover, we do not satisfy imperfect duty if we adopt an end and then drop it. An ongoing commitment to this end is required. Failing to adopt and maintain an obligatory end is a moral failure in the way that failing to adopt a personal end is not (see my Sect. 3). Yet, choosing appropriate actions and occasions to further ends requires judgement and knowledge of circumstances and is considerably more complex than the application of perfect duty. We thus should not accept that questions of application of imperfect duty can simply be settled by the authority of duty.

Furthermore, the context of Kant’s claims about the authority of morality is always one of conflict between morality and happiness, specifically of *collisions* between perfect duty and inclination. Compliance with perfect duty is binary. An agent either does or does not comply. In cases of collision, duty commands a course of action, usually an omission, and inclinations incentivise that I commit an action that would violate duty. Silencing only applies when a situation is “a matter of complying with [...] duty” (VIII:278.17) and inclinations incentivize an action that would be a violation of duty (see also VIII:402.21-3).¹⁵ Whilst happiness is not to be “taken into consideration at all” if there is a “collision” between happiness and duty (VIII:283.6–10), pursuing personal happiness is rational and permissible if there is no such collision (see also V:93.11–5). Collision with duty appears to be a stronger form of conflict than failure to be maximally beneficent. Take the case of a person who has helped others greatly but not as much as she possibly could have. I take it that we would not say that this person *violated* her duty. The way we, and Kant, think about imperfect

¹⁴ Van Ackeren and Sticker (2018a: 418) are to my knowledge the only one’s pointing out the significance of this point for understanding the stringency of beneficence.

¹⁵ See also van Ackeren, Sticker (2018a: 421) who argue that if “we could further an obligatory end but not doing so would not constitute a violation of duty, silencing does not apply because these are not cases of conflict”. I should note that I think that not furthering an obligatory end could be understood as resulting from a conflict between duty and inclinations in a loose sense, but it would not constitute a proper *collision* and thus silencing does not apply.

duty acknowledges much more fine-grained distinctions than merely between violating and not-violating duty.

In many cases, the course of action that is most conducive to one's personal happiness will be incompatible with promoting an obligatory end as much as one could. However, taking this course of action usually does not mean that an agent fails to have adopted this obligatory end at all. Only violation of perfect duty and failing to adopt and maintain an obligatory end altogether would count as a collision or violation.¹⁶ It is plausible to assume that agents can be committed to an end without always prioritizing it. Otherwise, agents could only be committed to one end (or a few ends the application of which would never interfere with each other). However, agents are typically committed to a plurality of ends that they frequently have to weigh against each other.

In fact, Kant himself presents a taxonomy of different types of ends. Besides obligatory ends there are non-obligatory ends that we necessarily have, most importantly, our own happiness¹⁷, and non-obligatory personal ends, which differ between agents and specify an individual's conception of happiness (IV:436.19-22, V:34.11-2, VI:385.1-9). The distinction between obligatory, non-obligatory but necessary, and non-obligatory discretionary ends corresponds to problematic, assertoric, and apodictic imperatives (VI:414.32–415.5). Non-obligatory ends are permissible to pursue and their pursuit is, in principle, compatible with the pursuit of obligatory ends.

That conflicts between obligatory and personal ends should not be usually understood as collisions also becomes apparent in the way Kant frequently describes beneficence as ruling out that we “looked with complete indifference on the need of others” (V:69.20–35), and to “not feel like contributing anything to [others'] well-being, or [others'] assistance in need” (IV:423.21-3, see also VI:543.10-2).¹⁸ Kant does not think that any maxim that falls short of maximal beneficence fails universalization. In fact, it is difficult to see why *only* a maxim of maximal beneficence could

¹⁶ One might interject here that apart from outright violation of duty there could be something like the wrong of failing to fulfil a duty. Kant thinks that when it comes to imperfect duty “failure to fulfil them is not in itself *culpability* (*demeritum*) = — a) but rather mere *deficiency in moral worth* = o, unless the subject should make it his principle not to comply with such duties” (VI:390.19-22). I will say more about this in this and the next section. Kant thinks that not promoting an obligatory end when one could does not constitute a violation of duty unless an agent has made it their principle not to comply with an imperfect duty, in which case she has not adopted the corresponding obligatory end. Moreover, Kant thinks that failure to promote an obligatory end that one has adopted is a deficiency in moral worth, which does not appear to constitute a positive moral wrong. I hope to show in this paper that we should indeed not think of less than maximal promotion of obligatory ends as a moral failure. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

¹⁷ IV:415.28–416.1, 430.18-9, V:25.12-20, VI:386.1-2, 387.26-9, XX:200.11-28fn. Kant believes that there are other necessary ends, such as procreation (VI:277.26-7). I bracket these ends here since it is difficult to see how supposed natural ends fit with Kant's claim that ends must be adopted freely (VI:385.1-9). Not everyone has adopted specific natural ends such as procreation, whereas it is plausible to assume that agents are committed to their own happiness in a sense that might be qualified as freely or voluntarily.

¹⁸ However, sometimes Kant does make stronger claims: we ought to be beneficent “where we can” (IV:398.8). Statements to this effect constitute the basis for van Ackeren, Sticker's (2018a) reading of beneficence, according to which we must help every time we can, but not as much as we can. I generally agree with their observations about the limits of beneficence, but I disagree with their idea that obligatory ends still enjoy a special status, because we must further them, to some extent, whenever possible.

be prescribed by a universalization procedure.¹⁹ The same holds for the Formula of Humanity, which mandates that we treat persons “*always at the same time as an end*” (IV:429.10-2). Strictly speaking, the formula does not maintain that we must do as much as we can but only that we must “always” do something to treat someone as an end.²⁰ Categorical Imperative formulae do not establish that we must help others as much as we can. Only complete or near complete indifference to others collides with or violates duty.

It is a difficult question how we should envisage the application of ends to concrete cases. It is clear that judgement plays a central role for this. One of the few passages that spells out this role suggests that “judgement can decide what is to be done only in accordance with rules of prudence (pragmatic rules), not in accordance with rules of morality (moral rules)” (VI:433.fn.). Kant’s, *prima facie* surprising, appeal to prudence or instrumental rationality here makes perfect sense within the context of my argument. Whilst duty commands that we must adopt certain ends, the application of these ends to specific cases is not settled by moral rules or the authority morality enjoys, but by the same principles (pragmatic rules) as the application of all other ends.²¹ If obligatory ends do not enjoy a special normative status in their application, because this application is merely a matter of pragmatic rules, then opportunities to further an obligatory end have to be weighed against opportunities to further other ends. This weighing is open ended in the sense that obligatory ends do not automatically win out, just because they are obligatory to adopt.

That instrumental rationality and prudence can be significant for the application of duty is relatively uncontroversial at least when it comes to options that are morally on par or where the means are not determined by morality (Timmermann 2005: 20–1). Recently, Fahmy (2019: 430) has argued that in addition “moral considerations are typically not decisive with regard to *which* obligatory end we promote at any given time”. Instead, this question has to be settled by prudential considerations. I think this is correct, but I believe that this is the case for *all* ends including choices between the application of obligatory and non-obligatory ends (with the caveat I will lay out in Sect. 3). Fahmy, much like Herman, by contrast, still assumes that obligatory ends have a special authority when she maintains that “the cultivation of benevolence, sympathetic participation, gratitude and beneficence shape the prudential considerations that are operative in the deliberative process that precedes a

¹⁹ Formosa and Sticker (2019: 629) argue persuasively that “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”.

²⁰ This roughly corresponds to the position held by van Ackeren, Sticker (2018a) (see my fn.18). It should also be noted that on a recent influential reading (Kleingeld 2020) the Formula of Humanity only pertains to those persons we “use” (“brauchst” IV:429.12) and this is by no means everyone we could benefit. The Formula of Humanity could therefore be read as grounding a relatively undemanding conception of beneficence. See also Sticker (2023) who argues that a strict duty to aid in emergency cases require that we introduce into the Formula of Humanity a new prohibition, namely, against treating as a mere *thing*, and that the formula, as it stands, cannot ground duties of emergency aid. On the other hand, Audi (2016) thinks that the formula applies to all *conduct* and is of broad scope.

²¹ This passage has recently also been highlighted by Klein (2021) who presents a subtle exegetical discussion of the passage and its relation to Kant’s conception of teleological judgement and the role of prudence for his political philosophy.

decision to perform (or not perform) a meritorious action” (432). For her it is duty, specifically virtues of love, that ultimately adjudicate between ends.²² Her only concession to personal ends is that “Kant insists that ‘Providing for oneself to the extent necessary just to find satisfaction in living (taking care of one’s body, but not to the point of effeminacy) belongs among duties to oneself’ (MM, VI:452)” (430). It is thus duties to self that can make space for some personal concerns by drawing them within the realm of duty. This, much like Herman’s proposal, makes duty the arbiter for conflicts between personal and obligatory ends. In fact, pursuing personal ends seems to be legitimate only insofar as these ends serve the pursuit of duty. This misrepresents the distinct and non-derivative value these ends have for a life well lived.²³ Before I move on to spell out what my own proposal entails, let me address an exegetical objection against the idea that in their application there is nothing special about obligatory ends. Kant’s most prominent example for how latitude works in practice is that it constitutes “a permission to limit one maxim of duty by another (e.g., love of one’s neighbor in general by love of one’s parents)” (VI:390.11–2, see also XXVII:537.3–28). It seems here as if latitude does not leave room for non-moral ends, since the example is one of intra-moral limitation: One maxim that specifies the promotion of the obligatory end of beneficence (“love of neighbours”) is limited by another maxim that also specifies promotion of beneficence (“love of one’s parents”). Kant also emphasizes that personal or “subjective” ends should be “subordinated” to obligatory ends (VI:389.12–5).

Let me note firstly that VI:389–90 does not merely seem to be at odds with my own interpretation, but also with standard latitudinarian readings of imperfect duty. Imperfect duty here only seems to allow for latitude in cases where something of more *moral* significance is at stake. Yet, this passage is not as clear cut as it might seem. Kant introduces latitude thusly: “the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty” (VI:390.8–9). This strongly suggests that latitude also pertains to “how much one is to do” for obligatory ends. Kant also stresses that agents can be more or less virtuous (see VI:390.18–29, 453.26–33). Failing to promote an obligatory end as much as one can is not a violation of duty but “mere *want of virtue*” (VI:390.25). There is no requirement to maximize virtue.²⁴ We should therefore understand passages that seemingly tell us to do as much as we can as, in fact, emphasizing that we should strive to become better persons and that we should never be complacent, not as imposing a requirement to set aside all personal ends.

²² Elsewhere Fahmy (2010) maintains that adopting an obligatory end requires cultivation of certain affective dispositions and transformation of self. It seems that it is only obligatory ends that require such a transformation.

²³ Versions of the idea that duty for Kant is self-regulating because duties to self, obligatory ends, or indirect duty draw personal ends and concerns into the realm of duty have also been presented by Herman (2011b); Vogt (2008). Audi (2004: 94–101) notably suggests that living according to a principle of maximal beneficence could be a form of treating oneself as a mere means. See Sticker, Van Ackeren (2018a) for critical discussion of the idea that Kantian duty has the capacity to self-moderate.

²⁴ That, according to Kant, we do not have to *maximize* the amount of good we do for others is widely accepted in Kant scholarship and one of the reasons why many ethicists find Kant appealing (see, for instance, Herman 2007: ch.11; Baron 1995: 88–107 and 2016; Audi 2004: 101; Biss 2017: 627).

It thus seems that VI:389–90 is inconclusive as Kant's explanation of latitude says one thing, but his example and discussion of virtue suggests something else. Since it has exegetical and philosophical advantages to allow for latitude regarding how much we are to do, at least if we can tell a plausible story about why we must help in some cases and why there is leeway in other cases, we should take it to be Kant's considered view that, in principle, we can pursue personal ends at the expense of opportunities to promote obligatory ends. A possible explanation for the tension between the way Kant describes latitude and his ensuing example is that the concrete cases of potential conflict Kant discusses in the *Doctrine of Virtue* are cases of *intra-moral* conflict.²⁵ Kant might simply bracket tensions between morality and personal ends here, since he already discussed them at length in the *Groundwork* and *Second Critique*. Thus, in VI:390 he provides an example of two maxims of beneficence clashing with each other, but this leaves open that latitude can also extend to cases in which obligatory and personal ends pull in different directions.

3 Obligatory and Other Ends

I will now begin to work out what it means to be committed to obligatory ends *as ends*, and what these ends can demand of us. It will emerge that there is one, limited, sense in which obligatory ends are special among our ends. However, they are special because we have a duty to adopt them, not because they enjoy priority in our deliberations.

There are three general features of the pursuit of ends that can help us understand beneficence as an end, and one difference between obligatory and other ends.

Firstly, one activity can serve to promote more than one end at a time.²⁶ For instance, if I help organize welcome dinners for refugees, I might further the end of beneficence, as well as other ends of mine, such as meeting new people, learning how to cook, etc. It could be the case that organizing welcome dinners is the activity that, on the whole, promotes my ends more than any other activity that would promote just a single end. Organizing welcome dinners would thus be the activity that an agent rationally would lean towards, not because this activity would promote an *obligatory* end, but because this is overall a good way to promote her ends.

Secondly, adopting an end implies commitment to *promoting* this end. Agents cannot merely *claim* to have adopted an end. This holds for obligatory ends as much as

²⁵ This becomes apparent in the casuistical cases, which all concern conflicts between duty and other (seemingly) morally relevant considerations, not between duty and inclination simpliciter (VI:423.18–424.8, 426.1–32, 428.1–26, 431.17–34, 433.6–434.18, 437.4–26, 454.1–21).

²⁶ Herman (1991: Sect. 2) reminds us that it would be an impoverished conception of deliberation to think that ends are simply to be weighed against each other. She thinks we should conceive of deliberation in terms of a deliberative field constituted by our attachments, commitments, ends and moral side-constraints. Whilst it is possible for our ends to pull in different directions, we can and often do engage in activities that promote a number of our ends at the same time and the promotion of one end can be informed and guided by other ends.

for other ends.²⁷ Moreover, adopting an end might not just be a matter of performing certain actions but also of cultivating stable affective dispositions to feel pleasure or satisfaction in certain states of affairs (Fahmy 2019: 419).

Thirdly, we cannot straightforwardly infer what ends an agent adopted from the consequences of her actions. Actions can have unforeseen and unintended consequences and there is much more to commitment to an end than actions that bring about states of affairs. Being committed to an end means that certain considerations are salient for one's deliberation, though they might not always win out and result in action. Specifically for beneficence this means that an agent who performs acts of charity does not necessarily have adopted beneficence as an end. The acts could, for instance, be side-effects of improving one's reputation. For beneficence to count as one of our ends, we would at least need to perform a consistent pattern of acts of helping, and this end would have to figure in our deliberations. Observers can sometimes be reasonably certain that someone did not make beneficence their end, whereas being confident that beneficence is someone's end would require first-personal access to a person's deliberations, which observers lack.

Finally, an important difference between commitment to obligatory and other ends becomes apparent when one's commitment to an end is put to the test. Pinheiro (2015: 734) stresses, correctly, that "the requirement to adopt a moral end is itself a strict one" and that this means that there are choices between obligatory and non-obligatory ends in which agents have no latitude (see also Korsgaard 1996: 21). I hope to have shown that not all cases in which we could either promote an obligatory or a personal end constitute choices like these. Rather, these cases are extreme ones of direct collision between personal ends and the duty to adopt (and maintain) an end.

Kant claims that it is a case of "*culpability*" or "*vice*" if an agent fails to promote an obligatory end because he makes "it his principle not to comply with such duties.", i.e., because he did not adopt this end at all or is not committed to it in any meaningful sense (VI:390.18-29). There can be cases in which we have to act either in a way that is incompatible with the future promotion of a personal end (e.g., we would lose all future chances of furthering this end) or in a way that no agent who has adopted the end of beneficence ever would. An example of the latter would be an extreme case of not caring about the plight of others (looking "with complete indifference on the need of others" V:69.20-35), such as deciding not to aid people in close spatial proximity and in substantial danger who could be helped easily. In such a situation, we are required to help, even at great cost to personal ends, because failing to do so would be tantamount to relinquishing the end of beneficence. Duty requires that all obligatory ends be our ends, whereas there is no moral duty to promote or hold on to personal ends. In the next section, I will suggest that it is especially cases impacting an agent's immediate surrounding that can put commitment to an end to the test.

Even if beneficence is just one end among others, it is plausible to assume that we have to save the child drowning in the nearby shallow pond. After all, if we failed to save the child, we would fail to promote one of our ends that we could promote

²⁷ See also O'Neill (2013: 132): "a man who never does anything likely to achieve the obligatory end which he claims to hold simply provides excellent evidence that his claim is unjustified, not excellent evidence of peculiarly frequent slip-ups".

at little cost to other ends (it is stipulated as an *easy* rescue), to a considerable extent (much is at stake) and in our direct vicinity.²⁸ For any end that an agent fails to promote in a situation in which she could greatly further it and do so at little or no cost to other ends, we should wonder whether she really has adopted the end, if she fails to do so.²⁹ If we do not prioritize beneficence in cases in which failing to be beneficent would be tantamount to relinquishing beneficence, then this would be a *violation* of duty.

Of course, we might wonder here about cases such as someone who lets the child drown but still walks a friend's dog. The most likely explanation would be that the person did not adopt the end of beneficence and that they helped their friend for other reasons.³⁰ After all, as I pointed out, we cannot infer from external actions alone that someone did adopt an end. Furthermore, helping friends might be part of maintaining the self-deceptive illusion that one did adopt beneficence.

4 How Much Must We Do to Help?

Two features of the pursuit of ends can inform the application of beneficence, and they allow us to account for our intuition that we do not have to abandon (almost) all pursuit of personal ends.

1) *Non-Maximization*: The idea that we must promote an end to the *maximum* or choose the option that *optimally* promotes this end is not an intuitive feature of a commitment to an end. Usually, it suffices to choose an option that promotes the end *sufficiently*.³¹ Take as an example my end to eat good curry. We do not think that I would only live up to this end, if I go to great length to find the very best curry place in the world and only eat there. We usually think that it is sufficient if I eat at a good curry place that meets lower standards.

A moral requirement to *maximize* the promotion of beneficence or of obligatory ends in general would be an outlier in our ends-based deliberations and would require a rationale that explains why these ends are not merely to be adopted but also to be promoted maximally. We already saw that Kant's argument only establishes the former. There is nothing per se irrational about not being as beneficent as one could. It

²⁸ That helping in easy rescue cases in one's vicinity is not optional is widely accepted among Kantians. See Herman (2001). However, note the exception of Formosa and Sticker (2019: 11) who concede that their view does not "unequivocally condemn every single failure to rescue" in these cases.

²⁹ Noggle (2009: 7) reminds us that whilst there is often no concrete and clear threshold that an agent must meet to count as having adopted an end, this does not mean that we can *never* correctly judge whether someone has adopted an end.

³⁰ Kant famously maintains that it is always possible that ulterior (non-moral) motives drive our actions and that we can never be sure that we acted from duty (IV:451.21-36, VI:25.5-6, 38.7-12, 51.7-21, 70.1-71.20, 70.fn, 75.8-76.1, 451.21-36).

³¹ This intuition is, for instance, articulated by Raz (1999: ch.3) who argues that "ordinary human experience" supports the satisficing idea that reason typically does not conclusively determine what is to be done, but rather excludes certain options, and agents choose (based on their inclinations, feelings, and wants) among the remaining "eligible options" (65-6). The notion of satisficing was made prominent in ethics by Slote (1985: ch.3).

is upon the maximizer to show that in the case of beneficence only the very best is good enough.³²

Two remarks are in order here. Firstly, I do not mean to claim that it is rational to prefer the inferior option over the superior if both are *equally available*. In some cases, such as when we could greatly further one of our ends at no cost to other ends, only the very best might be good enough. Tim Mulgan's (2001: 131) *Magic Game* is such a case: An agent could effortlessly and without cost to themselves lift any number of people out of extreme poverty. If they do this for less than the total amount of people in extreme poverty, they have done wrong. That there are situations in which everything but the optimal would be unacceptable might be a problem for satisficing forms of consequentialism, but it does not count against my claim that for our pursuit of ends maximizing should not be considered the default attitude.³³

Secondly, I remain neutral concerning whether it is irrational to promote the *aggregate total* of one's ends to a degree that falls short of how much one could promote it. I suspect that it is, and that satisficing of any specific end is in the service of the maximal overall promotion of the aggregate total of ends. Still, under normal circumstances it is rational to promote specific ends only to a less than maximal extent, unless we could promote them at no expense to other ends.³⁴

2) *Distance*: Thinking of beneficence along the lines of the pursuit of personal ends can vindicate some of our intuitions about the differences between easy rescue cases in close spatial proximity and rescuing people far away. I believe that in our ordinary pursuit of ends, we can find *a bias towards the near*, or, more generally, towards how we interact with our immediate surrounding.³⁵

³² An approach that is in some ways parallel to mine is Noggle (2009) who suggests that we can formulate an appealing and moderately demanding conception of beneficence if we understand beneficence as one of our *ultimate ends* that give our lives meaning. Agents do not have to promote these ultimate ends maximally. My take differs from Noggle's, firstly, in that he models ultimate ends on Williams "ground projects" (ibid.8): projects constitutive of one's agency. Kant, rightly, does not accept the notion of ground projects, as rational agents do not lose their agency if they abandon certain projects, even their most dearly held ones. Moreover, Kant does not think that beneficence must be an end that gives our lives *meaning*. Rather, he thinks that individuals ought to be committed to beneficence regardless of what gives their lives meaning. Secondly, Noggle does not establish how thinking of beneficence as one of our ends allows (spatial) distance to make a difference. On his account, it is difficult to understand why we absolutely must save the child drowning nearby, but we do not have to save as many of the worst off far away as we can.

³³ Obviously, nothing of what I have said here implies that on the Kantian framework compliance with *perfect* duty becomes optional after meeting a threshold. Perfect duties are typically duties of omission. If an agent performs a token of the prohibited type of action, they have violated duty, otherwise they have not. Perfect duties therefore work on a binary logic, you either comply or you do not. By contrast, imperfect duties are positive and require agents to do things. Their application admits of degrees (doing more or less), and what an agent does might lack moral worth without being a violation of duty (VI:390.18-29). This makes it possible to be a satisficer about imperfect duties but maintain a non-satisficing account of perfect duties, as Kant surely would have.

³⁴ Of course, a satisficing account of beneficence could in principle still be extremely demanding, for instance, if only the *best or second-best option* was sufficient. I take it that for the same reasons that we do not think that normally only the best option is good enough we also do not think that only the best or close-to-best-options are sufficient. However, I am open to it sometimes being the case that anything but the best or close-to-best-options is irrational. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

³⁵ In addition, there might also be a *bias towards actions over inactions*. Noggle (2009: fn.33) points out that "a single instance of deliberately thwarting [a] project casts far more doubt on its status as an end than

Distance certainly matters insofar as ends usually become more difficult to promote if distance is involved. Distance introduces uncertainty and practical challenges, and there are questions about how much influence on and control of things we can have at a distance. However, Kant himself interestingly thinks that distance also matters for imperfect duty in a more direct sense. He thinks that agents have particularly strong obligations to their spouse (VI:422.10–15), children (280.13–22), parents (390.12), and friends (469.17–24), as well as to fellow citizens (422.10–15). Whilst many of these cases are matters of emotional closeness rather than of physical (although often the two go together), it is clear that promotion of beneficence is not strictly impartial for Kant (see also VI:390.11–2). I take this to reflect a general point: We are typically not thinking impartially about promotion of ends, and factors such as distance guide our application of ends. In particular, proximity can create cases of urgency that can put our commitment to ends to the test.

Consider Joe, a self-declared art preserver who regularly donates a substantial amount of money to save and preserve precious artworks.³⁶ Now, imagine that during a fire in a museum Joe decides, upon (short but rational) deliberation, not to save a precious Van Gogh painting that he could take with him to safety without danger to his life or health. Joe's reason is that he believes that if he saves the painting, his name will be in the newspapers, and he is a private person who wants to keep a low profile. I take it that in such a case we would doubt that Joe has made preserving art his end. His financial contributions weigh little compared to the momentous decision that reveals his true priorities.³⁷ The mere amount and frequency of financial contributions agents make and the impact this has on the world as a whole do not necessarily track how committed agents are to an end (and whether they are committed at all). Commitment to an end is usually better expressed in how an agent's life is informed and shaped by this end and how she affects her surrounding in the light of this end than how she affects the world impersonally. This is especially so if it would be easier or more convenient for her to simply write a cheque than to overcome personal obstacles or adversities that would stand in the way of promoting an end. Yet, the latter is much more indicative of one's commitments. This is not to say that the only possible test cases for whether we are committed to an end are extraordinary and high-stakes scenarios. We would also doubt that Joe is committed to preserving art if he never spends any of his wealth or time on preserving art. Yet, if there is an

a single failure to promote it. Absent some dire financial need, selling the house's vintage moldings for \$1,000 casts much more doubt on the claim that the restoration is an important end than simply failing to spend an extra \$1,000 on the project." Action, it seems, is more expressive of our commitments than inaction. I cannot further develop this aspect of the pursuit of our ends here.

³⁶ I am grateful to Joe Saunders for discussion of specific cases and for pressing me on them.

³⁷ One might respond that this would merely show that Joe values his privacy more than preserving art. I think it is certainly the case that it would show that. However, I take it that it is possible that people can be disingenuous or even self-deceived about the ends they are committed to and that there can be cases in which prioritizing one end shows that another (apparent) end is no end of the agent at all. I could stipulate my case so as to make my point more apparent: the artwork at stake is the only extant artwork of a specific genre or school, the threat to Joe's privacy is only moderate as there is a good chance that he can save the artwork anonymously, etc. I take it that at some point we would doubt that Joe really cares about preserving artworks. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

easy way to promote an end in one's surrounding, then deciding not to do so usually reveals that one has not in fact adopted the end or has relinquished it.

This does not mean that there are no ends for which distance matters. Take, for instance, the flourishing of one's child as the end of a parent. It is not the case that a parent would normally care any less about their child's well-being if she is far away, nor would we think this appropriate. The same holds in other situations: If providing a good education to my students is my end, it is not appropriate to care less about my student's education just because I teach them online and they are far away. It should be noted, though, that these two cases concern special (parental) obligations or a role we voluntarily assumed, namely, as a teacher. These special and role obligations do impact the significance of distance.

For beneficence this implies that at least in some cases distance might not matter, namely, if you have made a commitment to specific forms of helping. If you have accepted an executive role in an international charity that fights global poverty, you would fail in your commitment if you decided that the charities' resources be allocated to the needy (but globally relatively well off) nearby. The same holds if you find yourself in an institutional or political position that requires impartiality. It might also be the case that people adopt specific maxims of beneficence such as "helping the worst off", in which case distance, once again, does not matter or matters far less. There can be ends that already, in their very nature, abstract from distance. Yet, I doubt that the most common type of beneficence, and the one that Kant's framework requires us to adopt, is most naturally understood as requiring us to abstract from how potential recipients of beneficence are (spatially and otherwise) related to us.

A bias towards implementation of ends in our immediate surrounding is part of our commitments to many of our ends. It is thus in line with how we think about ends in general that we must save people in dire need right in front of us, but we, normally, do not have to make equivalent (or greater) efforts and sacrifices to save or improve the lives of the (distant) global poor. This, of course, does not mean that we do not have to help the global poor at all, but only that some of the considerations that intuitively speak in favour of saving the child in the shallow pond fail to apply in the case of the global poor. What we must do for beneficence overall will thus be more limited than on a framework that requires that we help regardless of how we are spatially and otherwise related to those we could help.

One might reply that we should not accept a bias towards the near. Maybe we *de facto* care more about things nearby, but this simply expresses a failure to appreciate exactly what is happening far away because our psychology cannot grasp it vividly. After all, the art preserver might, in total, do more to preserve precious artworks than someone who only ever saves one artwork from a fire. Likewise, the person who donates a substantial amount to Oxfam but does not save drowning children in their vicinity might save more lives in total.

However, my discussion of the pursuit of ends at the very least reveals that the burden of proof is on those who maintain that we must think about beneficence not just differently from how we ordinarily think about our duties to help and rescue, but also differently from how we usually think about the pursuit of ends. Beneficence would thus have to be not merely an end we have to adopt, but also an end that functions in our deliberations differently from the role accorded to many non-moral ends.

It would have to be an end that already stipulates that we must pursue it regardless of distance. Yet, the Kantian duty that we must make beneficence our end does not establish such a special status or content.³⁸

In sum, we are left with the following picture: An imperfect duty, such as beneficence, is overwritten by perfect duty in the sense that I may never violate a perfect duty in my pursuit of obligatory ends. This, and that we must adopt and maintain all obligatory ends, is the only constraint that the authority of duty imposes on our pursuit of ends. In the next section, I will argue that mere luxury or (other than perfect duty) anything that is not instrumental to an agent's pursuit of her ends cannot justify that we pursue obligatory ends to a lesser extent. Ends (obligatory and non-obligatory) can be jointly promoted sometimes and sometimes it is rational to promote one end rather than another. In these cases, the issue isn't that one end can override other ends because it enjoys special authority. Rather agents need to balance ends according to instrumental considerations. Ends are typically non-maximizing, meaning that it is usually not rational to always pursue one end at the expense of other ends. Moreover, factors such as distance can matter when we face choices between ends.

5 Luxury, Distance and Cooperation

Let me close with two cases that will serve to clarify and refine my proposal.

Firstly, the art preserver Jane is told that there is a Van Gogh on the other side of the planet that could be saved if she donates the only £5 she has on her. She instead decides to spend the £5 on a coffee. This, I think, would call into question whether Jane really has adopted the end of preserving artworks. It may also call into question whether proximity really is as significant as I make it out to be. After all, the artwork here is far away and we still think that instrumental rationality requires that art preservers donate. Or, in terms of beneficence, if I am faced with the choice of saving the life of a distant child by forgoing a coffee, but opt for the coffee, it seems difficult to maintain that I have adopted the obligatory end of beneficence.

However, Jane's case is unlike the case of Joe, since for Jane pursuit of personal ends and spending resources on *luxuries* push in different directions. I do not think that it is rational for agents to prefer luxury over effective promotion of any of their ends (obligatory or otherwise), unless the supposed luxury spending promotes one of the agent's ends. My conception does not license that we prefer mere luxury over helping the needy.

Secondly, Jason is a coffee aficionado and purchasing the coffee would further his end of tasting different types of coffee. Here saving the artwork is in tension with another of his *ends*. In this case, Jason has to weigh both ends against each other, and it seems plausible (though is not a foregone conclusion) that Jason should still make

³⁸ A critic might dig in their heels and maintain that our ordinary pursuit of ends is systematically mistaken and should not inform ethical theorizing. We should bear in mind though that those advocating distance-insensitive principles, such as Singer (1972), do draw on at least some of our intuitions and would have to explain why we can disregard some intuitions but not others. Most recently, McElwee (2022) has argued that distance does in fact make a difference to what can be reasonably demanded of agents. Distance makes suffering less vivid, which makes it psychologically more difficult for agents to help. This, however, is not intended as a license for the affluent to do as little as they are currently doing.

the donation and forego the coffee in this case. After all, he could enjoy the coffee tomorrow rather than today. If Jason, in this case, decided against an easy rescue of an artwork, then this should make us wonder how committed he is. Something similar would apply to beneficence. Saving a life far away is more salient than tasting a coffee that I could taste tomorrow instead.

However, if Jason is approached repeatedly by requests for donations, it is at some point rationally warranted for him to decline making another donation. The threshold for when it is permissible to stop contributing is lower in cases that involve distance than in cases of emergency in one's vicinity. There are two rationales for this lower threshold. Firstly, at some point it will be reasonable for Jason to think that someone else who is also committed to preserving artworks should chip in and sacrifice their coffee (or something equivalent), whereas it is not the case that someone else could taste the coffee for him. This is even more so the case for beneficence, as beneficence is an end that we can assume others, unless they are in violation of their duties, have made their own.³⁹ Secondly, it is intuitive that in cases in which I can promote an end in my vicinity and this must be done so immediately, previous contributions do not matter, whereas when it comes to regular donations to promote the end elsewhere it does matter how much I have contributed in the past. In the latter case, agents at some point might have done enough (at least for the time being), and it is rational for them to shift focus to other ends. Jason does not have to spend all of his resources on saving art to the detriment of his other ends. This would be much too high a bar to set for something to be his end.

My conception of beneficence modelled on the pursuit of ends is thus demanding in the sense that when approached for a donation on behalf of victims of emergency far away mere luxuries do not constitute reasons for refusing to contribute, and we have to do something to help the distant needy even at some expense to the promotion of other ends. However, my theory licences that we spend resources on personal ends if we have already contributed sufficiently to beneficence. What it means to have contributed sufficiently is not determined by the absolute authority of morality, but rather by the question of how much we are to promote an end (any end) that we made our own, given our means, circumstances, and other ends.

6 Conclusion

Understood correctly, Kant's framework shows how beneficence fits into our everyday lives dedicated to the pursuit of various ends we hold dear. We know from our daily strivings what it means to promote ends and we have plenty of experience in balancing our ends against each other. We can make use of our everyday understanding of promoting ends in order to work out how to apply morally obligatory ends to specific cases. Understanding beneficence as one of our ends can ground our intuitions that we do not have to dedicate all of our resources and time to beneficence and that proximity can matter in our moral deliberations.

³⁹ Murphy (1993) stresses that beneficence is an end that we are typically engaged in collaboratively with others, and that we are not required to do more just because others fail to do their fair share.

One might worry that I manage to avoid an excessively demanding conception of beneficence only at the expense of swinging too far to the other side and present an anaemic or underdemanding version of beneficence; one incongruent with the moral responsibilities of (relatively) affluent agents in a world of acute emergencies and needless suffering. I would share this concern if beneficence was the only duty to others we have. However, it is very significant that the Kantian framework also acknowledges *perfect* duties. These include a prohibition against treating others as mere means (IV:429.10–2), which is standardly understood as prohibiting exploitation and, potentially, also being complicit in or benefitting from exploitation. Perfect duties might also ground remedial duties to eliminate and reduce injustice or to compensate victims of historical injustice, such as slavery and colonialism. There is more to morality than beneficence. My paper focused on how beneficence should be understood as one end among other ends. Attention should also be paid to how adopting and enacting beneficence is just one duty among others.

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