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# KANT, MORAL OVERDEMANDINGNESS AND SELF-SCRUTINY<sup>1</sup>

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This paper contributes to the debate about how the overdemandingness objection applies to Kant's ethics. I first look at the versions of the overdemandingness objections Kant himself levels against other ethicists and ethical principles and I discuss in what sense he acknowledges overdemandingness as a problem. Then I argue that, according to Kant's own standards, introspection about the moral worthiness of one's actions can constitute forms of moral overdemandingness. Self-scrutiny and Kant's well-known claim that we can never be certain that we acted for the right reason jeopardize agents' deserved happiness. Furthermore, self-scrutiny can constitute an activity Kant himself criticizes under the labels of "micrology" and "fantastic virtue". The demandingness of critical self-scrutiny has not yet received due attention in the overdemandingness debate since this debate is focused on duties we have towards others.

Many philosophers consider moral overdemandingness a central problem for standard forms of Consequentialism. Recently, Immanuel Kant as well as ethical theories that draw on Kantian insights have also received critical attention in the context of the overdemandingness debate. In the current paper, I will show, firstly, that we find versions of the objection that ethical theories demand too much already employed by Kant. Secondly, I will show how the overdemandingness objection applies to Kant's conception of imperfect duties to self. The systematic upshot of my paper will be to show how we should expand our understanding of overdemandingness if we want to make Kantian ethics part of the overdemandingness debate. The category of duties to self has so far not received much attention in the context of the overdemandingness debate, since overdemandingness is commonly seen as a problem arising from duties to *others*, specifically, from affluent agents' duties towards the globally poor. Moreover, many current ethicists are skeptical of the category of duties to self. Yet,

these duties are pivotal for Kant and must therefore be part of the debate about the potential overdemandingness of his ethics.<sup>2</sup>

In the first section, I motivate my discussion of Kant's ethics in the context of the overdemandingness debate by providing an overview of the recent literature on overdemandingness as it pertains to Kant. This will reveal that a closer look at duties to self is a desideratum. In the second section, I discuss the overdemandingness objections Kant himself levels against the Stoics and those who deny the existence of merely permissible actions. This will help us understand what kind of theories or principles Kant himself considers overdemanding. In the third section, I argue that, according to Kant's own conception of what counts as overdemanding, critical self-scrutiny of one's motives poses two overdemandingness problems for Kant's ethics. In the fourth section, I respond to three objections against my criticism of Kant.

## I

Many philosophers believe that an ethical theory that requires that its followers give up (almost) everything that makes their life worth living or that demands of agents more than is plausible cannot be correct. This so called "Overdemandingness Objection" in its current form started as a critical reaction to Peter Singer's (1972) influential "Famine, Affluence and Morality". Singer argues that we must radically revise how we think about our duties towards the victims of emergencies and natural disasters. Whilst Singer intends to work from premises that non-Consequentialists supposedly can and should accept, his argument is commonly considered a paradigm of Consequentialism. Recently, the debate has moved beyond Singerian Consequentialism. Philosophers now discuss the potential overdemandingness of Rule-Consequentialism and forms of Consequentialism that contain absolute constraints (Hooker 2009), and of indirect Rule-Consequentialism (Carter 2009), as well as of non-Consequentialist theories, such as Contractualism (Ashford 2003, Hills 2010), Kantian ethics (see below), virtue ethics (Swanton 2009)<sup>3</sup> as well as of absolute prohibitions (van Ackeren, Sticker 2015).

It is important to note that there are currently different so-called "overdemandingness objections": moral demands go beyond what can reasonably be expected of agents or they violate the Ought Implies Can principle, adherence to a strict ethical theory would undermine important non-moral values, morality is too intrusive

and requires a great deal of detachment from one's personal projects and valuable interpersonal relationships, etc. In the next section, I will elaborate on Kant's own notion of what makes an ethical theory or ethical principles excessive or unfit for human beings like us. I will close my paper with some brief remarks about the (dis)unity of overdemandingness objections.

To understand the true scope of the overdemandingness objection it is important to bear in mind that predecessors of this objection were already levelled against Kant, for instance by G.W.F. Hegel (1991 §135; 1976, V.C.c., VI.C.a-b). In a recent introduction to the problem of overdemandingness for Kant and Kantian ethics, van Ackeren and Sticker (2018a, 374) argue that Hegel objects to Kant's moral philosophy because Kantian morality supposedly requires agents to act in a metaphysically impossible way, namely, to actualize their pure practical reason in the phenomenal world. This phenomenal world is causally determined and leaves no room for the exercise of pure practical reason in it.<sup>4</sup> Van Ackeren and Sticker suggest that we understand this as a form of overdemandingness objection, since Hegel objects that agents are morally required to go beyond what is metaphysically possible for them to do. The overdemandingness objection has a long and rich history<sup>5</sup>, and we can benefit from looking into this history, in particular so if we want to understand how the problem of overdemandingness is reflected in non-Consequentialist theories.

Despite repeated calls by Consequentialists, such as Tim Mulgan (2001, 5-6), to investigate whether and how the overdemandingness objection can be applied to Kant and Kantian ethics more broadly, this discussion is often still brief and misses its target.<sup>6</sup> Mulgan himself, for instance, claims that Kantian ethics is potentially "extremely demanding" since "Kant's commitment to impartiality clearly rules out any foundational role for partiality or concessions to the agent's self-interest", and wide duties "do not outweigh perfect duties, but they presumably seek to fill up the space those duties leave open" (Mulgan 2001, 6). Both of Mulgan's claims, that Kant's ethics is impartial and that wide duties fill the free space strict duties leave in such a way that they make morality extremely demanding, are exegetically questionable as they read Consequentialist assumptions (strict impartiality and maximization) into Kant.

In contrast to Consequentialists' attempts to stress the demandingness of Kant's ethics, Kantians frequently emphasize that we do not have to maximize the amount of good we do for others, and we do not have to be strictly impartial and can, within limits,

give preferential treatment to our own ends and to people near and dear to us.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Onora O’Neill (1993, 459) points out that Kantian ethics is less demanding than Utilitarianism, because, according to the former, the most stringent moral requirements, perfect duties of justice, are to omit acts of injustice, which only requires inaction on the part of the agent. Duties of justice are not “*relentlessly demanding*”, since they leave still plenty of permissible options open (O’Neill 2009, 64). Violetta Igneski (2008) argues that, due to Kant’s focus on autonomy, agents must be allowed space to set and pursue personal ends. Likewise, both Alice Pinheiro Walla (2015) and Formosa, Sticker (2019) argue that Kantian beneficence comes with built-in limitations that restrict how much sacrifice for the well-being of others can reasonably be required. Importantly for my purpose, none of these thinkers see duties to self as substantially increasing the demandingness of Kant’s ethics. If anything, Kantians stress that this kind of duty constitutes prerogatives for the agent to care about *herself*.<sup>8</sup>

Consequentialists tend to stress the demandingness of Kantian ethics, whereas Kantians tend to see Kant’s ethics and current developments of his theory as an ethics made for finite and fallible humans for whom it is essential to set their own ends and to pursue personal projects.<sup>9</sup> Many Kantians believe that the more moderate demandingness of Kantian ethics gives it an edge over highly demanding forms of Consequentialism. The issue of demandingness is thus a crucial point of contention between Kantianism and Consequentialism.

Whilst Kantians present textual evidence that duties towards the globally poor are less demanding for Kant than for most Consequentialists, the literature pays insufficient attention to a kind of duty that is particularly central on Kant’s framework, namely, *duties to self*.<sup>10</sup> I will argue in this paper that having to scrutinize the motives of one’s actions in the service of self-perfection constitutes two separate overdemandingness problems internal to Kant’s ethics.

## II

“Overdemandingness” is not a term Kant himself explicitly uses, and some philosophers have expressed doubt that the overdemandingness objection can be applied to Kant.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Van Ackeren, Sticker (2015, sec.3) suggest that Kant

would consider overdemandingness objections a sophisticated form of self-deception that is supposed to make more room for the agent's inclinations whilst making herself falsely believe that she is a morally good person.<sup>12</sup> However, Kant himself acknowledges that excessive demands can be a problem. Elaborating on Kant's own remarks will provide us with a nuanced understanding of what it means, according to Kant, for a theory or principle to be overdemanding. Furthermore, it will allow me to reveal potential overdemandingness problems for Kant's ethics, according to Kant's own standards.<sup>13</sup>

The prime target of Kant's own overdemandingness objections are the *Stoics*. Kant expresses agreement with the Stoics because they, unlike other ancient ethicists, make virtue, not happiness, the supreme principle of morality (V:126.35-7). Their mistake, however, is to have "represented the degree of virtue required by [morality's] pure law as fully attainable in this life" (V:126.37-127.1). They thus "strained the moral capacity of the *human being*, under the name of a *sage*, far beyond all the limits of his human nature and assumed something that contradicts all cognition of the human being" (V:127.2-4). The sage is elevated above the animal nature of human beings and even raised above duty since no temptation to transgress the moral law exists for him (V:127.fn.). The Stoics require agents to fully live up to an ideal that finite human beings, who can never be "altogether free from desires and inclinations" (V:84.4-5), cannot reach. They thus require something that is not possible for finite agents to achieve. Morality, for us, must rest on necessitation and respect for the moral law not on holiness (V:84.28-32).<sup>14</sup>

Kant believes that the Stoics' demand to become a sage contradicts all "cognition of the human being" (V:127.4). Importantly, the German, "Menschenkenntniß" commonly does not refer to a form of scientific or metaphysical knowledge but to an everyday understanding of human affairs and human character. Kant's objection against the Stoics is based on this ordinary understanding of how humans act. We see human beings constantly pursue their own happiness and strive to satisfy their desires. It would thus go against our ordinary understanding to think of a human being without any desires and who does not pursue her own happiness at all.

Whilst Kant is certainly right that it puts a considerable burden of proof on a theory if the theory issues demands that are difficult to square with our everyday understanding of human actions, this, by itself, might not be much of a restriction on

ethical theories. Strictly speaking, Kant only criticizes that the Stoic sage violates “*all cognition of the human being*”, meaning there is *not a single* cognition of human beings that would help us understand how it is possible for an agent to do what, according to the Stoics, is morally required of her. However, an ethical theory that does not violate all cognition of the human being could still require agents to sacrifice everything. After all, giving one’s entire wealth to the needy or heroic actions that come with great sacrifices, rare as they may be, are actions that we usually can explain based on our everyday understanding of human action. The constraint to not violate all *Menschenkenntniß* can only rule out theories that assume that human beings can be totally indifferent towards their personal well-being.<sup>15</sup>

There is a second form in which the Stoics, according to Kant, are overdemanding, though. They

would not let the second *component* of the highest good, namely happiness, hold as a special object of the human faculty of desire but made their *sage*, like a divinity in his consciousness of the excellence of his person, quite independent of nature (with respect to his own contentment), exposing him indeed to the ills of life but not subjecting him to them (at the same time representing him also free from evil); and thus they really left out the second element of the highest good, namely one’s own happiness (V:127.5-12).

The Stoics do not accord happiness its proper place and the goodness of the life of the sage, their embodied ideal, is not affected by any conditions outside of his control, such as pain, loss of personal relationships, etc. For the Stoics personal happiness is simply “contained in consciousness of one’s virtue” (V:112.16, see also V:111.18-112.8, 115.26, XXIX.600.10-2). Happiness is nothing other than being aware that one is virtuous. This entails that Stoics cannot account for cases of conflict between morality and happiness (V:112.27-32) and for cases in which a morally good agent is unhappy and a villain happy (IV:442.16-7, V:60.26-36, 127.7-16, XXIX:623.20-33). Furthermore, Stoics cannot explain why anything but awareness of one’s virtue would make an agent happy and why agents strive for happiness in ways others than through self-fortification and moral self-perfection. They might not even be able to explain how it could ever be rational for agents to be motivated to action by a desire for happiness. Many ordinary human actions and pursuits will appear puzzling and outright unintelligible to Stoics.

Kant's criticism of the Stoics is significant, as Kant himself is sometimes criticized because his ethics is supposedly only concerned with duty and neglects other important aspects of human existence, such as an agent's concern for her own good life.<sup>16</sup> Kant, however, stresses that happiness is an important part of human existence and "the second *component* of the highest good". The complete good is not simply morality, but virtue and happiness in proportion to desert (V:110.31-111.5). A world in which virtuous agents who are unconditionally committed to morality are unhappy is deficient. There is a kind of happiness agents deserve because of the moral worth of their actions. Having to sacrifice or forego this kind of happiness would mean that agents are asked to sacrifice too much, in the sense that they are deprived not simply of opportunities to satisfy their inclinations but of a good "the judgement of an impartial reason" (V:110.26, see also IV:393.20) approves of.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the Stoics, Kant acknowledges that personal happiness is an important motivational drive for agents and that pursuing our own happiness is rational, as long as we pursue happiness within the bounds of morality and as long as happiness is not our unconditional determining ground. Furthermore, *deserved* happiness, the highest good's second component, has moral significance and a moral theory must reflect this significance. Whilst it is not a problem for an ethical theory if it requires us to give up *undeserved* happiness (and in fact this might rather be a good thing), it would be a problem for an ethical theory if it required agents to sacrifice happiness they deserve or if it undermined deserved happiness.<sup>18</sup>

Kant also warns of overdemandingness in his discussion of the "fantastically virtuous who allows *nothing to be morally indifferent (adiaphora)* and strews all his steps with duties, as with mantraps". This "[f]antastic virtue [Mikrologie] [...] would turn the government of virtue into tyranny" (VI:409.13-9).<sup>19</sup> In the Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explains that "morally indifferent (*indifferens, adiaphoron, res merae facultatis*)" is an "action that is neither commanded nor prohibited" and thus "merely *permitted*, since there is no law limiting one's freedom (one's authorization) with regard to it and so too no duty" (VI:223.5-9). He leaves it open here "whether there are such actions" (VI:223.9-10). Kant is sceptical of the existence of *adiaphora* if they require a "permissive law (*lex permissiva*)" which gives explicit permission to follow one's personal preferences in morally neutral cases. If



there were such a law “the authorization would not always have to do with an indifferent action (*adiaphoron*)”, since these actions would in fact be morally qualified, namely, explicitly permitted (VI:223.10-7).

In what sense the government of virtue can be a tyranny becomes more apparent if we look at two current versions of the overdemandingness objection. Firstly, overdemandingness can be understood as an overreach in *scope*. It greatly restricts an agent’s options and deprives her of the space to pursue her personal projects if for every choice she faces there is only one option that is morally permissible.<sup>20</sup> Allowing for *adiaphora* is an obvious way to avoid this overreach and to create a free space for agents’ personal preferences.

Secondly, the examples Kant gives for actions that it would be fantastically virtuous to make the subject matter of moral scrutiny—“whether I eat meat or fish, drink beer or wine, supposing that both agree with me” (VI:409.16-7)<sup>21</sup> and “whether I decide to walk about in my yard, or sit still” (XXVII:512.14-29) –suggests that he does not merely worry about the frequency of morally relevant situations but also about making the wrong kinds of cases subject matter of moral deliberation. Kant is concerned about how it would impact our deliberation and our projects and personal relationships, if we think that every case, no matter how trivial, would necessitate moral reflection. This also becomes apparent in the polemical term “micrology” [Mikrologie], which literally means a science of the small or the activity of reasoning about small matters.<sup>22</sup> A realm of morally neutral activities eases the worry that agents would have to reflect about the morality of their actions to an undue or extraordinary extent as well as reflect about the wrong kinds of cases. Constant moral reflection and constant vigilance (as opposed to vigilance only when it counts) would force agents to adopt an overly detached attitude to their projects and personal relationships. Agents would have to see them always through the filter of what they are required to do, and they would be moralized to an extent that is out of line with how we normally think about them.<sup>23</sup>

Despite Kant’s own polemics against a position that allows for no *adiaphora*, he states in the *Religion* that

[i]t is of great consequence to ethics in general, however, to preclude, so far as possible, anything morally intermediate, either in actions (*adiaphora*) or in human characters; for

with any such ambiguity all maxims run the risk of losing their determination and stability (VI:22.19-23).

Those who do not accept *adiaphora* “are commonly called *rigorists* (a name intended to carry reproach, but in fact a praise)” those who do “*latitudinarians*” (VI:22.23-6).<sup>24</sup> It seems that rigorists are the fantastically virtuous from the *Metaphysics of Morals*, but instead of ridiculing them, Kant here expresses agreement with them. When Kant criticizes the fantastically virtuous, he presumably has in mind someone who micromanages his moral life or who is obsessed with details that do not make a moral difference and who thus has adopted an overly moralistic attitude towards his personal projects and relationships. However, Kant is also skeptical of a conception of morally indifferent actions, according to which these actions are not subject to moral evaluation at all, almost as if the moral law had forgotten them. In the *Religion*, he argues that a

morally indifferent action (*adiaphoron morale*) would be one that merely follows upon the laws of nature, and hence stands in no relation at all to the moral law as law of freedom – for such an action is not a *factum*, and with respect to it neither *command*, nor *prohibition*, nor yet *permission* (*authorization* according to law), intervenes or is necessary. (VI:23.fn)

An action that is not subject to moral evaluations, according to Kant, would be a part of the natural or sensuous world and, in fact, not be an action at all. The idea of *adiaphora* applied to actions makes no sense to Kant since he believes that actions always presuppose maxims<sup>25</sup>, and maxims can always be morally evaluated. Every action is thus at least potentially open to moral evaluation. Furthermore, agents must always be concerned that their actions do not violate anyone’s rights and they must at least make sure that their maxims are morally permissible. However, moral evaluation can leave actions underdetermined in the sense that a number of different options are all merely permissible. Morality alone does not settle whether an agent should perform one merely permissible action over another. Agents are at liberty to perform either. *Adiaphora*, if we can use this term at all, must be on the level of the “merely permitted” (VI:223.5-9).<sup>26</sup>

A moral theory should set out general guidelines and leave the rest to an agent’s judgement without requiring endless moral scrutiny. Agents must be aware that there

are certain things they are never allowed to do, such as lie, make wrongful promises, murder, etc., and they must commit themselves to obligatory ends. Once an agent has incorporated these prohibitions and ends into her maxims, she can act on her maxims without moral reflection before every action. Kant frequently expresses the belief that it is usually not difficult to determine what the right thing to do is and that even philosophically untutored agents can obtain moral cognition “in the very quickest and undeceptive way” (IV:403.4-5, see also IV:403.18-22, VIII.286.8-17).<sup>27</sup> This is of course not to say that there cannot be *any* difficult cases that require reflection<sup>28</sup>, but Kant thinks that commitment to moral principles and a well-functioning capacity of judgment are called for, not endless reflection about details. As the next section will reveal, there is a tension in Kant between *ex ante* deliberation about what to do and *ex post* reflection about why we did it. Kant believes that the latter is much more challenging.

In the next section, I will apply forms of the overdemandingness objections Kant raises against others to Kant himself. I should note that in doing so I accept the general outlines of Kant’s own characterization of his normative ethics and will discuss whether there still remain overdemandingness problems. We can of course question Kant’s confidence (and those of Kantians) that perfect duties leave plenty of permissible options open and that latitude moderates and limits duties of beneficence substantially<sup>29</sup>, though I will not do so in the present paper. In the final section, however, I will discuss latitude with regard to duties to self.

### III

That Kant levels versions of overdemandingness objections against other philosophers shows that he, in principle, accepts that overdemandingness can be a problem. A passing remark from the *Groundwork* is illuminating for the question of where overdemandingness problems could arise for Kant’s own ethics:

I am willing to concede that the majority of our actions conforms with duty: but if we look more closely at the imaginations and intentions of their thoughts we everywhere come up against the dear self, which is always flashing forth, and it is on this – and not

on the strict command of duty, which in many cases would require self-denial – that their purpose relies (IV:407.23-7).

Kant assumes that performing actions in external conformity to duty is not so demanding that people would not normally do it. After all, many perfect duties are also duties of right, non-adherence to which can incur punishment and violations of perfect and imperfect duties can constitute breaches of social conventions that might result in blame and social ostracism. It is thus usually in an agent's self-interest to externally conform to duty.

The real challenge is *true virtue*, which Kant acknowledges is very rare and difficult to attain. The dear self is so prevalent in everything we do that it can even become “doubtful at certain moments [...] whether any true virtue is actually to be found in the world at all” (VI:407.32-4, see also IV:406.8-25, VIII:284.21-285.7). “True virtue” of course refers to Kant's well-known notion that actions must not only be in conformity to duty, but be motivated by respect for the moral law, the “sole and also undoubted moral incentive” (V:78.20-1). In his discussion of the overdemandingness of other theories, Kant never criticises the concrete *actions* these theories demand in specific situations, or that they can become *too costly* for agents. Kant believes that the real moral challenge is not located on the level of actions or costs but a question of *motivation*.<sup>30</sup>

It is indeed remarkable that Kant tends to focus his criticism on those agents who act for the wrong reasons. In the *Religion*, Kant proclaims that “*perversity of the heart*” (VI:37.22) is:

dishonesty in not screening incentives (even those of well-intentioned actions) in accordance with the moral guide, and hence at the end, if it comes to this, in seeing only to the conformity of these incentives to the law, not to whether they have been derived from the latter itself, i.e. from it as the sole incentive. (VI:37.23-31)

It is one of the characteristics of Kant's ethics that he is particularly worried about agents who habitually act on impure motives even if these impure motives incentivize external conformity to duty (VI:30.1-8).<sup>31</sup> Even in the case of “diabolical” evil (VI:37.21) Kant is concerned about motivation, namely, about doing evil *for the sake of evil*, not about the harm a devil might do or about rights-violations. This, of course,

does not mean that Kant is completely unconcerned about rights violations. After all, his *Doctrine of Right* is dedicated to the question of how agents can co-exist with each other despite the persistent threat of infringement upon their external freedom by others (VI:218.11-219.30). Kant, however, believes that the chief weakness of human beings that it is upon ethicists and moral educators to address is that agents fail to commit themselves to duty for duty's sake.

Kant's focus on motivation deserves greater emphasis and critical discussion in the overdemandingness debate. I should note though, that I do not need to maintain for my ensuing arguments that motivation is the *only* thing that Kant thinks we should be focusing on in moral assessment and in our moral development. I only need to maintain that this is a very important aspect of Kant's ethics and that there is, according to Kant, considerable moral pressure on agents to strive for pure motivation. The many passages in which Kant criticises agent's behaviour for merely conforming to duty, suspects agents of hidden motives and stresses development of a truly moral disposition as the goal of moral education vindicate this claim.

That Kant frequently warns us that the dear self can always sneak into our maxims shows that he assumes that agents do not easily reach a state in which they act from a stable disposition of obedience to duty alone. In fact, a state in which morality is without any effort is impossible to reach for human beings, and a false, Stoic, ideal (see sec.II). Cultivating one's commitment to duty is a struggle. This becomes particularly apparent in the many passages in which Kant emphasizes the need for *critical self-scrutiny*, an activity he also refers to as the "descent into the hell of self-cognition" (VI:441.19). As a first step of cultivating a moral disposition as well as throughout the process agents must scrutinize the motives of their actions.<sup>32</sup> In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant thus makes the "First Command of all Duties to oneself" to "know (scrutinize, fathom) yourself [...] in terms of your moral perfection in relation to your duty" (VI:441.2-7).

Scrutinizing oneself morally is important for self-perfection, firstly, in order to obtain a realistic, non-self-conceited grasp of the merit of one's actions and lack thereof, and, secondly, to understand which of one's maxims one must revise and how. Critical reflection about one's motives functions as a constant reminder that one must do better.<sup>33</sup> That all finite agents (even virtuous ones) must strive for self-knowledge was recently stressed by Mavis Biss (2014) who presents moral striving in Kant "as an ongoing contemplative activity complexly engaged with multiple forms of self-

knowledge” (ibid.1). Biss emphasizes that even an agent “who has adopted a good ‘supreme maxim’ is liable to temptations to act on first-order maxims that violate moral law because of the propensity to evil” (ibid.4). Self-knowledge, as “knowledge of one’s moral transgressions and weaknesses, as well as of patterns in one’s self-deceiving rationalizations and distorted self-narratives” (ibid.5), can thus even be beneficial for an agent who already has adopted the right maxims but is nonetheless still tempted to deviate from her morally good maxims.

It is striking that, whilst Kant stresses the importance of critically scrutinizing one’s motives, he fails to definitively “settle the issue” of how to obtain the corresponding self-knowledge (O’Hagan 2009, 528). According to Sven Bernecker (2006, 164-5), this is because Kant considers this a question for empirical and rational psychology rather than for ethics. However, there are two important hints we can take from the recent literature. Firstly, whilst the most natural way to envisage critical self-scrutiny might be introspection, i.e. critical reflection about past actions and motivations, Owen Ware (2009, sec.2) points out that there are other ways to obtain self-knowledge about one’s motives and character, namely, inferences from one’s own conduct after a supposed transformation of character and assuming the position of an impartial judge of one’s whole life. Both ways are important supplements to introspection, but, just like introspection, they can only yield defeasible or fallible insights and thus do not overcome the opacity of the self (see below).

Secondly, Irina Schumski (2018, 62) recently provided a useful elaboration of what the duty of moral self-cultivation entails on Kant’s framework:

[a]s long as we are blissfully unaware that we would succumb to certain kinds of temptations, that our priorities are out of order, and that our motives should be re-described to reflect how favourable circumstances are necessary to keep us in line, we can tell ourselves that all is well. We can tell ourselves that we wouldn’t put anything above duty, no matter how tempting it is (self-deception), and when push comes to shove, and we allow ourselves to give in, we can convince ourselves that, since we are such virtuous people, the action must have been justified and make up a story that confirms this assessment (rationalisation).

We can consider ourselves from an impartial perspective and try to work out whether we correctly described our actions and motives or whether they “should be re-described

to reflect potential liabilities to error” (ibid.63). This makes it more difficult for us to deceive ourselves, since it reveals to us our character flaws and weaknesses that we must pay attention to (ibid.63-4).<sup>34</sup> Schumski stresses that “[n]eedless to say, all of these tasks are extremely demanding. They are emotionally demanding because admitting one’s flaws is painful and disheartening, a source of shame and guilt. But they are also cognitively demanding in a way that cultivating one’s emotional and affective dispositions is not” (ibid.64). I wholeheartedly agree with Schumski that demandingness problems lurk in the background of the duty of self-perfection.<sup>35</sup> However, in what follows I will not focus on emotional costs and cognitive efforts as such, but on two internal problems self-scrutiny poses given Kant’s own concerns about overdemandingness.

Before I do this there is one important aspect of self-scrutiny that we need to understand, namely, that it cannot come to an end.

Kant emphasizes that even the “acutest self-examination” might fail to uncover a hidden impure motive. We can thus never know “with complete certainty [...] that the real determining cause of the will was not actually a covert impulse of self-love”. Even “the most strenuous examination” cannot ensure that we do not just “flatter ourselves with the false presumption of a nobler motive” (IV:407.1-16).<sup>36</sup> We can never be certain that there is a type of action or a single maxim with regard to which we do not need to do better. Sometimes Kant makes the even stronger claim that the “real morality of actions (their merit and guilt), even that of our own conduct, therefore remains entirely hidden from us” (A/B:551fn./579fn.), and not merely that we lack certainty. If we can never be certain that we acted for the right reason (let alone if we cannot know with *any degree of confidence* whether our actions were moral), then we can also never be certain that we made true progress in our endeavour to become a person that does what morality requires for the sake of duty alone.

Even if we could not find any impure motives within ourselves, we could never with certainty attribute this to our moral improvement, since, alternatively, we might have become better at deceiving ourselves, and thus there is always more reflection required about whether we *really* acted for the right reason.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Kant claims that the duty to perfect oneself and become virtuous never comes to an end, since “virtue can never settle down in peace and quiet with its maxims adopted once and for all but, if it is not rising, is unavoidably sinking” (VI:409.26-8). Constant vigilance concerning

one's motives is required, given that new situations, moral challenges and temptations arise and we can thus never be complacent.<sup>38</sup>

That we can never know that we acted for the right motive is sometimes called "Introspective Opacity".<sup>39</sup> Two things are important to note here. Firstly, that any supposedly moral motivation we uncover in introspection or otherwise can be the product of self-deception is not an abstract or merely sceptical worry for Kant, but a very real option for him. In all of his major works on ethics, Kant discusses self-deception or rationalizing ("Vernünfteln") as a major threat for critical self-evaluation.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, in contrast to pure motives we can uncover with certainty self-interested motives, since Kant thinks we have no interest in thinking of ourselves as worse than we are. Thus, if I come to believe that I acted for the wrong reason I can assume that this is a disinterested judgement and not the upshot of self-deception.<sup>41</sup>

That the duty to scrutinize motives cannot come to an end is significant, since, as Schumski pointed out, it requires *resources* (time and intellectual as well as emotional energy) to reflect on one's motives and principles. This time and energy the agent cannot spend on other (moral or non-moral pursuits). This, on its own, might not be a great problem, since it is unlikely that these costs are usually very substantial. In addition, Kant himself seems unconcerned about how costly duty can be. Finally, that critical self-scrutiny can never come to an end does not imply that we must spend all our time reflecting about our motives. After all, there are other duties we have to fulfil, such as furthering others' happiness, and other ways to work on our character. However, I will now show that self-scrutiny constitutes two overdemandingness problems for Kant.

(i) In a number of passages, Kant indicates that the outcome of critical self-assessment can have a powerful impact on agents. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he warns of "the *pain* one feels from the pangs of conscience" (VI:394.3-5), and, in the *Religion*, that, at least at the end of an agent's life, the "reproaches of [...] conscience" are more troubling than fear of death (VI:78fn.). Furthermore, in the Second Critique he claims that

in fact a righteous person cannot be happy if he is not first conscious of his righteousness; for, with such a disposition, the censure that his own cast of mind would force him to bring against himself in case of a transgression, and his moral self-condemnation would



deprive him of all enjoyment of the agreeableness that his state might otherwise contain (V:116.5-10).

In this passage, it seems that it is particularly agents strongly committed to morality (they are righteous) who are burdened by self-scrutiny and by the impossibility of ever being certain about having acted morally good.<sup>42</sup>

There are two ways in which all enjoyment of one's agreeableness or happiness can be lost. Firstly, pangs of conscience can have a direct negative impact on an agent. Kant himself is careful not to overstate this phenomenon. In the above cited Second Critique passage, he speaks explicitly of "consciousness of righteousness [Rechtschaffenheit]" (V:116.5-10), which is required to avoid pangs of conscience. The German "Rechtschaffenheit" suggests that this is only consciousness of not having violated (or not intending to violate) external *laws* ("Recht") or of not having violated others' *rights*.<sup>43</sup> Kant also explicitly speaks of "cases of transgression" awareness of which would deprive of all enjoyment. The most immediate and severe pangs of conscience result from clear awareness of having violated duty, not from cases where one is merely unsure about whether one acted for the right reasons.

Kant, however, does not discuss the negative impact of self-assessment exclusively in the context of clear moral transgressions. His discussion of reproaches of conscience at the end of one's life in the *Religion* takes place in the context of uncertainty about one's disposition and of how an all-knowing judge would evaluate one's life as a whole.<sup>44</sup> Whilst reproaches of conscience are particularly strong following awareness of specific transgressions of perfect duties, there are also moments in one's life—when one reflects on the morality of one's life or disposition as a whole—in which conscience judges an agent's disposition or whether she, in general, puts duty over self-interest. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant strikingly describes the judge who presides over the internal court of conscience as a "scrutinizer of hearts" [Herzenskündiger] (VI:439.4), i.e., someone who sees into the heart and knows and judges an agent's disposition and motives.<sup>45</sup> This judge has to be considered the "person in relation to whom all duties whatsoever are to be regarded as also his commands; for conscience is the inner judge of all free actions" (VI:439.6-8).<sup>46</sup>

Conscience as a scrutinizer of hearts suggests a second way in which agents can be deprived of enjoyment. Even agents who committed no external violations of duty can never be certain that they lived up to the standards of the scrutinizer of hearts. After

all, their commitment to duty can still be lacking. This uncertainty might not be grounds for the same kind of immediate reproaches of conscience that follow one's awareness of having violated a perfect duty, but it can undermine the enjoyment of a good that agents are entitled to, namely, their *deserved happiness*.

Even agents unaware of any violations cannot be certain of the worth of their actions. In fact, even an agent who always acts from duty when moral action is called for (if that is possible at all) and who has all the means necessary to be happy in accordance with his desert would still lack certain confirmation of the moral worth of his actions and thus be exposed to the worry that this happiness is ultimately undeserved. This might not be a concern that is constantly on the forefront of his mind, but it will surface at least in those moments when he reflects about the morality of his disposition and life as a whole; be that on his deathbed or in a calm moment when he takes stock and asks himself whether he deserves his good fortune or the goods that make his life worth living.

As we saw, Kant stresses that the highest good is complete virtue and proportionate happiness (V:110.31-111.5, see my sec.II). He thinks that agents should get the happiness they deserve and that a fully moral agent (if we can speak of such an entity) should be maximally happy and presumably enjoy this happiness fully. If an agent evaluates his life or even just his current circumstances and is not confident that he does deserve his good fortune (and he can never obtain a certain confirmation that he does), then this can conceivably "deprive him of all enjoyment of the agreeableness that his state might otherwise contain" (V:116). It is interesting to look at Kant's exact formulation here. Agents lose *enjoyment* of agreeableness, but not this agreeableness itself. Agents do not lose whatever makes them happy, such as family relations, material resources, etc., and they might even (at least to a certain degree) still feel happy. However, they will also be conflicted, feel that there is something bad or inappropriate about their happiness and be unable to fully enjoy and appreciate their happiness if they do not think that they deserve it.<sup>47</sup> This especially affects the virtuous or righteous person, who, Kant claims, "cannot be happy if he is not first conscious of his righteousness" (V:116.5-10), i.e. who presumably does need positive confirmation that he is at least not a bad person. Furthermore, such an agent can even lose "*all enjoyment*", which is a very strong claim that might not hold for less than fully virtuous or righteous agents.

However, even the less than fully righteous person's enjoyment of her happiness (even the happiness she does deserve because it is proportionate) is impacted negatively if she doubts that it is deserved. As a rational agent she is still subject to evaluation and reproaches by her conscience (VI:400.23-4). Only an agent who "pays no heed" to conscience's verdicts (VI:400.33) will be unconcerned about whether reason impartially approves of her happiness. On everyone else, Kant assumes, conscience does have an impact and it is thus a live question for them whether they deserve their good fortune. A positive verification of desert would put all doubt to rest and allow for full enjoyment of deserved happiness, but such a positive verification cannot be forthcoming given the ever-looming threat of self-deception.

One might object that, for Kant, whether one deserves one's happiness is not a concern for the *agent* herself. It is *God* who will see to the just distribution of happiness in an afterlife (see V:123fn.). God knows our motives and we can therefore at least *hope* that the distribution of happiness will ultimately be according to desert.<sup>48</sup> However, as we saw in sec.II, in his critical discussion of the Stoics, Kant is concerned with happiness in *this* world. He does not object that the Stoic agent might be deprived of happiness in an afterlife, but rather that the Stoics have an incorrect conception of this-worldly happiness. I take it therefore that it would also be a problem for Kant if his theory deprived agents of this-worldly deserved happiness or of its enjoyment. After all, Kant here presumably seeks to accommodate the commonsensical point that everyone who cares about morally at least to some extent will wonder about what they themselves morally deserve. Therefore, the question whether their own good fortune is a good in a strong, impartial sense will figure in their introspection and inform their self-understanding. An agent would abdicate responsibility if she leaves this question completely for God to decide.<sup>49</sup>

Even if we follow Kant's assumption that happiness is not necessarily or unconditionally good, since it can be obtained using immoral means and can be undeserved, concern for the morality of one's actions and disposition should not bar an agent from enjoying the happiness she morally *deserves*. It seems out of the question, however, that agents, once they think that they are moral enough, could cease critical reflection and henceforth enjoy their happiness without concern for the morality of their actions. This would open all doors to self-deception and self-conceit. Unless agents do not care about their morality, they are exposed to the nagging worry that their happiness

could be undeserved and not a good thing from the perspective of impartial reason and there is no way for agents to put this worry to rest, even if it is unfounded.

It should be noted, though, that Kant is still in a better position than the Stoics. The Stoics, according to Kant, deny *any* substantial role to happiness, whereas Kant does accord such a role to happiness as a *de facto* motivating force of agents and to deserved happiness as a component of the highest good. However, Kant's framework cannot fully accommodate his own claims that deserved happiness is impartially good and that an ethical theory that deprives agents of deserved happiness is overdemanding.

Finally, we should be clear about the scope of this problem. Firstly, according to Kant, more righteous or more virtuous persons might be more strongly or more often effected by pangs of conscience. However, this is not an overdemanding problem, but it simply captures the fact that those who are more concerned about the morality of their actions are more strongly affected by negative self-assessment. Secondly, Kant indicates that there are occasions when agents take stock and wonder about their life, character or disposition as a whole. Agents might find that they are not good enough to deserve their good fortune and if they are right about this there is also no overdemandingness problem here. Rather, these agents must do better in the future. However, agents can never discover certain proof that they are good enough to deserve the happiness they enjoy, and this might deprive virtuous (and even moderately moral agents) of the (full) enjoyment of a good that they do deserve. Their attitude towards their own deserved happiness has become conflicted in a way that it should not be, because they deserve better.

(ii) Kant believes that finding out what one must do is usually easy. He criticizes micrology, the idea that ethics requires constant reflection even about details that do not matter morally (see sec.II). This criticism is based on two intuitive concerns, namely, that agents must have free space to pursue their personal ends and that our reasoning should not be overloaded with moral concerns that force agents to constantly look over their shoulders and that overshadow all other concerns. Kant wants us to have this free space and he thinks it is micrological pedantry to morally reflect about what to choose for lunch. However, as we saw in Kant's discussion of adiaphora, he believes that all rational actions are performed on maxims and all maxims can and should be

morally evaluated. There is no maxim for Kant on which agents can act without ever subjecting it to scrutiny about whether it reflects the right priority of morality over self-interest. Furthermore, self-scrutiny can never come to an end and everything agents do, even the motives for morally trivial actions, can potentially be subject-matter of soul-searching. It is not clear how Kant could show that this type of soul-searching would be inappropriate or excessive. After all, agents would be doing their duty.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, as we saw a number of interpreters, such as Schumski and O'Hagan, see combating self-deception as the main function of the duty to self-scrutiny. This is correct, I believe. Kant worries that self-deception is potentially ubiquitous. Even in seemingly trivial cases agents have to worry about whether they misdescribed their actions, and that these cases might not actually be morally trivial. Due to the ever-present threat of self-deception, agents cannot simply dismiss choices as morally neutral, since this might be part of a self-deceptive strategy.

Let us return to the two concerns that explain why virtue can become a tyranny in order to better understand what the problem with self-scrutiny is. The first one, that agents must have free space to pursue their projects, is not infringed upon by critical self-scrutiny about motives, as critical self-scrutiny is largely a form of *ex post* reflection and does not rule out specific options. Thus, there is no restriction of agents' free space or liberty here. This is different for the second concern that agents do not have to be always vigilant.

For fantastically virtuous agents even minute details can be morally significant and require moral reflection. Now, if *ex ante* moral reflection can be excessive or overly focused on details and this forces us to adopt an attitude that is damaging to our personal projects and relationships, then it is difficult to see why this should be in principle different for *ex post* reflection. Micrology can be a problem at any stage of thinking about morality, if we think that it is a problem at all. For instance, if eating meat or fish was never an interesting moral question to begin with (and Kant thinks it is not), why would the *motive* for which I eat meat or fish (or anything) matter? For Kant it does, though, firstly because all maxims can and should be subject-matter of moral scrutiny concerning their permissibility as well as concerning the motives they incorporate or the attitude they express towards morality, i.e., whether agents put morality or self-love first. Secondly, even when I decide between a number of merely permissible options, it still matters whether I acted within the constraints of duty but only out of self-interest.

Agents thus have to reflect about whether prospect of pleasure, not respect for the moral law and the constraints it imposes on them, is the strongest incentive in their food choices. Critical self-scrutiny extends to counterfactuals, since having the right motivation means having a stable disposition to do the right thing in *all* cases.<sup>51</sup> Concerns about motivation and the priority of duty are always present in the mind of an agent who takes self-perfection seriously.

The Kantian agent is to worry and reflect about whether she put first respect for the moral law, and this worry can be instantiated in ways that might well be called “micrological mantraps”. Kant’s focus on the importance of introspection encourages rather than condemns setting up micrological mantraps for oneself. It seems that Kant cannot have his pie and eat it: Rejection of fantastic virtue and the requirement to reflect about the motives of potentially all of one’s actions.

One might respond by arguing that Kant presumably thinks that agents should not reflect about the motives for supposedly innocuous actions but only about those actions we commonly think of as morally relevant, i.e., typically actions in situations in which one salient option is something other than merely permissible.<sup>52</sup> This would solve the problem that agents are to reflect about supposedly trivial issues. However, for two reasons Kant lacks the resources to provide a principle that could restrict occasions for critical self-scrutiny. Firstly, as I pointed out in sec.II, there are no morally neutral maxims for Kant, only situations in which all the salient choices are merely permissible. Kant’s idea that all actions are performed on maxims and that all maxims can be morally evaluated makes it impossible for him to carve out an area of human action that does not require critical moral scrutiny.

Secondly, as pointed out (sec.II), on Kant’s framework moral cognition is typically easy. What is difficult, according to Kant, is true virtue or mustering sufficient motivation to carry through with what one acknowledges as one’s duty.<sup>53</sup> Kant cannot help himself to a distinction between easy and difficult moral cognition and maintain that only cases in which it was difficult to work out what morality requires warrant *ex post* scrutiny of motives, because he would deny that for a rational agent it is usually difficult to cognize her duty. That duty is usually immediately apparent to everyone is an important element of Kant’s egalitarian assumption that morality does not require special instructions or expert knowledge, but it also makes it difficult for Kant to single out specific situations or areas as more difficult for moral cognition than others. Of

course, there can be cases in which agents are aware that they ought to do something that is not in their self-interest and in which they feel the counterweight of their inclinations working against the moral option. This, however, only means that this situation *certainly* is a case that requires attention to motives, it does not imply that these types of situations are the only ones that do.

Kant warns against an attitude that makes virtue a tyranny insofar as this attitude denies that our projects and relationships have a normative standing independently of how much they further moral goals. This warning, however, should also apply to *ex post* reflection. Critical self-scrutiny can be micrological and Kant endorses such an attitude towards duties to self and he lacks the conceptual means to rule it out within his own system.

Before I move on to discuss three more general points concerning Kant and demandingness, let me address a potential objection specifically against my second argument.<sup>54</sup> One might think that at least for the majority of agents, *ex post* moral self-scrutiny will not take much effort, time or reasoning simply because even a cursory glance at our actions immediately reveals that we are not yet morally perfect. We thus do not need to worry about moral self-scrutiny overloading our reasoning.

In response, I think it is important to distinguish two different ways in which we can have insight into our imperfection. Firstly, there is the general acknowledgement that we are imperfect and that we can do better and secondly there can be specific insights about concrete shortcomings and failings that can guide us in our self-improvement and that can help us fight self-deception. Kant presumably believes that ordinary agents would readily agree with the claim that we are all imperfect.<sup>55</sup> However, Kant would be very skeptical of any attempt to excuse failure to work out how we can do better by reference to one's general imperfection. In the Second Critique, he explicitly warns of conversations in which every example of virtuous human character is "made suspect" (V:153.29) by presenting alternative explanations of these examples in terms of self-interest. The result of such conversations can be that virtue is held to be a mere phantom, and striving towards virtue "depreciated as vain affectation and delusive self-conceit" (V:154.15-6). Rationalizers here overemphasize the frailty of human nature, a frailty that makes it supposedly impossible for finite creatures to ever fully comply with this law, and this supposedly offers an excuse for not even trying to (see also VIII:379.32-35).

Whilst it is easy for us to see that we can always get it wrong, no matter how virtuous we are, Kant thinks that we can also act for the right reason. It is thus an important and meaningful question whether we, fallible humans, in specific cases lived up to the commands of reason and, if not, how we can do better. Our general imperfection does not license failure to strive to find out how we can do better, to uncover what tempts us, what soothing but morally detrimental stories we told and tell ourselves about our own actions and which situations are morally dangerous for us or tempt us. Acknowledging our general imperfection must be the beginning of self-scrutiny rather than its conclusion.

It is certainly not *per se* overdemanding to expect of agents to critically reflect about their actions and motives and to adjust their behavior and dispositions as a result of this reflection. However, due to their propensity to self-deception, agents can never finish this task. Even a very moral agent might still experience anxiety about her character and motives and thus be deprived of happiness she morally deserves (i). Furthermore, self-scrutiny forces agents to be constantly vigilant about their motives. Kant himself thinks that the idea that agents have to adopt a critical moral perspective on all their actions and decisions, even on intuitively innocent or trivial ones, is moralistic and excessively infringes on important non-moral elements of our lives (ii).

Obviously, whether the command to investigate the true motives of one's actions should qualify as *overdemenanding* also depends on where we set the bar between simple demandingness, which is not a problem for ethical theories but rather a constitutive feature of such theories, and *excessive* demandingness. In the current paper, I assumed the standards Kant himself suggests in his criticism of other approaches.

#### IV

What I hope to have established so far is, firstly, that Kant in principle accepts overdemandingness as a problem. Secondly, there is one additional source of demandingness in Kant's ethics that we must factor into a discussion of the potential overdemandingness of his theory, namely, the duty to scrutinize one's motives. Thirdly, according to his own claims about excessively demanding theories, Kant has two overdemandingness problems with regard to self-scrutiny.



I will close this paper by addressing three replies to my criticisms, the first two Kantian in nature (a and b), the third concerned with the nature of overdemandingness (c).

(a) An obvious Kantian rejoinder to the two problems I uncovered in the previous section is to emphasize that on Kant's framework the duty of self-perfection, of which the duty to scrutinize one's motives is a part, is *imperfect* and leaves "latitude" (VI:390.6-7). Kant even claims that it is open to an agent's individual choice "*how far one should go in cultivating one's capacities*" (VI:392.11-3). This presumably moderates the demandingness of the duty to perfect oneself and might help agents at least to avoid the latter of the two problems I set out in the previous section, as there would be no pressure on the agent to reflect all the time, or even very often.<sup>56</sup>

However, it is unclear whether Kant really thinks that latitude can ground prerogatives for agents to prioritize their own inclinations or projects over imperfect duty. When Kant introduces latitude in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he stresses that latitude does not make it permissible to make exceptions to moral rules for the sake of one's inclinations, but merely 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).<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, it is striking that, for Kant, the general latitude that pertains to the duty to perfect oneself does not pertain to *moral* self-perfection. Kant stresses that developing talents in general is "a matter for [the agent] to decide as he chooses" (VI:392.13-5). "[T]here is no law of reason" that tells agents how far they must cultivate their "natural perfection" (VI:392.16). Matters are different for cultivating one's *moral* disposition, though. Agents are required "to strive with all one's might that the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty" (VI:393.8-10). An agent is required to do as much as they can to attain a pure disposition. Presumably, this entails that, as part of this endeavor, they reflect critically on the morality of their actions 'with all their might'.

The duty to perfect oneself morally has a peculiar status among imperfect duties, since it consists of an end that agents must promote as much as they can, and this duty is thus more stringent than other imperfect duties.<sup>58</sup> Moral self-perfection is more narrow than other forms of self-perfection, because cultivating our moral character is

the most important aspect of self-perfection (VI:387.12-23, 392.20-3). Furthermore, having a pure disposition affects the morality of all our actions. If we morally have to care about anything at all, then we have to care about the attitude we have towards our own actions—and that implies that we have to do as much as we can to work towards our moral perfection or at the very least that we cannot simply excuse ourselves from this task because the duty is merely imperfect.<sup>59</sup>

Kant himself suggests that the reason why moral self-perfection is not a narrow or perfect duty, is that “a human being cannot see into the depth of his own heart, so as to be quite certain, in even a *single* action, of the purity of his moral intention and the sincerity of his disposition” (VI:392.30-3), and since “it remains hidden from the agent himself how much pure moral content there has been in his dispositions” (VI:393.1-3). However, pace what Kant says here, it is far from obvious that a duty’s stringency would be affected if we could never *know* that we fulfilled this duty. In addition, Kant’s argument does not show that *striving* to perfect oneself is only a wide duty, since striving to perfect oneself does not require complete success and awareness of this, but only effort. Even if we think that we cannot be required to accomplish the task of self-perfection, we can be required to try as hard as possible.

Kant here does not present a good reason for why the duty to strive for self-perfection is only wide and would admit of the kind of latitude that would help address the problems discussed in the previous section. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that these problems do not actually hinge on a requirement that we reflect about our motives *as much as we can*, though such a requirement would make these problems more worrisome. The overdemandingness problems are due to Kant’s moral-psychology, in particular his conception of Introspective Opacity, his idea that happiness can be deserved and the claim that it is inappropriate or excessive to micromanage one’s moral life. Even if we only reflect about our motives occasionally, in a peaceful hour, we might worry that we do not deserve our happiness and we might set mantras and reflect about the motives of rather trivial choices.

(b) One might respond to my criticism by pointing out that I seem to demand something that Kant, for good reasons, cannot provide, namely, a *principle* that regulates the proper application of the general duty of moral self-perfection. This seems

inappropriate as Kant stresses that matters of application require “a power of judgement sharpened by experience” (IV:389.30). Kant might have failed to provide the conceptual means to rule out scrutiny of the trivial because he thought that it is obvious that anyone with a functioning capacity to judge will not endlessly scrutinize trivial matters.

However, I think we should be skeptical of appeals to the capacity of judgement as a quick and easy strategy to defend Kant against substantive objections. Kant himself says very little about the notion of moral salience and moral relevance and how it is to inform our judgement.<sup>60</sup> Deferring to judgement to solve substantive problems is a questionable strategy as much of the perceived potency of judgement to fill in gaps in Kant’s theory might be due to how underdescribed the notion is. At best, it shows that Kant wants to solve certain problems and might have resources to, but it does not help us understand how the solution exactly looks like. This is of course in the nature of judgement, since there cannot be rules that completely determine judgment (see A/B:132-3/171-2, V:169, VIII:275).

Furthermore, matters of moral salience and moral triviality are more difficult than the usual operations of subsuming cases under principles or finding principles for cases. Kant himself acknowledges the existence of casuistical cases in which certain factors such as a ruler’s responsibility for a country, protecting others’ from harm, social conventions, etc. conflict with strict prohibitions against suicide and lying (see VI:423.18-424.2, 431.17-34). It is at least *prima facie* unclear whether some of these complicating factors are relevant and must be part of our moral deliberation. Knowing what is morally significant is at least in some cases difficult and cannot simply be addressed via an appeal to agents’ individual judgement. Moreover, self-perfection is the requirement to become a person that puts duty first in everything she does (at least as a side constraint that is never to be violated). This does make all maxims objects of critical scrutiny, even seemingly morally trivial ones. It would thus at least not clearly be a misjudgement to scrutinize even seemingly morally trivial maxims. Finally, we are prone to self-deception and one strategy to deceive ourselves is to convince ourselves that certain maxims are not morally relevant, for instance, because acting on them does not harm or affect others. Yet, this is rationalizing, since the point of morality for Kant is not to avoid harming others but to be fully committed to duty. Thus, even if we think that a maxim is morally irrelevant, we have at least some reason to critically reflect

about whether this is really the case and the fact that matters of application are, to a certain extent, up to our judgement does not change this.

These are admittedly brief remarks concerning a crucial element of Kant's theory. Those who see judgement as pivotal for our understanding of Kant might insist that Kant does have the resources to answer my criticisms. However, at the very least the burden is on them to spell out how judgement can help us avoid excessive self-scrutiny whilst we can maintain Kant's claim that we have strong ethical reasons to subject ourselves to thorough moral scrutiny.

(c) The problems of self-scrutiny that I discussed differ from standard versions of the overdemandingness objection as they are currently levelled against forms of Consequentialism and usually spelled out in terms of costs to an agent's well-being. This might give rise to the objection that whilst my paper successfully establishes that self-scrutiny, as Kant conceives of it, is fraught with problems, the problem here is not *overdemandingness*.

In reply, I would like to point out that there is a great variety of objections that are often summarized under the more general label of "overdemandingness objection": The notion that moral sainthood is not an appealing ideal for humans (Wolf 1982), that the scope of morality must be limited (Fishkin 1982), Peter Railton's (1984) alienation problem, Bernhard Williams's (1985) Integrity Objection, as well as recent approaches, according to which we should spell out overdemandingness in terms of difficulty or effort (McElwee 2016, Chappell 2019), constraint of options (Benn 2016), or excessive responsibility (White 2017) rather than in terms of excessive costs to agents.<sup>61</sup> Many of these conceptions of (over)demandingness are applicable to a broader range of duties than duties of rescue, aid and beneficence. Determining how demanding an ethical theory is and whether it might be overdemanding requires that we work out how the duties and principles of an ethical theory fare with regard to these problems and objections. We should not restrict ourselves to a narrow understanding of overdemandingness if we want to bring a broader range of theories and duties into the focus of the debate.

Critically scrutinizing one's motives constitutes an as of yet underappreciated aspect of the problem that morality can be overdemanding. This aspect deserves further

discussion, if we want to understand which ethical theory has an edge if we take seriously the idea that morality should be for humans who live human lives.

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<sup>2</sup> I can only briefly point out one further upshot of my argument. Showing that duties to self can be implausibly demanding demonstrates that the widely shared assumption that *only* beneficence can give rise to excessive demands is unwarranted. According to a prominent view, advocated first by Murphy (1993 and 2000), our overdemandingness intuitions are explained by the underlying principle that I should not have to pick up others’ slack or that I should not have to do more because others do not do as much as they morally ought to. Murphy assumes that only beneficence can be overdemanding in this sense, since for deontological constraints others’ (non-)compliance is irrelevant. I am never allowed to murder even if others do this, and it is never overdemanding on me to demand that I refrain from murder. Murphy overlooks, however, that there can be duties other than beneficence and deontological constraints and that these other duties could be implausibly demanding. The assumption that



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overdemandingness problems only apply to beneficence was most recently endorsed by White (2017, sec.5).

<sup>3</sup> For recent discussions specifically of the demandingness of Kant's conception of virtue see Timmermann (2018), Formosa, Sticker (2019).

<sup>4</sup> A version of this objection was recently raised against different aspects of Kant's ethics and metaphysics by Saunders (2016, 2019) and Saunders, Sticker (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> See also Sidgwick (1907, 87) who already addresses the problem that Utilitarianism is "charged with setting up too high a standard of unselfishness and making exaggerated demands on human nature". Furthermore, Stern (2012) recently showed how the issue of moral demandingness is a central issue in the debate between Kant and post-Kantians, most notably Hegel and Kierkegaard.

<sup>6</sup> According to Lazari-Radek and Singer (2014, 324), "a high degree of demandingness is not unique to utilitarianism". Many "other normative theories are also highly demanding—Kantian theory or contractualism, for example". However, as evidence they only refer to Ashford's and Mulgan's (2012) discussion of *Contractualism*. Furthermore, with the exception of O'Neill's (2009) discussion of rational constraints, two recent collections of essays on the topic of demandingness by Chappell (2009) and van Ackeren, Kühler (2015) do not address Kantianism.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Kant's claim that for "wide" duties "no specific limits can be assigned to what should be done" (VI:393.32-4), and how far we should go in the sacrifice of our own welfare "depends, in large part, on what each person's true needs are" (VI:393.27-9 see also VI.432.10-2). See Hill (1992, ch.8) for a classical and influential latitudinarian reading of Kant. I will say more about latitude in sec.IV.

<sup>8</sup> Vogt (2008) argues that Kant's ethics is much less restrictive than many believe, since duties to self make room within morality for agents to pursue their personal projects. Timmermann (2005, 25) stresses that the existence of duties to self at least entails "that untrammelled altruism is not at all morally good". The idea that duties to self constitute prerogatives that make morality less demanding is rarely challenged by Kantians, though Timmermann at least concedes that duties to self do not guarantee "that a recognizably Kantian ethical theory would be much less demanding subjectively" (ibid.). See, however, now Sticker, van Ackeren (2018, sec.4) for a critical discussion of the idea that duties to self can make specifically beneficence less demanding.

<sup>9</sup> An exception is van Ackeren, Sticker (2015) who argue that Kantian *perfect* duties can be overdemanding. See also Timmerman (2018) who argues that Kant's ethics is indeed very demanding but not problematically so. Interestingly, philosophers have also expressed the worry that Kant's ethics, specifically his notion of beneficence and duties to aid, might be *underdemanding* (see Stohr 2011, 46, Formosa, Sticker 2019, Sticker, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> See also van Ackeren and Sticker (2018a, 376) who emphasize that "what agents owe to themselves" is a type of duty that is "often overlooked in the current (over)demandingness debate and can enrich the conceptual framework of this debate".

<sup>11</sup> See for instance Vogt (2008, 222) as well as Sticker, Van Ackeren (2018, 408) for discussion of this anachronism worry.

<sup>12</sup> See also Wilson (1993, 278) who criticizes the overdemandingness objection as "an ideology of academicians who are now, in a way they have never been before, part of a materially favored class".

<sup>13</sup> Van Ackeren, Sticker (2018a, 373) cite the same passages that I will be looking at in detail to show that Kant "levels a version of what we nowadays would call the Overdemandingness Objection". Likewise, Timmermann (2018, sec.2) focuses on these and a few other passages and he also reaches the conclusion that "Kant himself criticizes ethical ideals for ignoring the limitations of human nature, i.e. for – in this particular way – being too demanding" (ibid.381). My discussion in this section goes beyond their relatively short discussions of these passages in that I also identify specific criteria for excessive demandingness in order to confront Kant's own ethics with these criteria. Timmermann, by contrast, discusses overdemandingness as the current debate understands it, namely, with regard to beneficence to others and specifically, how much latitude beneficence permits (ibid.sec.4-8). The same is true for Van Ackeren, Sticker (2018b). I think that if we look at the kinds of overdemandingness Kant is concerned about, it becomes apparent that duties to self are more problematic for Kant than beneficence and that they are a more salient venue of critical discussion.

<sup>14</sup> In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant, however, also appeals approvingly to the sage as an ethical ideal (see VI:383.18-32, 457.6-11).

<sup>15</sup> That not contradicting all *Menschenkenntnis* is a minimal standard is passed over by other discussions of these passages in the context of demandingness, such as Timmermann (2018) and van Ackeren, Sticker (2018a).

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<sup>16</sup> See IV:407.27, V:156.20, VI:404.23-405.2 for some particularly striking remarks that feed such criticism.

<sup>17</sup> That the distinction between having to forego satisfaction of inclinations and having to sacrifice deserved happiness is potentially of great significance for the overdemandingness debate, especially as it applies to Kant's ethics, is emphasized by Pinheiro Walla (2019, 132-5). She cites V:88.4-20 as source for this distinction and stresses that this important distinction has so far been neglected in the literature. Pinheiro Walla spells out deserved happiness chiefly in terms of satisfaction of "permissible interests" (ibid.132), interests that it would normally be permissible to pursue but that, contingently, it is in a specific situation not possible to pursue without a moral violation. This is different from deserved happiness in my sense, since the pursuit of an interest might not violate duty, but an agent might still not be moral enough to deserve the happiness that successful pursuit of this interest would yield. There might thus be rather a tripartite distinction between having to forego satisfaction of inclinations that it would always be impermissible to satisfy, having to forego satisfaction of inclinations or interests that it is, as a matter of contingent fact, impermissible to pursue in a situation, and having to sacrifice deserved happiness (from the permissible satisfaction of inclinations). I think that the latter is the most important for the issue of overdemandingness.

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that to deliver deserved happiness the highest good requires the postulates of immortality and God. What matters for our purposes is that Kant thinks that happiness is impartially good if it is proportioned to desert. I remain neutral concerning whether Kant's conception of the highest good establishes how this is metaphysically possible.

<sup>19</sup> See also Kant's discussion of casuistical questions in which he wonders where "pedantry regarding the fulfilment of duty, as far as the wideness of obligations is concerned" (VI:426.16-8) begins.

<sup>20</sup> Fishkin (1982, 20), for instance, believes that it is commonsensical that morality is "reserved for special occasions" and argues that a "*substantial proportion*" (ibid.23) of actions are in the zone of the morally neutral. Williams (1985, 181-2) suggests that lack of morally indifferent actions is one of several ways in which morality "can come to dominate life altogether".

<sup>21</sup> This example is not ideal, since nowadays we *do* think that there are important ethical questions concerning our diet, such as ecological impact and animal suffering. See Albertzart (forthcoming) for a discussion of how Kant's notion of *adiaphora* can apply to our contemporary globalized and interconnected world.

<sup>22</sup> "Mikrologie" is explained elsewhere as pedantry, empty pondering, excessive attention to formalities, useless subtlety (VII:221.30, IX:46.31-33, 49.11) and a tendency to be overly scrupulous in matters of conscience (VI:440.15, XXVII:199.34). These references to "Mikrologie" are from Pinheiro Walla (2013, 320) and Timmermann (2018, fn.7).

<sup>23</sup> This concern is, for instance, expressed by Cullity (2003, 406) who worries that morality requires that pursuit of life-enhancing goods might be governed by a distinctive and, for most of us, distinctly damaging "form of self-surveillance". See also Railton (1984) who worries that constant moral reflection can alienate us from our personal projects and relationships.

<sup>24</sup> Kant explicitly mentions the Romantic poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller as such a latitudinarian (VI:23-4.fn.). In the *Lecture Notes Mrongovius II*, we find a somewhat different conception of the "*latitudinarius*". He is here presented as someone who believes that all moral laws admit of exceptions and who is therefore "dangerous" (XXIX:633.4-24).

<sup>25</sup> Choice "cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself)" (VI:24.1-5). Allison (1990, 39-41) calls this the "Incorporation Thesis". See also VI:20.18-34, 23.3-24.5, 57-8.fn., 321.fn.

<sup>26</sup> See also Kant's characterization in *Vigilantius*: "*adiaphora* are all those actions which are not accompanied by any obligation" (XXVII:512.14-29), i.e., neither obligatory to perform nor to omit. These actions do not fall outside of the scope of moral evaluation. See also Timmermann (2018, 381) who points out that this is a "slightly non-standard sense" of the idea that actions cannot be morally indifferent. Kant's conception of *adiaphora* is, however, by no means unheard-of. Even Fishkin (1982, 23) who advocates a "robust zone of indifference" concedes that only under "normal conditions" (ibid.21) are actions in this zone. All actions can in principle be morally evaluated and no actions are entirely outside the scope of morality. See Albertzart (forthcoming, sec.2) for critical discussion of Kant's conception of *adiaphora* as merely permissible actions. She stresses that since it is context dependent whether actions are merely permissible, deliberation can still be extremely demanding.

<sup>27</sup> For this reason, Kant claims that his practical philosophy does not aim at advancing a "new principle of morality", but merely a "*new formula*" for a pre-philosophical principle (V:8.28-33). The correct moral

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principle is already present in ordinary reasoning as a “standard of its judging” (IV:403.37). See Sticker (2017) for critical discussion of Kant’s claim that his ethics merely aims to systematize and vindicate the common cognition of morality.

<sup>28</sup> See Kant’s discussion of the casuistical cases for examples: VI:423.18-424.8, 426.1-32, 428.1-26, 431.17-34, 433.6-434.18, 437.4-26.

<sup>29</sup> For the former see the critical discussion of perfect duties by van Ackeren, Sticker (2015) and for the latter Cummiskey’s (1990, sec.7) “Spartan” interpretation, according to which Kantian beneficence is as demanding as consequentialist normative theories that command to maximize an impersonal good. Timmermann (2018) also advocates a very demanding conception of imperfect duties according to which latitude only pertains to the choice of means to obligatory ends and to the priority of perfect over imperfect duties.

<sup>30</sup> See also IV:411.14-6, 442.6-22, V:85.8-15, 89.6-8, 116.14-117.24, 155.2-157.21, VI:376.34-377.12, 482.30-483.8, VIII:395-6fn.

<sup>31</sup> The third and most extreme degree of human evil Kant discusses in the *Religion* is depravity or perversion: “the propensity of the power of choice to maxims that subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (not moral ones)” (VI:30.11-2). Even depraved or perverse agents thus often still act in conformity to duty as long as the system of external laws and of social sanctions does an adequate job at making misdeeds costly for offenders. See also VI:36.34-6.

<sup>32</sup> Of course, the focus of Kant’s ethics is not actions as such, but their underlying *maxims* (see VI:388.32-3). Agents thus should scrutinize the motives incorporated into their maxims. I should note that I want to avoid commitment to any specific theory of how maxims and motives relate, so as to make my arguments compatible with any account of this. See Bernecker (2006) and Schumski (2018) for discussion of the relation between maxims and motives.

<sup>33</sup> Most recently, Naumann (2017, 320) stressed that for Kant “[t]o perfect oneself morally, self-knowledge is a necessary precondition”. Kant himself, in a preliminary draft of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, calls self-knowledge the “*subjective precondition of all virtues*” (XXIII:400.17-9). It should be noted that the duty to self-perfection goes beyond questions of motivation and encompasses the duty of apathy, respecting others and improving society (see Formosa 2017, ch.5).

<sup>34</sup> Likewise, O’Hagan (2009) stresses that moral self-knowledge is supposed to protect against self-deception.

<sup>35</sup> See also Papish (2018, 159) who stresses that we should understand Kant’s warning of the hell of self-cognition as pointing to a distinctive “pain and humiliation that accompanies self-comparison with the law and the hell that accompanies self-cognition as, maddeningly, a morally necessary task that is interminable, that resists decisive measurements of progress and precision, and that is morally necessary for *any* human being, regardless of her sensible desires, her character, and whether she suffers from the vice of self-deception”. Whether or not the outcome of the critical self-reflection is negative, the fact that agents have to submit to this scrutiny is experienced as a form of pain, humiliation or “agony with respect to self-cognition that stems not from being kept in check by someone or something else, such as the law, but from engaging in, voluntarily, a task that is without end and that seems to lack obvious standards for correctness”. In what follows, I will provide two reasons for why this agony is excessive even on Kant’s own framework.

<sup>36</sup> See also Kant’s warning of the “*perfidy* on the part of the human heart (*dolus malus*) in deceiving itself as regards its own good or evil disposition [...] This dishonesty, by which we throw dust in our own eyes and which hinders the establishment in us of a genuine moral disposition” (VI:38.7-33).

<sup>37</sup> See also Ware (2009, 682-4) who argues that Introspective Opacity entails that we can never be certain that we became better persons.

<sup>38</sup> See Papish (2018, 159-64) for extensive discussion of how self-cognition concerning maxims, motives and character is open-ended. She stresses that even beyond the threat of self-deception self-cognition can be challenging: “failures of self-cognition are not reducible to willful acts of self-deception. Struggles for self-knowledge are endemic to human life” (ibid.156).

<sup>39</sup> See A/B:278/334, 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 for more. I am grateful to Joe Saunders, Irina Schumski and Bob Stern for discussion of introspective opacity in the context of duties to self.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance IV:404.37-405.19, 424.25-33, V:153-4, VI:51, 192-202, 377.18-378.5

<sup>41</sup> See La Rocca (2013, 367-70) who helpfully distinguishes between what can be temporarily *hidden* (impure motives) and what is in principle *invisible* (pure motivation). We can only ever obtain highly uncertain indications of pure motives as the result of a negative inference from our inability to detect any impure motives. For Kant, Introspective Opacity is ultimately rooted in his metaphysics and

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transcendental idealism, according to which there are absolute limits on our cognition of ourselves as rational and moral beings. Cognizing positively that one of our actions was motivated by respect for the moral law would be a cognition of the efficaciousness of the *noumenal* in the empirical world and finite rational beings cannot have this kind of cognition (see A/B:551fn./579fn., V:100; VI:51).

<sup>42</sup> Kant also emphasizes that “a righteous man [...] in the greatest distress” might be required to sacrifice all his happiness rather than violate duty, but that he is at least “sustained by the consciousness that he has maintained humanity in its proper dignity in his own person and honored it, that he has no cause to shame himself in his own eyes and to dread the inward view of self-examination” (V:88.4-9). Kant clearly wants it to be the case that moral agents can (at least sometimes) be aware that they are moral (see VI:391.16-25). However, it is not clear that Introspective Opacity allows this, and it is not clear that the righteous man really has no cause to dread self-examination. After all, he can never be *certain* that he is indeed righteous, and he still has to fear that he discovers his dear self to be his true driving force.

<sup>43</sup> The connection between conscience and duties of *right* is also apparent in other passages such as VI:186.1-7. Even here Kant, however, emphasizes that conscience is not simply concerned with violations of duties of right but rather with the, much more challenging, “moral principle, requiring no proof, that we *ought to venture nothing where there is a danger that it might be wrong*” (VI:186.23-4). Conscience warns agents against moral recklessness resulting from insufficient critical scrutiny of intended courses of action. The principle that agents ought never to do anything that could potentially be wrong seems extraordinarily demanding and merits further discussion. See Timmermann (2017) for more.

<sup>44</sup> See also the extensive footnote on VI:69-71 in the *Religion* for a discussion of conscience as a judge of the “moral worth” and “disposition” of an agent, not merely of conformity to perfect duties.

<sup>45</sup> In the *Religion*, Kant emphasizes that “the judicial verdict of one who knows the heart [Richterausspruch eines Herzenskündigers] of the accused must be thought as based on the universal disposition of the latter, not on the appearances of his disposition, [i.e.] on actions that either diverge from the law or agree with it” (VI:72.36-73.2).

<sup>46</sup> See VI:406.34-407.1 for the idea that conscience pertains to all duties and is even a presupposition for susceptibility to duty. See also *Reflection* 7183 in which Kant argues that: “It seems that consciences rewards everything good and punishes everything evil, but in different degrees” (XIX:266.20-1, my translation).

<sup>47</sup> It is important in this context that Kant’s theory of happiness is a subjectivist one cashed out in terms of satisfaction of inclinations and the pleasure resulting from this (A/B:806/834, V:22). Depriving an agent of the enjoyment of her happiness thus also deprives her at least of part of her happiness, as happiness is a subjective state of experiencing well-being or enjoyment. Kant’s emphasis on the *enjoyment* of happiness being undermined (as opposed to happiness itself) should therefore not be overstated. The distinction shows, however, that Kant is aware that uncertainty about the desert of one’s happiness does not impact agents in the same straightforward way as pain, illness or loss of friends would.

<sup>48</sup> Pinheiro Walla (2019, sec.3) stresses that rational hope in Kant’s sense can be a response to overdemandingness concerns.

<sup>49</sup> I am grateful to Markus Kohl and Ville Paukkonen for pressing me on the role of Kant’s conception of God for my argument.

<sup>50</sup> Of course, it might be more effective for agents’ self-development to focus on cases in which they are tempted to do something they believe they should not do or cases in which they are in doubt about the right option. After all, these are the cases that certainly require critical scrutiny. However, it is not the case that agents must be maximally efficient in their pursuit of obligatory ends. After all, agents are also not to blame if they donate money to charities that do not save the maximum amount of lives or satisfy the maximum amount of vital needs. Agents’ contributions are still good and meritorious even if they could have advanced an obligatory end more effectively.

<sup>51</sup> It is illustrative of how stringent the requirements of self-perfection are that, according to Kant’s conception of rigorism, agents are either good or bad and even *one* bad action is sufficient to qualify the agent as bad, whereas one good action is insufficient to qualify the agent as good (VI:20.30-4). Kant seems to think that bad actions are more expressive of our character than good ones. Thus, agents are to strive for a disposition that puts morality first in everything they do, because if they put morality second only once, they would be morally bad.

<sup>52</sup> I am grateful to my now colleague Seiriol Morgan for pressing me on this point during my job talk.

<sup>53</sup> A clear example for this is the case Kant presents in the Second Critique section 6. A prince demands on pain of immediate execution that an agent “give false testimony against an honourable man whom the

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prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext". In this case, the agent "would consider it possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him" (V:30.21-35). Kant here does not even entertain the possibility that this situation might be *epistemically* difficult for the agent. Matters of duty are clear and the interesting question is only whether the agent will be strong enough to live up to what he acknowledges as his duty.

<sup>54</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

<sup>55</sup> Of course, some agents might be so self-deceived that they believe they have overcome all imperfection, in which case critical self-scrutiny must set them right about this.

<sup>56</sup> It would still be a problem for agents, though, that they could never be certain that they deserve their happiness. However, they might worry less about this, if they do not have a duty to engage in self-scrutiny.

<sup>57</sup> See also Timmermann's (2018) reading, according to which latitude does not ground prerogatives for the agent's inclinations or happiness (see also fn.29 of my paper).

<sup>58</sup> See also Ware (2009, 677fn.12) who explicitly denies that we should understand the duty of self-knowledge as an imperfect one. As "the first of all self-regarding duties [...] self-knowledge precedes and conditions the possibility of both perfect and imperfect duties".

<sup>59</sup> See also the *Common Saying* essay where Kant grants "that no one can become aware with certainty of having performed his duty quite unselfishly". However, "that the human being ought to perform his duty quite unselfishly and that he must altogether separate his craving for happiness from the concept of duty, in order to have this concept quite pure: of that he is aware with the utmost clarity or, should he believe that he is not, it can be required of him that he be so, as far as he can; for the true worth of morality is to be found precisely in this purity, and he must therefore also be capable of it" (VIII:284.21-36).

<sup>60</sup> Herman (1993, 73-94) famously proposes to amend Kant's account with so-called "rules of moral salience", which "structure an agent's perception of the world so that what he perceives is a world with moral features" (ibid.77). Most recently, Parfit (2011, 294-8) has criticised Kant's conception of maxims as objects of moral evaluation for not incorporating the notion of a morally relevant property and for allegedly abstracting from considerations of moral relevance.

<sup>61</sup> See also van Ackeren, Sticker (2018a, 374) who briefly survey versions of the overdemandingness objection and conclude that there is "no well-established family tree that captures the main variants of overdemandingness objections". My own brief survey is an expansion of theirs.