

Kant, the Practical Postulates, and Clifford's Principle

Samuel Kahn

Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis

kahnsa@iupui.edu

Abstract

In this paper I argue that Kant would have endorsed Clifford's principle. The paper is divided into four sections. In the first, I review Kant's argument for the practical postulates. In the second, I discuss a traditional objection to the style of argument Kant employs. In the third, I explain how Kant would respond to this objection and how this renders the practical postulates consistent with Clifford's principle. In the fourth, I introduce positive grounds for thinking that Kant would have endorsed this principle.

Keywords

Kant—Clifford—evidentialism—practical postulates—highest good—pragmatic encroachment

One of the starting points for pragmatism is Clifford's principle, which Williams James famously attacked and which runs as follows: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence."¹ It might be thought that Kant would have sided with James in this debate. After all, in his doctrine of the practical postulates Kant argues that, although there is no theoretical evidence for or against freedom, God, or the immortality of the soul, nonetheless agents ought to believe in these three things. However, in this paper I argue that there are grounds for thinking that Kant would have sided with Clifford rather than with James (notwithstanding the practical postulates). In so doing, I argue that Kant's practical postulates might have anticipated recent developments in pragmatic approaches to the ethics of belief.

Accordingly, the paper is divided into four sections. In section one, I review Kant's argument for the practical postulates. In section two, I discuss a traditional objection raised against arguments like the one found in Kant's practical postulates. I argue that various traditional approaches to this objection are not open to Kant. However, in section three I suggest that this objection nonetheless misses the heart of Kant's argument in the practical postulates. I use this to motivate the idea that the practical postulates might be consistent with Clifford's principle. In the fourth and final section, I turn to Kant's stance on lying and self-deception to explain why I think Kant positively might have upheld Clifford's principle.

1. Kant's argument for the practical postulates.

Kant's argument for the practical postulates can be found in all three of his *Critiques* as well as in many of his other published and unpublished works.² I shall use Kant's 1788 exposition from the *Critique of practical reason* to explain the basic idea behind the argument while gesturing

¹ For a helpful discussion of the evolution of the James-William debate and the ethics of belief more generally, see (Chignell 2016).

² For an excellent discussion of the practical postulates (to which I am much indebted), see (Wood 1970).

toward some of the important differences between this version of the argument and versions of the argument found in Kant's other works.

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

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

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

...a need of *pure practical* reason is based on a *duty*, that of making something (the highest good) the object of my will so as to promote it with all my powers; and thus I must suppose its possibility and so too the conditions for this, namely God, freedom, and immortality, because I cannot prove these by my speculative reason, although I can also not refute them. (5:142)³

In this passage, Kant argues that the practical postulates are based on (a) the fact that the faculty of pure practical reason has a basis for belief in God, freedom, and immortality (*viz.*, duty) and on (b) the fact that the faculty of speculative reason cannot prove or refute this belief. Similarly, in the concluding section of Book II of the *Dialectic of pure practical reason* (which is in turn the concluding section of Part I of the *Critique of practical reason*) Kant asserts that it is a good thing that our cognitive powers are limited in this way. Kant's argument for this assertion is that, human moral psychology being what it is, if we were able to prove the content of the practical postulates, most moral action would be done merely from fear of punishment in a future life. Thus, Kant reasons as follows:

As long as human nature remains as it is, human conduct would thus be changed into mere mechanism in which, as in a puppet show, everything would *gesticulate* well but there would be *no life* in the figures. Now, when it is quite otherwise with us; when with all the effort of our reason we have only a very obscure and ambiguous view into the future; when the governor of the world allows us only to conjecture his existence and his grandeur, not to behold them or prove them clearly; when, on the other hand, the moral law within us, without promising or threatening anything with certainty, demands of us disinterested respect; and when, finally, this respect alone, become active and ruling, first allows us a view into the realm of the super sensible...then there can be a truly moral disposition... (5:147)

³ All quotations from Kant are taken from the Cambridge blue series translations. All citations are given in accordance with the standard Academy pagination that runs in the margins of these translations.

Now technically, the two-premise argument I have reconstructed above is missing a premise. The missing premise is as follows: if there are no theoretical grounds against belief in X and there are practical grounds for belief in X, then agents ought to believe in X (even if there are no theoretical grounds for belief in X). This premise might be taken to be directly opposed to and thus inconsistent with Clifford's principle. I shall return to this in section three of this paper when I argue otherwise. For now, I want to explain in more detail Kant's commitment to premises 1 and 2.

Kant takes the work for premise 1 to have been done in the *Critique of pure reason*. For example, in Book II Chapter I of the *Transcendental dialectic*, the Paralogisms chapter, Kant takes himself to have shown that the doctrine of rational psychology, which purports to give insight into the nature of the soul, is based on faulty reasoning.⁴ Similarly, in Book II Chapter II of the *Transcendental dialectic*, the Antinomy chapter, Kant takes himself to have shown that when speculative reason takes on ideas about freedom, it winds up in an antinomy.⁵ Moreover, in considering the solution to this antinomy Kant argues that speculative reason cannot prove the reality or even the possibility of freedom; it can show only that freedom and causality need not be in conflict:

It should be noted that here we have not been trying to establish the **reality** of freedom, as a faculty that contains the causes of appearance in our world of sense. For apart from the fact that this would not have been any sort of transcendental investigation having to do merely with concepts, it could not have succeeded... Further, we have not even tried to prove the **possibility** of freedom; for this would not have succeeded either... [To show] that this antinomy rests on a mere illusion, and that nature at least **does not conflict with** causality through freedom—that was the one single thing we could accomplish, and it alone was our sole concern. (A557-8/B585-6)

Finally, in Book II Chapter III of the *Transcendental dialectic*, the Ideal chapter, Kant takes himself to have shown that the traditional arguments for the existence of God, the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the physicotheological argument, do not work.⁶

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

...it leads to 1: the problem in the solution of which speculative reason could do nothing but commit *paralogisms* (namely, the problem of immorality)...2. It leads to the concept [namely, freedom] with regard to which speculative reason contained nothing but an *antinomy*...3. As for that which speculative reason had

⁴ For a helpful discussion of Kant's Paralogisms, see (Ameriks 2000).

⁵ For a helpful discussion of Kant's Antinomies, see (Guyer 1987, esp. chapter 18). For a helpful discussion of the third Antinomy in particular (the antinomy alluded to in the main text above), see (Allison 1990, esp. chapter 1).

⁶ For an excellent treatment of Kant's arguments in the Ideal chapter, see (Wood 1978).

to think but to leave undetermined as mere transcendental *ideal*, the *theological* concept of the original being, it [*viz.*, practical reason] furnishes significance to this (for practical purposes, i.e., as a condition of the possibility of the object of a will determined by that law), as the supreme principle of the highest good in an intelligible world... (5:133)

There are two last points I would like to make about this before turning to Kant's commitment to the second premise of my reconstruction of the practical postulates argument.

First, notwithstanding his claim (reproduced above) that speculative reason cannot prove God, freedom, or immortality of the soul, Kant does think that speculative reason can go some way toward grounding belief in God. Although Kant thinks that the ontological and cosmological arguments are hopeless, he thinks that the physicotheological argument is not. This is evident in the following excerpt:

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

In this passage, Kant claims that the physicotheological argument licenses an inference to the existence of a wise, beneficent, and powerful creator. The point he wants to make, however, is that this argument falls short of licensing an inference to the existence of an omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent creator.⁷ The rationality of belief in *that* kind of creator, according to Kant, is warranted only by appeal to practical reason and, in particular, the argument of the practical postulates. Nonetheless, from this it may be seen that Kant's commitment to the first premise above is more complicated than might appear at first blush: Kant thinks that speculative reason does give grounds for belief in a God, just not an omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent one.⁸

Second, the interplay between the practical postulate for the existence of God and the physicotheological argument illustrates one of the ways in which Kant's arguments about the practical postulates evolved through the course of his life.⁹ For instance, as just seen, in his 1788 *Critique of practical reason* Kant thinks that the practical postulate for the existence of God does not derive any of its plausibility from the physicotheological argument. But in Kant's 1790 *Critique of the power of judgment*, the physicotheological argument is taken to bolster the practical postulate. This is illustrated in the following passage:

⁷ Kant's more charitable attitude toward the physicotheological argument is evident also in the *Critique of pure reason*, where he remarks that this argument "always deserves to be named with respect" (A623/B651) and that "we have nothing to object against the rationality and utility of this procedure, but rather recommend and encourage it" (A624/B652).

⁸ In the *Critique of pure reason* Kant suggests that because physicotheology cannot warrant belief in a *supreme* deity, "it cannot be sufficient for a principle of theology, which is supposed to constitute in turn the foundation of religion" (A628/B656). This raises interesting questions about Kant's ideas about the nature of religion, but none that can be pursued here.

⁹ I discuss these issues at greater length in (Kahn 2015).

...the fact that rational beings in the actual world find ample material for physical teleology there (although this was not necessary) serves as the desired confirmation of the moral argument, insofar as nature is thus capable of displaying something analogous to the (moral) ideas of reason. (5:479)

From this it may be seen that in the *Critique of the power of judgment*, Kant thinks that the moral argument of the practical postulates receives a confirmation and, in fact, a *desired* confirmation from the physicotheological argument. I turn now to Kant's commitment to the second premise of my reconstruction of the argument of the practical postulates: that there are practical grounds for belief in freedom, God, and immortality.

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

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

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

According to Kant, the highest good is a world in which happiness is in accordance with virtue.¹⁰ That is, the highest good is a world in which wicked agents are unhappy and virtuous agents are happy. A world in which wicked agents go unpunished and virtuous agents are unhappy would not satisfy this description.

There is some ambiguity in Kant's texts about the exact nature of the highest good. For instance, one might wonder whether the highest good requires not only proportionality between happiness and virtue but also that all agents actually be virtuous: it seems *prima facie* plausible

¹⁰ There is a lot of dispute about how Kant conceives of the highest good. In saying that the highest good requires happiness to be in accordance with virtue, I am disagreeing with, among others, Reath, who claims that "the proportionality of virtue and happiness is not essential to the doctrine [of the Highest Good]" (Reath 1988, 594). Reath argues for this claim on the grounds that (a) Kant has more than one conception of the highest good; (b) on one conception of the highest good, Kant conceives of it as a union of universal happiness with the strictest morality; (c) conceiving of the highest good in this way is to take there to be a subordination relation between virtue and happiness (happiness is subordinate to virtue); therefore, (d) to conceive of the highest good in this way is not to take there to be a proportionality between virtue and happiness:

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

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

that a world in which all agents are supremely virtuous and enjoy a corresponding state of beatitude would be better than one in which some agents are wicked and unhappy.¹¹ Moreover, Kant does not spend much time explaining why the Categorical Imperative requires agents to promote the highest good. He seems to be more concerned with distinguishing his conception of the highest good from the conceptions he attributes to other schools of thought.¹² However, there is no question but that Kant thinks there is a duty to promote the highest good: “It is a priori (morally) necessary to produce the highest good through the freedom of the will” (5:113).

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

These postulates are those of *immortality*, of *freedom* considered positively (as the causality of a being insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world), and of the *existence of God*. The *first* flows from the practically necessary condition of a duration befitting the complete fulfillment of the moral law; the *second* from the necessary presupposition of independence from the sensible world and of the capacity to determine one’s will by the law of an intelligible world, that is, the law of freedom; the *third* from the necessity of the condition for such an intelligible world to be the highest good, through the presupposition of the highest independent good, that is, of the existence of God. (5:132)

There are many ways in which one might object to these claims. For instance, even if one concedes that realizing the highest good requires freedom, immortality, and God, one might argue that merely promoting the highest good does not.¹³ The fact that the connections Kant makes between the highest good and freedom, immortality, and God are unstable (different in

¹¹ In chapter II of the *Dialectic of pure practical reason*, Kant distinguishes between the supreme good and the complete good. As he defines these terms, the supreme good is an unconditioned good, a good that is “not subordinate to any other” (5:110). Kant argues that virtue is therefore the supreme good. The complete good, by way of contrast, is “that whole which is not part of a still greater whole of the same kind” (5:110). Kant says that when he refers to the highest good, he is using this term to refer to a complete good, not a supreme good, and “for this, *happiness* is also required” (5:110).

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

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

¹² Especially the Epicureans and the Stoics:

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

¹³ I owe this point (and much else besides) to Paul Guyer, to whom I would like to express my utmost thanks and gratitude for many illuminating discussions of the topics in this paper (and others).

different texts) might indicate that Kant was uncomfortable with his argument on this front.¹⁴ However, this is not important for current purposes.

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

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

Notice that in order to motivate his argument for premise C, Kant appeals to the principle that ought implies can (OIC): Kant claims that because there is a duty to realize the highest good, it must be possible to do so.¹⁵ I shall return to this in the next section of this paper. For now, the point is that Kant thinks that because the highest good can be realized only if we are free and immortal and if God exists, the fact that there is a duty to promote the highest good entails that belief in these things is warranted. In other words, the duty to promote the highest good renders belief in God, immortality, and freedom rational:

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

¹⁴ For example, in his 1793 *Religion within the boundaries of mere reason* Kant seems to repudiate his earlier line of reasoning about immortality from the *Critique of practical reason*: “notwithstanding his permanent deficiency, a human being can still expect to be *generally* well-pleasing to God, at whatever point in time his existence be cut short” (6:67).

¹⁵ There is some dispute in the secondary literature regarding how Kant understands OIC. I discuss this at some length in part I of my (Kahn 2019).

I turn now to section two, in which I confront an objection that is often made to arguments like Kant's argument for the practical postulates.¹⁶

2. Kant and the anti-voluntarism argument.

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

This problem has been raised so frequently in the post-Cliffordian debates about doxastic voluntarism that it has been given its own name: the anti-voluntarism argument (AVA). The AVA can be reconstructed more rigorously as follows:

1. If we have any epistemic obligations, then doxastic attitudes must be under our control.
2. Doxastic attitudes are never under our control.
3. Therefore, we do not have any epistemic obligations.¹⁷

¹⁶ There is a striking difference between Kant and Martin Luther that emerges from consideration of Kant's argument for the practical postulates. Luther, like Kant, thought that agents cannot fulfill their duties without God. Luther seems to have thought that this is true of pretty much all duties, whereas Kant thought it is true only of duties bound up with the highest good. Moreover, Luther and Kant had different reasons for thinking that agents cannot fulfill their duties without God. As seen above, in the *Critique of practical reason* Kant argues that God is needed to explain the connection between happiness and virtue in the highest good. Luther's reasoning, by way of contrast, seems to have rested on ideas about human corruption. The difference between Kant and Luther that I would like to draw attention to briefly in this note, however, is how all of this connects to OIC.

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

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

But Luther, I suspect, would argue that although God can aid us and thereby enable us to fulfill our duties, these duties are still binding even if (for whatever reason) God decides not to aid us. Thus, Luther would conclude, ought does not imply can, after all.

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

¹⁷ This reconstruction of AVA is taken from (Ryan 2003, 48).

I am going to canvass three ways in which Kant might reply to this argument.

One way in which Kant might reply to the AVA is by rejecting 2. There are at least three ways in which doxastic attitudes are under our control. First, the states of the world our beliefs are tracking are sometimes under our control.¹⁸ For example, suppose that for some reason I want to form the belief that the floor is wet. The easiest thing to do so would be to empty the remaining contents of my coffee mug onto the floor beside me, plainly something I am capable of doing. Second, the evidence we have access to (or the evidence on which we most frequently and/or unreflectively rely) regarding these states might be under our control.¹⁹ For example, if I am often late to meetings because I work up until the last minute, I might set my watch 10 minutes fast (and hope that in unreflective moments I shall forget that I did so). Third, we might fiddle with our belief-forming mechanisms.²⁰ On some readings of the *Pensées*, this is part of what Pascal advocates in order to cultivate belief in God, and this seems to be part of what Orwell wants us to take away from the interviews between O'Brien and Winston in *1984* (e.g., when O'Brien uses EST to induce in Winston the belief that $2+2=5$, and when O'Brien accuses Winston of failing to control his own memory). Although the practice of changing people's belief-forming mechanisms is often focused on when the change is for the worse (as in *1984*), the profession of teaching seems to be built around the idea that there are desirable and good ways of sensitizing and training students' belief-forming mechanisms.²¹

However, this reply to the AVA would not help much with regard to the practical postulates. Kant does not think that agents have control over whether God exists, and he thinks it is a fact that speculative reason does not furnish evidence for or against the contents of the practical postulates (not something over which agents have control). Indeed, as was seen above, that is built into the argument for them. And although Kant does have various ideas about pedagogy and about how to train students' minds, he does not seem to think that the practical postulates entail that adults ought to undergo some sort of spiritual training to induce a change in their cognitive faculties that somehow will usher in belief in freedom, God, and immortality. That is not what the practical postulates are about.

A second way in which Kant might reply to the AVA is by rejecting 1. There are at least two ways in which Kant might affirm epistemic obligations while denying that they are under

¹⁸ This idea is taken from (Feldman 2001).

¹⁹ This idea is taken from the movie *Memento*, in which the main character changes the writing on the photographs he uses as an external form of memory.

²⁰ I owe this idea (and many others) to conversations with Allen Wood about these (and other) subjects, for which I would like to express my most profound and deepest appreciation.

²¹ A fourth way in which Kant might reject 2 in AVA would be by adopting a more thoroughgoing doxastic voluntarism. For useful discussion of this idea, see (Steup 2000), (Steup 2001, esp. part II), or (Ryan 2003, esp. section 8).

our control. First, the scope of OIC might be restricted.²² It might be argued that although, e.g., duties about helping others imply can, epistemic duties do not. But (the argument continues) epistemic duties are nonetheless normative, and failing to fulfill them is wrongful. The fact that one cannot fulfill epistemic duties does not impugn their normativity: OIC should be replaced with non-epistemic-OIC.²³ Alternatively, it might be argued that the kind of “ought” involved in epistemic obligations does not involve voluntary control. One way to make sense of this would be to appeal to different senses of “ought” and to argue that epistemic obligations are not normative.²⁴ For instance, it might be argued that epistemic obligations are predictive or evaluative.²⁵ We do make predictions about what people will believe (what they ought to believe in the circumstances), and we do evaluate people on the basis of their beliefs (what they ought to believe if their faculties are functioning correctly). Perhaps all epistemic oughts can be reduced to these kinds of claims. The idea here would be that only normative ought implies can, and because epistemic oughts are not normative, there is no violation of OIC. Yet another way to make sense of this would be to argue that although epistemic oughts are normative and imply can, “can” does not always imply voluntary control: “can” implies voluntary control only if the faculty of will is involved, and the faculty of will is not (generally) involved in forming beliefs.²⁶ This approach is similar to the scope-restriction strategy described at the beginning of this paragraph except that it enables us to retain an unrestricted version of OIC.²⁷

²² Ryan rejects OIC in general, but this is not open to us on behalf of Kant (given his obvious commitment to OIC even in his argument for the practical postulates). But Ryan also has an argument for rejecting (1) that might be used to motivate merely a scope restriction:

...just imagine that the psychological literature claiming that human beings regularly make reasoning mistakes is correct. What we should conclude from such findings is that we don't reason the way we ought to reason. We would not conclude that we were just wrong when we thought denying the antecedent, or some such fallacy, was something we should not do. So, premise (1) is false. (Ryan 2003, 59)

One problem with this argument is that it rests on the assumption that the reasoning mistakes described in the psychological literature are not under our voluntary control. The reason this is a problem is that in this context, making such an assumption might be seen as question-begging: some sort of evidence seems called for. Another problem with this argument is that Ryan's claim about what we should conclude from such findings might not withstand critical scrutiny. For example, it might be argued that given the environments in which and the constraints under which we evolved, the reasoning mistakes documented in the psychological literature are exactly the ones we should be making (at least before taking logic classes). However, a detailed discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of the present investigation.

²³ In support of the idea of restricting the scope of but not altogether rejecting OIC, see (Graham 2011, esp. section 6.4), who suggests (but does not take a strong stand on) the idea that positive duties are ability constrained but negative duties are not.

²⁴ Chituc *et al.* argue that “there is no reason to posit different meanings of ‘ought’ other than to preserve the truth of ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ in light of contrary evidence” (Chituc *et al.* 2016, 9). This is false. The reason to posit different meanings of ‘ought’ is that it has different meanings, as evidenced by the OED (which lists more than 10 separate meanings).

²⁵ The terminology in this sentence is taken from (Chuard and Southwood 2009, section 2.1).

²⁶ This idea is taken from (Chuard and Southwood 2009, esp. section 5).

²⁷ The distinction between this approach and the scope-restriction approach is a fine one, and some might argue that it is sophistical. It is not my aim to defend or to dispute that here. However, it is worth pointing out that according to standard interpretations of Kant's ethics, normativity is fundamentally about the will. Consider, for instance, the following line from the opening section of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Kant's moral philosophy: “The fundamental principle of morality...is none other than the law of an autonomous will” (Johnson and Cureton 2017). Thus, it would not be open to standard interpretations of Kant's ethics to affirm the normativity of epistemic oughts while denying that epistemic oughts involve the faculty of will: to say that the faculty of will is not involved in belief would be to imply that epistemic oughts are not normative.

However, this reply to the AVA also would not help much with regard to the practical postulates. Kant appeals to OIC explicitly in some of his statements of the argument for the practical postulates, but he gives no hint that he thinks OIC should be restricted.²⁸ This suggests that he would not adopt the strategies suggested in the previous paragraph in regard to the practical postulates. Indeed, as both Schrader and Wood emphasize, the price of disavowing the practical postulates is paid in normative coin according to Kant: Kant thinks that someone who does not believe in God, immortality, and freedom risks losing his/her good opinion of him/herself (s/he will be saved from this only if s/he has not thought things through sufficiently clearly).²⁹ This is borne out in many places, including the following excerpt from the *Critique of practical reason*:

...granted that the pure moral law inflexibly binds everyone as a command...the upright man may well say: I *will* that there be a God, that my existence in this world be also an existence in a pure world of the understanding beyond natural connections, and finally that my duration be endless; I stand by this...and I will not let this belief be taken from me; for this is the only case in which my interest, because I *may* not give up anything of it, unavoidably determines my judgment. (5:143, emphasis in original)

Note not only Kant's claim about "the upright man," reinforcing the moral nature of the practical postulates (someone who is less upright might not say what Kant attributes to the upright man), but also Kant's emphasis on the faculty of will in this passage. This serves, I think, to undermine attempts to answer the AVA on Kant's behalf along the lines suggested in the previous paragraph.

It is worth pointing out that the previous two strategies are not mutually exclusive. This suggests a third strategy for dealing with the AVA: someone might reject both premises of the argument. For instance, it might be argued that an epistemic obligation is genuine if but only if it can be reduced to one or more of the following: (i) an obligation to change a state of affairs in the world that one's beliefs track; (ii) an obligation to change the evidence one has for a given state of affairs; (iii) an obligation to undergo some kind of cognitive training; (iv) an evaluative claim; or (v) a predictive claim. The first three of these are normative, deontic obligations; the last two are not. So on this strategy of dealing with the AVA, sometimes epistemic oughts are binding but sometimes they are not.

The problem with this is that taking the disjunction of the first two strategies does not get around the problems raised above for them individually. So this third strategy does not look

²⁸ For instance, in the *Critique of pure reason* Kant says that the argument in the practical postulates "finally comes down to the inference that something is...**because something ought to happen**" (A806/B834, boldface in original).

²⁹ See (Schrader 1951, esp. 233) and (Wood 1970, esp. 23-34).

promising as a way of rescuing the practical postulates.³⁰ Thus, I move now to the next section of this paper, in which I explore one last strategy: I argue that the AVA misses the heart of the practical postulates.

3. Kant's views on evidence

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

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

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

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

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

³⁰ Nonetheless, this third strategy might provide a promising route for dealing with other issues in Kant scholarship, like debates about Kant's stance on the laws of logic. Interlocutors in such debates sometimes seem to assume that logic is either normative and binding or not—exclusive disjunction. For example, Tolley argues against “those interpretations that ascribe to Kant a position in which he takes the logical laws to be *imperatives* for thinking” (Tolley 2006, 372), and Tolley challenges proponents of these interpretations to explain how the laws of logic could be normative:

...I think it remains to be shown that there exists a way to view logic as dealing with a capacity which enjoys “freedom” of the sort that would seem to be required if there is to be a normative dimension (in the sense specified above) to the laws which govern the capacity at issue. (Tolley 2006, 397)

While I do not want to take a position on this debate here, I take it that my remarks above go some way toward showing that there exists a way (e.g., involving training) to view logic as dealing with a capacity which enjoys freedom of the sort that would seem to be required if there is to be a normative dimension to the laws which govern the capacity at issue (and I take it that this need not preclude analyzing some claims about the laws of logic into non-normative claims).

and moreover harmonizing with the theoretical need of reason to assume that existence and to make it the basis of the further use of reason... (5:145-6)

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

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

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

This begins to get at why I think the practical postulates are consistent with Clifford’s principle, at least on some readings of this principle. Clifford’s principle says that it would be wrong to believe without sufficient evidence. But Kant’s doctrine of the practical postulates is not saying that we ought to believe despite insufficient evidence: it is saying that there is sufficient evidence. It is just that this evidence comes from practical reason.

There are at least two ways in which the practical postulates might be said to garner sufficient evidence. The first way is that morality might provide evidence on its own. That is, the fact that there is a duty to promote the highest good and the fact that this duty can be fulfilled if but only if there is a God, immortality, and freedom might be taken, by themselves, to increase the evidence for these things above 50%. If there are powerful (independent) arguments for accepting the commands of morality and OIC, these arguments might translate into evidence for the practical postulates.

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

But this would be a misinterpretation of the idea I was advancing in the previous paragraph.³¹ Moreover, it would not fit well with Kant's claims, discussed at the beginning of this section, about the practical postulates not generating a command to believe. The idea I was advancing in the paragraph above is that Kant might think that truth-conducive evidence can come from morality itself.

However, this idea faces its own textual challenges (including Kant's strict separation of the faculties of practical and speculative reason in his discussion of the practical postulates). Moreover, although Clifford does not have an in depth treatment of what counts as truth-conducive evidence, to say that such evidence could come from the presence of a duty does seem at the very least revisionary. So I think that the second way in which the practical postulates might be said to garner sufficient evidence is more promising.

The second way is by lowering the standards for what counts as justification. This idea, which has been developed recently by pragmatists under the name of "moral encroachment theories of justification," can be illustrated with betting.³² What counts as sufficient evidence that one's opponent has a bad hand in a low stakes poker game might not be accepted as such in a game in which the stakes are considerably higher. Kant uses a similar example in the *Critique of pure reason*:

Often someone pronounces his propositions with such confident and inflexible defiance that he seems to have entirely laid aside concern for error. A bet disconcerts him. Sometimes he reveals that he is persuaded enough for one ducat but not for ten. For he would happily bet one, but at ten he suddenly becomes aware of what he had not previously noticed, namely that it is quite possible that he has erred. (A824-A825/B852-B853)³³

Applying this to the practical postulates, the idea would be that because there is a duty to promote the highest good and this duty can be fulfilled if but only if one believes in God, immortality, and freedom, the standards of evidence are lower (perhaps much lower) than they would be if one did not have such a duty or if this duty could be fulfilled in some other way.

³¹ Of course, it also might be a misinterpretation of Clifford's principle. Pace suggests that it would render Clifford's principle less plausible (Pace 2011, 242-243). However, I am not going to engage with these issues here.

³² The account I give here is much indebted to the clarity of Pace's exposition of this theory in (Pace 2011).

³³ Chignell gives the following gloss of this passage:

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

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

However, by itself this is open to objection even from within the doctrine of the practical postulates. Recall from section one of this paper: a key premise in the argument for the practical postulates is that there are no theoretical grounds for or against belief in freedom, God, or immortality of the soul. Thus, unless the standards of evidence are lowered to (or below) 50% probability, lowering the standards of evidence will not suffice for Kant.³⁴ Of course, there are those who might accept beliefs as justified provided that the balance of evidence does not tell against them even if the balance of evidence is not in their favor.³⁵ This might be called permissive (as opposed to positive) justification.³⁶ Perhaps this is what Kant means in speaking (in the second block quote reproduced in this section) of the belief accorded by the practical postulates as “voluntary.” But some might find this difficult to reconcile with Kant’s claim (in the third block quote reproduced in this section) that someone who cannot bring him/herself to believe in the practical postulates should give up on the duty to promote the highest good. Can Kant get more mileage from the practical postulates than lowered standards of evidence?

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

Then again, perhaps not. One major challenge to this idea is that it simply does not fit well with the text. While Kant perhaps *could* argue this way, in the *Critique of practical reason* Kant alludes to the physicotheological argument only to show its shortcomings, not to appeal to

³⁴ Pace makes a similar point:

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

³⁵ Consider Chignell’s account of the kind of belief at stake in the practical postulates:

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

- S has an “absolutely necessary” moral end *e*,
- a necessary condition of S’s attaining *e* is S’s having a firm assent that *p*, and
- p* is a logically possible proposition for or against which S cannot have sufficient objective grounds.

(Chignell 2007, 356)

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

³⁶ I take this terminology from (Sayre-McCord 1996).

it as the subpar knight-errant justifier that makes the grade once but only once the standards have been lowered by the duty to promote the highest good.

So it seems to me that the best reading of the practical postulates is to say that Kant thinks we are justified in believing in the existence of God, immortality of the soul, and transcendental freedom because the presence of the duty to promote the highest good lowers the standards of evidence to 50%. Perhaps dissatisfaction with this (*viz.*, the idea that the standards of evidence are lowered by the presence of a duty) helps to explain Kant's insistence (briefly discussed above in section one) in the *Critique of the power of judgment* that the practical postulates receive a "desired confirmation" in physical teleology. Perhaps it also helps to explain the following passage from the "Fragment of a moral catechism" which Kant includes for illustrative purposes in the *Doctrine of method* of his 1797 *Metaphysics of morals*:

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

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

Notice that a version of the physicotheological argument receives pride of place in the pupil's response to the teacher's question about grounds for assuming the existence of a God who "apportions happiness in accordance with a human being's merit or guilt," the God of the *Critique of practical reason* practical postulates.

Of course, there might be any number of explanations for putting this response into the mouth of a pupil in a fragment of a moral catechism. But the point is that one such explanation might be that the argument of the practical postulates does not generate evidence on its own: it lowers the standard of evidence. Kant might not have been satisfied with the idea (inchoate as it might have been) that the standard of evidence could be 50% even in the presence of a duty. And if the standard is still above 50%, then independent evidence is still needed (even though that independent evidence might not be sufficient on its own).

That said, perhaps the idea that morality can provide truth-conducive evidence itself underlies Kant's post-1800 arguments for the existence of God in the *Opus postumum*. As Adickes points out, "[t]he entire doctrine of the highest good, together with the proofs of God and immortality [which are] built upon it, now has as good as completely disappeared in convolutes VII and I" of the *Opus postumum*.³⁷ Consider, for instance, the following passages:

³⁷ (Adickes 1920, 846). I owe the reference to this passage to Greene, who translates it as follows: "The whole teaching of the highest good together with the proofs based thereon of God and immortality has now...practically disappeared" (Greene 1960, lxxv).

The principle of the knowledge of all human duties *as (tanquam)* universally valid commands, that is, *in the quality* of a highest, holy and powerful law-giver, raises the subject thought thereby to the rank of a single, powerful being: That is, the existence of such a being cannot be concluded from the idea which we ourselves think of God, but yet we may infer as [if] there were such a being... (21:20)

The reality of the concept of freedom can, thus, only be presented and proved *indirectly*, through an intermediary principle, rather than *directly* (immediately). Likewise the proposition: “There is a God,” namely, in human, moral practical reason, [as] a determination of one’s actions in the knowledge of human duties as (as if) divine commands... (21:30)

In it, that is, the idea of God as a moral being, we live, move and have one being; motivated through the knowledge of our duties *as* divine commands. (22:118)

...the supersensible is not an object of possible experience... but merely a judgment by analogy—that is, to the relational concept of a synthetic judgment, namely, to think all human duties *as if* divine commands and in relation to a person. (22:120)³⁸

In these passages, Kant argues that the existence of God can be substantiated by thinking of one’s duties as divine commands and in relation to a divine being. Thus, as Adickes points out, Kant seems to be leaving behind the argument for the practical postulates which, as noted above, substantiates the existence of God through the doctrine of the highest good.

However, Kant’s claim that the *Opus postumum* arguments prove God only indirectly and by analogy militates against the idea that morality itself provides truth-conducive evidence: it militates in favor of an argument like the practical postulates even if not appealing to the highest good (i.e., like the practical postulates in the way in which they provide justification: *viz.*, by lowering the requisite evidentiary standards rather than by providing positive evidence). But I do not propose to settle these conjectures about the *Opus postumum* here. The point for current purposes is that the practical postulates need not be read as inconsistent with Clifford’s principle. I turn now to the final section of this paper, in which I introduce positive evidence to explain why I think Kant would have upheld this principle.

4. Why I think Kant would have upheld Clifford’s principle.

³⁸ Based in part on passages like these, Adickes argues that Kant repudiates the practical postulates in his old age. However, not everyone agrees with Adickes on this score (see, for instance, (Schrader 1951) and (Greene and Silber 1960)). I owe these references to Allen Wood, who briefly discusses this dispute in (Wood 1970, chapter 1). As a friendly and minor emendation to Wood, I point out only that in (Wood 1970, 256n4) Wood mistakenly refers us to (Silber 1960) rather than to (Greene and Silber 1960).

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

Kant's attitude toward lying to others is often evinced by focusing on his (in)famous murderer at the door case, which bears some similarities to Clifford's shipowner case (in both, agents run the risk of responsibility for others' deaths). In Kant's case, we are to imagine a murderer knocking on the door and asking us the whereabouts of his/her intended victim. The victim is hiding in the basement, but Kant says we ought not to lie from love of humanity. Indeed, Kant argues that if we do lie and the murderer discovers the victim as a consequence, we are at least partly responsible for the victim's ensuing death:

...if you had lied and said that he [the victim] is not at home, and he has actually gone out (though you are not aware of it), so that the murderer encounters him while going away and perpetrates his deed on him, then you can by right be prosecuted as the author of his death. (8:427)

This case is often used to show (and decry) Kant's rigoristic commitment to inflexible rules about lying. However, this is based on a misunderstanding of the case.³⁹ Kant's treatment of the murderer at the door case is actually about a duty of right: it is about lying in formal declarations rather than mere lying. It is as if the murderer at the door had us under oath. This is difficult to imagine, and so the issues are probably better illustrated by a different example. Suppose that Alyosha is giving testimony in a court of law and that he knows that if he tells the truth, his brother, in whose innocence he firmly believes, probably will be convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Suppose, further, that Alyosha knows that if he perjures himself, he could make up an alibi for his brother. Finally, suppose that Alyosha believes that the justice system, notwithstanding the error he thinks it would make in this individual case if he tells the truth, is basically rightful and not corrupt. Should Alyosha perjure himself?

If details are needed to make this case come alive, they can be lifted from *The Brothers Karamazov*, on which this example is loosely based. But the point is that this might make Kant's views about the murderer at the door more intuitive (or at least less counterintuitive). In the novel, Alyosha tells the truth. Would you?

Regardless of how you answer that question, it is worth pointing out that Kant's views about (mere) lying to others as set out in the *Metaphysics of morals* are perhaps even more emphatic than his views about lying declarations:

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

³⁹ My treatment in this section of the murderer at the door case in particular and of Kant's views on lying in general are heavily indebted to (Wood 2007, chapter 14).

Based on this, it might be argued that even if the caricature of Kant derived from his 1797 *On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy* is not well-founded, it is correct.⁴⁰ That is, even if the murderer at the door case is about a duty of right and thus does not give good grounds for ascribing to Kant the view that lying to others is never permissible, nonetheless there are good grounds for ascribing this view to Kant.

However, even in the *Metaphysics of morals* (in fact, only a few pages after articulating such a seemingly uncompromising view of the duty not to lie to others) Kant poses the following casuistical questions:

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

As Wood points out, these questions “are intended...as invitations to the reader’s reflections and exercises in judgment” (Wood, 2007, 252). This suggests that Kant might have been willing to allow some exceptions to the duty not to lie to others. However, there is no similarly suggestive text in the *Metaphysics of morals* regarding exceptions to the duty not to lie to oneself, and this leads me to the second piece of evidence I would like to consider in favor of my thesis: Kant’s attitude regarding the permissibility of self-deception.⁴¹

Kant sets out his views about self-deception in the following passage from the *Metaphysics of morals*:

Insincerity is mere lack of *conscientiousness*, that is, of purity in one’s professions before one’s inner judge, who is thought of as another person when

⁴⁰ Wood suggests that Kant is deliberately exaggerating his own doctrine for a good effect:

I think they [*viz.*, Kant’s extreme claims about lying to others] have to be understood as the rhetorical exaggerations on the part of a moralist who is not only motivated by the philosophical aim of systematizing moral rules for theoretical purposes but also—or even instead—concerned to have what he sees as the proper effect on his audience. (Wood 2007, 252)

Wood makes a compelling case for his reading, drawing not only on places where Kant seems to countenance lying to others but also, among other things, on Kant’s *Lectures on pedagogy*, in which Kant asks if children should be taught “whether a white lie [*Notlüge*—I follow Wood in thinking that “necessary lie” is a better translation of this term than “white lie”] can be permitted.” As Wood points out, Kant answers this question firmly in the negative:

No! There is not one conceivable case in which it would be excusable, and least of all before children, who would then look upon each tiny thing as such an emergency situation and often allow themselves to tell lies. (9:490, quoted on Wood 2007, 490)

I do not want to take a stand here on whether Wood is right about the rhetorical purposes of Kant’s claims in the *Metaphysics of morals*. I note only that if Wood is right and thus Kant is exaggerating for good effect, then Kant might be accused of exactly the kind of transgression he is trying to prevent in his audience (*viz.*, lying when it seems that a good end can be produced thereby).

⁴¹ Wood makes this point about the asymmetry between Kant’s treatment of self-deception and deception of others (with regard, e.g., to the seemingly mitigating effects of the casuistical questions) at (Wood 2007, 257-8).

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

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

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

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

Persuading oneself to profess belief in God in one’s inner thoughts, not because one believes it or because there is evidence for it but because “it could do no harm and might even be useful,” is an inner lie according to Kant and deserves, again, the strongest censure. Moreover, although this might not have been what Kant had in mind in gesturing toward the way in which lying to oneself can spread into one’s relations with others (Kant seems to have thought that self-deception has a general corrupting effect on one’s moral character), it is easy to see how self-deception can lead to the deception of others: in order to maintain the self-deception, one will have to lie to others, too.⁴²

The conclusion I want to draw is this: given how censorious Kant is of lying to others and to oneself, it seems to me *prima facie* implausible that Kant would have taken a permissive view of eliciting belief in oneself or in others on insufficient evidence. Moreover, I have argued that the best evidence that Kant would have eschewed Clifford’s principle, Kant’s doctrine of the

⁴² I owe this point to conversation with Wood.

practical postulates, is actually consistent with Clifford's principle. Thus, it seems to me plausible to assert that Kant would have upheld Clifford's principle.⁴³

⁴³ I would like to thank Chris Skrownowski for invaluable comments on an earlier (and significantly worse) draft of this paper. I also would like to thank the participants of the 14th meeting of the Eastern Study Group of the North American Kant Society, and especially David Sussman, James Hebbeler, and Joseph Trullinger, who were kind enough to discuss the ideas I develop in this paper during breaks between the sessions notwithstanding the fact that I was actually presenting my work on Kant and the duty to promote one's own happiness at that conference.

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