

ARE SINGLE MORAL RULES ABSOLUTE
IN KANT'S ETHICS?

by
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Are single moral rules absolute in Kant's ethics?

It is a very widely accepted view, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, that Kant intended some single moral rules to be considered absolute so that one should not fail to observe them under any condition. My purpose is to show in this paper that such a view, as well as some related views, are erroneous.

1. THERE MAY BE EXCEPTIONS TO SINGLE MORAL RULES IN KANT'S VIEW

According to Hospers, to take only one example, Kant holds that certain moral rules »have no exceptions»: that lying, killing, breaking a promise, theft and suicide are »always wrong».¹ Most Kantian critics and commentators have disagreed with Kant, maintaining that acts of these kinds are not always wrong. Kant, they consider, has failed to make a distinction between saying that one should make no exceptions to a rule and that the rule itself has no exceptions.

Let us assume for a moment that Kant's critics are right. Then lying and breaking a promise, at least, would be »always wrong» because these two are most often given as examples of his supposed view.

It is true that Kant often refers to lying and to the breaking of a promise when illustrating his main view. I have been unable to find, however, any passage, at least in his main ethical works, where Kant really says that such things would be wrong in all circumstances. In-

¹ Hospers, HC, 283f. The same view is given, for example, in Bradley, ES, 95f, in Cohen & Nagel, LS, 365, in Field, MT, 37f, in Mackenzie, ME, 160, in Paulsen, SE, I, 354, II, 209, in Rogers, HE, 193f, in Ross, FE, 134, 173, 189.

stead, one can show counter examples of both of them as well as some referring to killing and other single rules.

In *Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant explicitly says that lying is not always wrong.² Here he realizes that it forms part of the original freedom of man to do to others anything that does not diminish the rights of others. Consequently one has a right to make a statement or promise regardless of whether it is true and sincere, or untrue and insincere, because it depends upon the listener whether he believes or not what he hears.

This example may be sufficient to show that lying is not forbidden in all conditions according to Kant. In order to do justice to Kant's critics it must be admitted, however, that he is writing here from a legal rather than from a moral point of view. From the legal point of view, such lying is permitted as does not harm the rights of others. On the other hand, there are passages in which Kant seems to regard as morally wrong even such lying as is legally permitted.³

It is true, as I shall show later, that Kant is inclined to regard as morally wrong not only harmful but also harmless lying because it violates humanity in one's own person. It is also true that when referring to lying Kant is mostly concerned with such lying as is either harmful to others or harmless. Both kinds of lying are morally blameworthy if no other points of view need to be considered. But this does not exclude the possibility that lying is not only morally permitted but even obligatory in a case when truthfulness is very harmful to others or to oneself.

Kant raises some casuistic questions which seem to show, at least indirectly, that lying is sometimes morally permitted or even obligatory.⁴ Lying, for example, out of politeness, provided that it is harm-

² MS, 39f. Here as elsewhere Kant observes the general tradition of moral philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries so closely that he even uses the same examples as can be found in several previous writers of those centuries. Kant's lectures, which he seems to have given in the years 1775—1780 and which have been reconstructed and published under the title *Lectures on Ethics* on the basis of the notebooks of his pupils, show even more clearly that Kant was well acquainted with the tradition of moral philosophy of his time. It seems to me that many errors in interpreting Kant are due to the fact that many modern philosophers, ignorant of Kant's background of tradition, have criticized him from the point of view of the present-day meaning of many concepts which he himself used with a different meaning.

³ MS, 240—243.

⁴ MS, 243f.

less, seems to be a moral duty if truthfulness would be too impolite. If an author asks one: »How did you like my book?», what should one answer? Kant himself seems to think that faced by this casuistic question one ought not to tell the truth if it would be harmful to others though he himself does not give his own answer here any more than in most other casuistic questions.

A more serious casuistic question, Kant goes on, is the following. A servant lies at the command of his master, telling someone that his master is not at home. But who is responsible if the person goes away because of this lie and commits a great crime which would have been avoided if the servant had told the truth? In other words, Kant seems to regard a lie at the command of the master as permitted, perhaps even obligatory if no other consequences need to be taken into consideration.⁵

Though Kant condemns harmful lies from a legal point of view, nowhere in *Metaphysik der Sitten* does he say that a lie is always wrong. Rather, it may be concluded indirectly from some of his casuistic questions that lying is permitted in some conditions. Furthermore, it may be inferred from Kant's general view that a lie may be even a duty in a case where the consequences of truthfulness would be very bad. Is not a thing which in itself is morally forbidden (*unerlaubt*) permitted (*erlaubt*) if necessary to avoid breaking a still more important rule? Kant asks in connection with some casuistic questions.⁶ The highest duty of man, according to Kant, is to increase his own perfection and the happiness of others.⁷ But if so, the happiness of others may demand sometimes that one lies at least in order to prevent others from suffering injustice and misery which they have not deserved.

The other single rule which is usually mentioned by those who think that some single rules are absolute in Kant is that one ought never to break a promise. Usually Kant's critics write as if he had in mind any kind of promise which one ought never to break.⁸ Actually Kant has in mind a specific kind of promise.

In the first place, a promise involves some other person to whom something has been promised. A promise which one has made alone

⁵ In his lectures Kant realizes that one is not responsible for such an act as is done on the authority of the law though such an act may be, if taken in itself, wrong. LE, 58.

⁶ MS, 237.

⁷ MS, 196f.

⁸ Cp. Hospers, HC, 279f.

and by oneself is not a promise at all.⁹ Consequently one can break a promise made by oneself. Secondly, from the legal point of view even a promise which a third person has heard is invalid and may be broken if it is not accepted by the one to whom it was made so that it is an agreement of the united will of both.¹⁰ Thirdly, a promise is not a promise if that which has been promised is harmful to the other person.¹¹ If I have promised someone that I am going to harm him, obviously, according to Kant, I do not have any legal or moral duty to keep my promise. Thus, Kant does not maintain that one ought never to break one's promise.

Kant's critics might defend themselves by saying that the above examples about lying and promise are taken from his book *Metaphysik der Sitten* which was written later than his two earlier and better known ethical works.¹² It could be argued that at first Kant regarded certain single moral rules as absolute, but that he later changed his view.

But against that it can be argued that Kant had the same ideas as published in his last book on ethics already in mind at the time of his first ethical work. He refers already in a footnote in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* to his forthcoming book, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, in which he promises to treat single duties more systematically.¹³ If Kant's critics had paid attention to this footnote and, as suggested there, also read *Metaphysik der Sitten*, they probably would have been saved from misreading his earlier work.

But even if one disregards *Metaphysik der Sitten* and reads only

⁹ Similarly a lie in order to be a lie seems to involve another person who has been deceived. Purposive self-deceit seems to be self-contradictory according to Kant. MS, 241. Therefore Hospers is misleading when interpreting Kant: »A person may say nothing, but if he speaks, he is duty bound to tell the truth.« HC, 283. One can say by oneself aloud an untruth without being guilty of lying according to Kant although he realizes that there is sometimes self-deceit which he tries to make intelligible by referring to the double nature of man.

¹⁰ MS, 39f. Cp. MS, 75f.

¹¹ MS, 75f.

¹² *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, which is best known in Anglo-Saxon countries, was published 1785; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, which seems to be less read than known by name, was published 1788; and *Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1797.

¹³ GM, 68. Likewise Kant speaks also in the preface of GM about his plan to write *Metaphysik der Sitten*. GM, 25.

Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten in isolation, it seems impossible to find any positive proof for the defence of the view that certain single rules are absolute for Kant.

In the first place, in respect to promise breaking, several critics have misread *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. When illustrating the categorical imperative, Kant does not mean any kind of promise, as his critics seem to believe, but deceitful promises in which the maker of a promise thinks at the very moment of making it that he is not going to keep it.¹⁴ About such deceitful promises Kant at one point writes that »he ought never to make a deceitful promise».¹⁵ This is the strongest expression which I have been able to find to support the absoluteness of a single rule. But even here Kant does not say that one ought never to break a promise, but that one ought never to make a deceitful promise. The word »never» (*niemals*) should not, however, be stressed too much here because the main point of Kant is not to emphasize here that a single moral rule such as »one ought never to make a deceitful promise» can have no exception. Rather Kant appeals here to the common opinion of men when comparing the nature of hypothetical and categorical imperatives.¹⁶

Secondly, even in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant does not deny the possibility of breaking one moral rule if necessary in order to keep another more important rule. It is true that he often denies exceptions to some moral rules. But then he says that no exceptions are permitted in favour of our inclinations, or unilaterally in favour of oneself or someone else.¹⁷ Even Kant's critics would agree with Kant that the very concept 'duty' implies that if there is a conflict between a duty and an inclination one ought to follow one's duty as against one's inclination. From the fact that there ought to be no exception to a rule in favour of inclinations it does not follow that no exceptions could be made to one single rule in favour of some other rule.

Thirdly, Kant explicitly said in his lectures even before his moral-

¹⁴ GM, 41f, 69f, 80, PV, 36.

¹⁵ PV, 36.

¹⁶ It should also be observed that most authors in moral philosophy in the 17th and 18th centuries regard a deceitful promise as wrong in general and especially if the rights of others are violated.

¹⁷ *keine Ausnahme zum Vorteil der Neigung*, GM, 68, *für uns oder zum Vorteil unserer Neigung*, GM, 72, *aus Selbstliebe*, GM, 69, PV, 132, 139, *ohne Rücksicht auf seine Neigung*, MS, 16.

philosophical publications that some single rules do admit exceptions. Killing under the authority of the law, for example, is not murder: that is to say, killing is not always wrong, as the critics of Kant have thought Kant to have held.¹⁸ Although suicide as well as killing others is forbidden, there are circumstances under which life ought to be sacrificed.¹⁹ Kant also says that a lie is permitted if force is used to extort a confession from me: if my confession is improperly used against me, my lie is then a weapon of defence.²⁰

As a conclusion to this section it can be said that it seems to be impossible to find any positive support for the assertions that certain single moral rules are without exceptions in all circumstances. Instead there are positive hints both in Kant's earlier teaching and his latest moral-philosophical work that one need not nor should not follow certain single rules in all circumstances. In the next section I shall speculate on the reasons why many Kant's critics have misunderstood him in this respect.

2. KANT'S MAIN POINT HAS BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD

Perhaps the main reason for the above misunderstanding has been that critics have failed to see that Kant's references to some single rules in his main ethical works are of secondary importance to Kant. Contrary to the assertions of his critics he does not call attention to whether such single rules admit exceptions or not. Rather, his purpose is only to illustrate his main point by means of some ordinary single moral rules.

Kant starts from the fact that ordinary people already have morals and that, on the whole, these are sound.²¹ Even ignorant men for

¹⁸ LE, 58.

¹⁹ LE, 151, 155f.

²⁰ LE, 228. In the light of this, what, for example, Rogers says is strange: »Even a lie told with the intention of preventing a murder is unconditionally wrong, because the effects of the lie have nothing to say to its morality.» Rogers, HE, 193f. Paulsen compares Kant's attitude towards a lie and towards a murder in a similar way, as I shall show below. Cp. Paulsen, SE, II, 290.

²¹ GM, 25, 41—44, PV, 74, 113f. Kant very frequently refers to the morality of ordinary people or to common sense. Actually, that morality to which Kant refers is not merely that of ordinary men but rather a kind of mixture of the morality of ordinary people and of tradition of moral philosophy.

whom theoretical questions are dry and boring take a lively interest in moral discussions and are »so exact, so reflective and so subtle« in such questions.²² As a philosopher Kant does not regard it as his task to create a new morality, but to interpret philosophically the existing one.²³

In the preface to *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant says that the purpose of this treatise is »nothing more than the investigation and establishment of the *highest principle of morality*« (... *des obersten Prinzips der Moralität*) and is meant to be a complete study and one that must be separated from all other investigations of morality.²⁴ When referring a little later to the categorical imperative, Kant says that this has an application merely to lawfulness »in general« without setting up a basis for any law determining certain actions.²⁵ In the preface to *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* Kant describes his task in the same way.²⁶ Thus, in his main ethical works, Kant deliberately avoids treating single moral rules and duties and their mutual relations in some particular situations. Instead, his primary aim is to study the highest principles or criteria of single moral rules and duties.²⁷ When referring to some single duties in these works, Kant merely wants to give some scattered examples to show that the highest principles discovered by him are in accordance with ordinary moral rules and duties.²⁸

Kant's critics seem to have read him as if he had emphasized the fact that some single rules admit no exceptions. But when Kant gives, for example, four concrete examples of the categorical imperative, these are given only at random as examples of his main principle and not at all to emphasize the absolute character of any of them as Kant's critics have mistakenly thought. At the end of *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* Kant again says that he has dealt with only a few of the most

²² PV, 240.

²³ Cp. PV, 16—21.

²⁴ GM, 26. Though Field quotes this and other similar passages, he fails to see that Kant really means here literally what he says. Cp. Field, MT, 16, 37f.

²⁵ GM, 40f.

²⁶ PV, 17f.

²⁷ In his lectures Kant presents a similar view. Just as logic deals with the use of understanding in general and not in particular conditions, so does practical philosophy deal with the use of the free will not in specific circumstances but independently of these. LE, 2f.

²⁸ Cp. MS, 6.

common rules as examples of moral education or exercise because the study of the manifoldness of single moral duties, that is to say of single rules, would be too large a task.²⁹

The highest principle of morality discovered by Kant is the categorical imperative, which is formulated in several ways. Two formulations may be sufficient here.

According to the first formulation one ought to act in such a way that the principle of one's action might become a universal law.³⁰ Kant seems to mean by this merely that one ought to act in a given situation in such a way as one would will all rational beings to act in similar situations, that is to say that one ought to apply that rule to the situation involved which one would will all rational beings to apply.

Kant realizes that this categorical imperative is a negative condition of a right act.³¹ But there can be no action without an end (*Zweck*). The highest end of all action is included in the practical imperative: act always so that humanity is treated as an end in one's own person or in someone else and never merely as a means.³² This means that each man ought to be treated as an end in himself.³³

Kant considers these highest principles as absolute in the sense that one ought never to ignore them; the words »always» (*jederzeit*) or »never» (*niemals*) must be taken literally in this connection.³⁴ They are at the same time the highest criteria of all single moral rules and

²⁹ PV, 252f.

³⁰ GM, 67f, PV, 47, 53f, MS, 25f, 198. In a civil state the categorical imperative is almost the same as the assumed united will of all citizens which Kant regards as the highest source and criterion of all laws. MS, 32, 67f, 109, 119f, 198f.

³¹ MS, 198f, PV, 59f.

³² GM, 79, 82, 92. This shows that Kant's ethics are not merely formal in the sense that they would give no content to duty, as critics have claimed, because he regards the intrinsic value of humanity as the highest end of all action; in practice this means for Kant that one's highest duty is to increase the happiness of others and one's own perfection. Cp. PV, 60, MS, 195—198.

³³ In this light Brandt's example referring to the possible application of the categorical imperative is poorly chosen: let the slave-owner torture a slave to death if it pleases his whims. It would accord with Kant's principle of universality, Brandt says, if all slave-owners agreed with him. Actually, Kant often emphasizes the immorality of slavery because it contradicts his practical imperative. Brandt, ET, 34.

³⁴ GM, 40, 79, 85, 91f.

duties.³⁵ A deviation »from the principle of duty» (*von dem Prinzip der Pflicht*) is certainly evil (*böse*).³⁶ But from the idea that the highest principles and criteria of all duties are absolute it need not follow that certain single moral rules are absolute in the same sense.³⁷ In any case it is difficult, if not impossible, to find passages in which Kant says that, for example, lying, promise-breaking or killing are always wrong in all circumstances.

It is quite clear that Kant's primary aim in his first two ethical works is to establish the highest principle of morality. The main reason why he refers to single moral rules is to show that his highest principle is in accordance with the ordinary rules held by common people. Or rather he shows that even common people have implicitly in mind the same highest principle which Kant has made explicit.³⁸

Many single moral rules are such that they are valid in most, though not perhaps in all, circumstances from the point of view of Kant's highest principles. Kant often compares single moral rules with such rules as, if observed, would promote happiness.³⁹ The first are categorical and so clear that it is easy even for an ordinary person to know what is his duty whereas the latter are uncertain in the sense that it is often very difficult to know which is the best rule to follow to achieve happiness. The fact that Kant emphasizes the unconditional nature of moral rules in comparison with the rules of happiness has caused a wrong impression that there is no exception to some given single rules in favour of some other rules in certain circumstances.

Let us see once more why lying is generally though not universally wrong according to Kant. The reason is that lying is in general contradictory with the practical imperative according to which one ought always to regard each rational being, including oneself, as an end and

³⁵ The categorical imperative is »the highest principle of all duty» (*der oberste Prinzip aller Pflicht*), GM, 69, 73, »the highest condition of all rules» (*die oberste Bedingung aller Maximen*), PV, 54, »the highest foundation of morality» (*der oberste Grundsatz der Sittenlehre*), MS, 26, »the principle of all rules» (*Prinzip aller Maximen*), MS, 32, 198; or practical imperative is the basis of the rules of all actions (*allen Maximen der Handlungen zum Grunde gelegt werden*), GM, 92.

³⁶ GM, 42.

³⁷ In *Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant says in connection with imperfect duties that their breadth does not mean »permission for exceptions from the rules of actions, but only permission to limit one rule of duty by another». MS, 199f.

³⁸ GM, 41, PV, 47—49.

³⁹ GM, 21f, 31f, 63—66, PV, 44—49, 63f, MS, 16.

never merely as a means.⁴⁰ Only that which is an end has a dignity (*Würde*) according to Kant's technical language in contrast to mere things (*Sachen*) which have only price and which can therefore be used as means. But now a man who lies loses a part of human dignity both in the eyes of himself and of others. Therefore lying means treating oneself as a thing, that is to say as a means, which is contradictory with the highest criterion of morality; actually a liar is worse than a thing because lying makes one into a bad rather than into a good means of achieving something.⁴¹

But it does not necessarily follow from this that one ought never to lie. In his lectures, where he also considers a lie as a violation of humanity in one's own person, Kant explicitly says that there are situations when one does not need to tell the truth if asked or when one can openly lie in self-defence against an aggressor.⁴² There is no evidence that Kant adopted a stricter opinion after his lectures. He always held that even lies harmless to others are generally evil because they violate humanity at least in one's own person. Kant is so much concerned about this that he is not always ready to admit that there are, however, circumstances, in which lying is permitted without this meaning a violation of humanity in one's own person.

3. THERE ARE NO CONFLICTS OF DUTIES

I have tried to show above that there is no positive proof that Kant would regard any single moral rule without exceptions. My point here is to show that there are actually circumstances in which Kant admits that there are exceptions to certain single moral rules.

⁴⁰ PV, 141f, 149, MS, 213, 240—243.

⁴¹ Cp. MS, 240—243. It is interesting to note that when referring to this passage of Kant, Paulsen gives an impression that lying according to Kant is contemptible »in all circumstances». Paulsen also adds to his criticism that if a murderer asked someone where the man whom he was planning to murder was hidden if the man questioned lied, he would have lost humanity by his lying. Paulsen, SE, II, 209. Actually Kant speaks here about lying in the abstract. Paulsen himself has added the words »in all circumstances» and invented the story about a murderer which Kant himself does not mention at all in the place referred to.

⁴² LE, 227f.

It has been asserted that Kant's assumed view of the absoluteness of some single rules leads to logical difficulties where duties conflict with one another.⁴³ In such situations, runs the argument against Kant, one has to break one rule for the sake of another more important rule. Ought one not to break a promise, for example, if somebody's life can be saved by so doing? Kant does not give, the criticism goes on, any advice as to how one ought to act when duties conflict.

It has been suggested as an improvement on this assumed theory of Kant that, when dealing with the conflict of moral duties, instead of regarding some single rule as absolute, one should modify moral rules by each other so that a more important rule should have preference over a less important one.⁴⁴ The absolute rule »do not kill«, for example, ought to be modified as »do not kill except in self-defence«. Kant is mistaken, it is said, when claiming that only the first kind of rule can be universalized. In support of such criticism it has been said that a qualified rule »do not do x except in circumstances A, B, or C« is as universal as any single rule. Kant placed every individual act only in one class of actions, such as truth-telling, lying or killing. But every act can be classified in a variety of ways. Kant has been said to have thought: »This action is a lie, and since lying is not consistently universalizable, all lies are wrong; so this action is wrong.« But against that it could be said: »This is a lie told to save a life, and lies told to save lives are right, so this act is right.«

Criticism that Kant was not aware of the so-called conflicts of duties is almost silly because such situations have been known as long as men have reflected on ethics. It is easy to show that Kant knew very well such situations as those indicated by his critics. As a matter of fact, Kant gave a reply to his later critics, though treatment of such questions was of secondary importance from his point of view. Furthermore, Kant's language in respect to so-called conflicts of duties is more accurate than that of his critics.

Kant makes a distinction between a general rule (*Regel*) and a universal law (*Gesetz*).⁴⁵ A rule is an empirical generalization (*gemein*) to which there can be exceptions, whereas a law is universal (*allgemein*) and without any exceptions. It is true that some ordinary duties may be expressed by some general rule such as »do not lie« if

⁴³ Hospers, HC, 284—287.

⁴⁴ Hospers, HC, 284—287.

⁴⁵ GM, 22, 73, PV, 63f, MS, 16.

no other rules need be taken into consideration. Strictly speaking, an action is not, however, a duty because it is determined by a general rule, but because it is determined by a universal law. From this point of view it is understandable that Kant denies the possibility of the conflict of duties.

The concept of the conflict of duties (*collisio officiorum* or *collisio obligationum*) is self-contradictory.⁴⁶ A duty is a concept which implies the moral necessity of a certain action. It cannot be necessary to follow two contrary rules (*Regeln*) at the same time. If one's duty is to follow a certain rule, there is not only no duty (*keine Pflicht*) to follow an opposite rule, but it is contrary to one's duty (*pflichtwidrig*) to do so. Therefore the conflict of duties is inconceivable (*obligationes non colliduntur*). Instead of that, the grounds of some duties (*Gründe, rationes obligandi*) can be contrary to each other and if one tried to follow such contrary grounds at the same time, one could be involved in conflicts. But it is not correct to say in such a situation that a stronger duty prevails (*fortior obligatio vincit*), but that the stronger basis of a duty prevails (*fortior obligandi ratio vincit*).

The last explanation is presented in *Metaphysik der Sitten*. But in order to do justice to Kant's critics, let us assume again that Kant did regard at least some single rules as absolute in his earlier ethical works and that he later changed his view. For this purpose let us make some distinctions between different classes of duties.

When giving concrete examples of different duties, Kant divides them, among other ways, into perfect and imperfect duties.⁴⁷ Of the perfect duties he says that they are strict (*streng*), narrow (*eng*), necessary (*notwendig*), or inflexible (*unnachlässlich*) as opposed to the imperfect duties which are called broad (*weit*) or meritorious (*verdienstlich*). It might be thought that at least some single rules defining perfect duties would be absolute.

If one reads superficially *Metaphysik der Sitten*, one may find support for such a view. Here Kant treats more systematically the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties and says that the first are strict whereas there is a certain looseness (*latitudo, Spielraum*) in the application of imperfect duties.⁴⁸

In his distinction between perfect and imperfect duties Kant follows

⁴⁶ MS, 24f.

⁴⁷ GM, 68—72, 79—81.

⁴⁸ MS, 199—203.

the tradition of moral philosophy of his time. The main point of difference between these two kinds of duties concerning which most contemporaries of Kant are in agreement appears also in Kant's main ethical works.

The perfect duties are correlative, so that if someone has a perfect duty to do something or not to do something, then there is someone else who has a corresponding perfect right to demand the fulfilment of that duty.⁴⁹ In some cases, such as contract or debt, the correlative nature of a perfect duty-right relation exists between definitely known men. In some other cases there are certain definitely known things to which each man has a perfect right, for example, to his life, limbs or liberty, whereas all other persons have a corresponding perfect duty in a negative sense not to violate those perfect rights of others. The perfect duty is rigid because its breaking means the violation of some definitely known perfect right of some other.

The imperfect duties are loose according to Kant for two main reasons.⁵⁰ In the first place, they are not correlative in the same definite sense as the perfect ones. It forms part of our imperfect duties, for example, to help those who are in need. But there is not always a definitely known person whom I ought to help and who would have a corresponding right to my help. Secondly, such duties are loose, and therefore it is not definitely said what and how much one has to do in order to fulfil them. It forms part of one's imperfect duty, for example, to develop one's talents. But it is not said exactly which talents and how far.

With respect to imperfect duties, Kant clearly says in *Metaphysik der Sitten* that single moral rules may admit exceptions.⁵¹ One must often limit or modify one rule by another. The looseness of imperfect duties leads necessarily (*unvermeidlich*) to casuistic questions concerning »how to apply a single rule to a certain situation«. The very fact

⁴⁹ In his lectures Kant strongly emphasized the sacredness of the rights of others, so that we have to fulfil such duties the fulfilment of which others have a perfect right to demand before all other duties. LE, 30, 50f, 193—195, 211. Kant's examples referring to perfect duties towards oneself seem to be inconsistent with this explanation. I have shown elsewhere that such duties were also primarily regarded as duties towards someone else, mostly towards God, who had the perfect right to demand their fulfilment. In Kant, mankind (humanity) has replaced God, so that duties towards oneself are rightly duties towards mankind. See Tenkku, LL.

⁵⁰ MS, 199—203.

⁵¹ MS, 34, 199—202, 221, 283.

that Kant introduces several casuistic situations shows that he knew very well such situations where one can follow one rule only by breaking another and when one has to decide which rule to follow and which to break.

In *Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant speaks as if only the looseness of imperfect duties might lead to casuistic questions and as if the rules of perfect duties were without exceptions. If so, Kant's critics might admit that Kant may have changed his view about the absoluteness of the rules of imperfect duties. Nevertheless, they could still maintain that Kant has always regarded at least the rules of perfect duties as having no exceptions.

But this is not true of the perfect duties even in Kant's earlier work. As a proof of this we have the following example.

When illustrating the practical imperative Kant refers to the perfect duty towards oneself according to which it is forbidden to kill, destroy or mutilate oneself as well as others.⁵² He remarks in parenthesis: »... I must omit here, for example, the question of the amputation of limbs to preserve life, exposing one's life to danger, in order to maintain it, etc. This belongs to ethics proper.»

In the last remarks Kant refers to an example which innumerable other authors have discussed. According to the view current in his time, no one has the right to commit suicide or even to maim or destroy himself in any way. But a man who is in danger of losing his life without amputation is facing a so-called conflict of duties. One of them would be »your duty is to preserve your life» and the second one »do not maim yourself or destroy any of your limbs». There should be no exception to either of these duties, if Kant's critics were right, because both of them belong to perfect duties which, if any, should be without exceptions.⁵³ Kant regards one's perfect duty to preserve one's life as much more important than one's perfect duty not to maim oneself. In his opinion, which rule one should break and which follow here is so self-evident for everyone that no discussion of it is needed in addition to the above remarks in parenthesis.

⁵² GM, 79f.

⁵³ According to Ross, the problem of the conflict of duties appears even among the duties of perfect obligations, which Kant treats as absolute, and even within a single one of these duties. Ross, FE, 173. It is Ross' credit that he knows the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties of which many of Kant's critics seem to be ignorant. But even he is mistaken because the above example of Kant refers to the rules of perfect duties.

As a matter of fact, when beginning to speak about perfect and imperfect duties, Kant in a footnote defines a perfect duty as one »which does not allow any exception in favour of inclination«. In other words, he does not say that there are no exceptions to one rule in favour of another among the rules of perfect duties.⁵⁴

In *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* there are two other similar casuistic questions well known in the moral-philosophical literature of Kant's time.⁵⁵ In the first example there is a situation in which a person is in danger of losing his life and tries to save the lives of others from a shipwreck by losing his own life. Without solving this problem Kant points out that there are two rules here which conflict: 1. it forms part of one's imperfect duty to help others; 2. one's perfect duty is to preserve one's own life.

There are fewer doubts, Kant goes on, in the situation in which one loses one's life in order to save one's fatherland. Yet there is some doubt whether it forms part of one's perfect duty to sacrifice oneself voluntarily and without the command of authorities for the same purpose.

I have referred to these examples in order to show that Kant was aware of the so-called conflict of duties even in his two best known ethical works. It is important that there are rules of perfect duties among these examples which, at least, should have admitted no exceptions for Kant if he had considered some single rules as absolute. But he did not.

Here again Kant's lectures support the view that he was always aware of the so-called conflicts of duties. As in *Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant says also in his lectures that duties cannot clash though their rules may clash.⁵⁶ Furthermore, he shows there indirectly how to solve such conflicts. One's duty, for example, is to pay creditors before showing gratitude to one's parents. In other words the more perfect duty must be preferred to the less perfect duty.

Kant gives also examples of other rules of perfect duties from which there may be exceptions in favour of some still higher rules. To preserve one's life is one of the most perfect duties. Yet Kant says that even the preservation of one's life is not the highest duty of man.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ GM, 68.

⁵⁵ PV, 247f. Cp. MS, 234f.

⁵⁶ LE, 20f.

⁵⁷ LE, 156.

It is clear that, according to Kant, there ought to be no exception to a duty because there can be no duty to break one's duty. But this does not mean that one ought never to break any single moral rule. The truth is rather that in certain circumstances there is only one duty. But one has first to consider what that duty is, that is to say what rule one ought to apply to that situation. After this has been decided, one knows what rule one ought to follow and what must be disregarded.

4. KNOWLEDGE OF A PARTICULAR DUTY

It is not always evident, especially in the so-called conflict of duties, what one's duty is, because one has to know what rule one ought to apply. Kant has been criticized in two ways in this respect. The first criticism is that Kant regards conscience as an unerring source of moral knowledge. The second is that he does not give any advice about how to know one's duty in particular situations.

a. An unerring conscience

It has been said sometimes that Kant regarded conscience as an unerring oracle which says what one's duty is in any particular situation. Moore, for example, presupposes Kant to have thought so when he makes the point against Kant that very harmful actions may be done from conscientious motives and that conscience does not always tell the truth about what actions are right.⁵⁸ Likewise Paulsen regards as the error of intuitionists, among whom he includes Kant, the belief that conscience is always unerring.⁵⁹ Mackenzie asserts that an unerring conscience is for Kant a chimera and that he, like Butler, meant by it a universal conscience.⁶⁰

These accusations concerning the infallibility of conscience are based on a misunderstanding. Broad correctly regards them as fool-

⁵⁸ Moore, PE, 180.

⁵⁹ Paulsen, SE, I, 350f.

⁶⁰ Mackenzie, ME, 150.

ish.⁶¹ But even he has misunderstood Kant when denying assertions that Kant regards conscience as unerring. The fact is that Kant did consider it as unerring, though in a different sense from what his critics think.

Some critics seem to have in mind their own idea of conscience, not Kant's, when misreading him. Paulsen, for example, supports his criticism that Kant regarded conscience as unerring by quoting Kant: »That which moral law commands is easily and convincingly visible to 'the most common understanding' (*für den gemeinsten Verstand*)».⁶² He says from his own standpoint that it is not true that no one has any doubt about what his duty is in certain situations.

As a matter of fact, Kant does not speak about conscience at all in the passage quoted by Paulsen, but about common understanding, which Paulsen unconsciously seems to have identified with conscience.⁶³ In general, and contrary to erroneous opinions held by many, it can be said that Kant very seldom uses the word 'conscience' and when he does use it, he does not mean by it that which his critics have thought him to mean.

For Kant conscience is not at all the kind of cognitive faculty by means of which one can know one's objective duty. This is the task of understanding (*Verstand*) together with the faculty of judgment (*Urteilkraft, iudicium*). The activity of the latter is a precondition of the activity of conscience. Thus one has to decide objectively what is one's duty. In accordance with this, conscience can know whether one honestly will or will not act according to such objective knowledge concerning one's duty. Conscience can give information only about the internal quality of one's will, not about one's objective duty. This interpretation can be inferred from the following statements.

Conscience is a natural inclination which we have as a matter of fact in the same way as we have other moral feelings regardless of whether we want to have them or not.⁶⁴ No one has a duty to acquire a conscience any more than any other natural inclinations and feelings

⁶¹ Broad, FT, 122.

⁶² Paulsen, SE, I, 350f.

⁶³ Cp. PV, 64. Kant himself does not emphasize in the passage quoted by Paulsen that it is always easy to know one's duty. Rather he compares the difficulty of the acquirement of two kinds of knowledge and he realizes that it is much easier to know one's duty than to know how one could best become happy.

⁶⁴ MS, 210f, 250.

which occur independently of our will. A man lacking a conscience is morally dead.

It is true that Kant says that an unerring conscience is a chimera (*Unding*). But he qualifies this statement: »For one can sometimes be mistaken in an objective judgment as to whether something is one's duty or not; but in the subjective judgment of whether or not I have compared it (= conscience) with my practical (here judging) reason in favour of that judgment, I cannot err». If someone has consciously acted according to his conscience, nothing more can be demanded from him in respect of guilt. There is only the question of whether his understanding has been enlightened about what is and what is not his duty.

In his philosophy of religion Kant talks about conscience in the same way.⁶⁵ »Whether an act is right or wrong at all is decided by understanding not by conscience.»⁶⁶ Kant defines conscience as »the moral faculty of judgment which judges itself». It does not judge an act — understanding does this — but itself in action, that is to say conscience can tell whether one has seriously used one's understanding in order to study whether something is right and whether one has honestly acted according to this judgment.

Though Kant regards conscience as unerring, it is erroneous to consider him as an intuitionist in the sense that conscience is the judge of what is right or wrong. It is unerring only when reporting about the internal quality of one's will. An erroneous conscience in this sense would be as absurd as to say that I do not know whether I believe that I see green now when I really believe that I see green now.

b. How a particular duty can be known?

Kant has been criticized for failing to give a complete guide to the actions we should avoid — still less those we should do.⁶⁷ According to this kind of criticism, he thinks that there is no difficulty in judging correctly what is one's duty. But such knowledge is not so easy to acquire, according to these critics. Therefore Kant ought to have given a code of acts to which we are morally obligated.

⁶⁵ RG, §§ 287—290.

⁶⁶ In his lectures Kant also often says that it is understanding, not conscience, which distinguishes between what is morally right and what morally wrong in an action. LE, 23, 36, 69.

⁶⁷ Carritt, TM, 78—84.

Kant has been misunderstood in such criticism at least in two ways.

Firstly, it is true that Kant often says that it is easy to know what is one's duty by means of common sense alone. But by saying so, Kant only wants to emphasize, as I have pointed out above, that it is relatively easier to know one's duty in different situations than how to become happy. But apart from this kind of comparison Kant does not deny the difficulty of knowing one's duty in some particular situation. On the contrary, his reference to casuistry is proof that sometimes such knowledge may be difficult to get, at least in the sense that one could be definitely sure what one's duty is.

Secondly, Kant's critics have failed to see, as I have also indicated above, that his main purpose is to find the highest principle of morality, not to list single particular duties for different situations.

The question of how to apply moral rules in particular situations is not the business of practical reason, but of the faculty of judgment (*Urteilkraft*).⁶⁸ The question whether an act is a case of some rule »forms part of the practical faculty of judgment by means of which that which is said abstractly as a universal rule is applied concretely to an action». ⁶⁹ The use of practical judgment, how certain principles and rules should be applied to particulars, leads to casuistry.⁷⁰ It may be required from the teacher of morality — though not from the philosopher — that he shows how certain casuistic situations should be solved.⁷¹

The fact that Kant regards the application of moral rules as the task of the faculty of judgment re-enforces my point that Kant did not regard single rules as having no exceptions. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he says that the task of the faculty of judgment is to determine whether something falls under a given rule (*casus datae legis*) or not.⁷² Such a faculty is a special talent which cannot be taught but must be practised. A physician, a judge, or a politician may carry in his head many rules; he may even become an accurate teacher of them, and he may yet, in the application of these rules, commit many a blunder, either because he is deficient in judgment — though not in understanding, knowing the general in the abstract, but unable to determine

⁶⁸ GM, 22, PV, 111, 242, MS, 221, 250.

⁶⁹ PV, 111.

⁷⁰ MS, 5, 221f.

⁷¹ MS, 300.

⁷² PR, 108—111, Cp. KU, 18.

whether a concrete case falls under it —, or because his judgment has not been sufficiently trained by examples and practical experience.

The faculty of judgment has a similar function in moral questions. This shows that Kant knew very well the so-called conflict of duties, that is to say cases in which one does not immediately see what rule ought to be applied.

Kant realizes that the development of the faculty of judgment does not form part of moral philosophy, but rather of moral education. He briefly treats such questions at the end of *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* and more thoroughly in *Metaphysik der Sitten*. Moral education may best succeed through examples, and thus it is casuistic. Examples are usually conflict situations in which one learns little by little to distinguish different duties (= single rules of duty) which come together in certain situations.⁷³

There are three reasons why Kant does not treat in more detail the application of single moral rules as required from him by his critics.

The first is that casuistry is not a science, nor part of a science, which ought to be studied by moral philosophers.⁷⁴ It is not the study of how to find universal truths, but an exercise (*Übung*) in finding a truth in particular. Such an exercise is not systematic but fragmentary, and because the business of moral philosophy is systematic, casuistry does not belong to it.

Secondly, the number of different casuistic situations is so great that their treatment would take too much time and space. At the end of *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Kant hopes that he will be excused for having referred only to the most common cases as examples of moral education because their more thorough treatment would lead too far beyond his main purpose, that is to say beyond the systematic study of the highest principle of morality.⁷⁵ In other connections Kant regards the complete division of empirical cases as impossible to effect.⁷⁶

Thirdly, moral education by means of casuistry is not the function of philosophy because even ordinary people may easily sharpen their faculty of judgment. The reason is that all men are much more interested in moral than in theoretical questions in their conversations.⁷⁷

⁷³ PV, 250.

⁷⁴ PV, 242, 250—253, MS, 221f.

⁷⁵ PV, 252.

⁷⁶ MS, 5, 283.

⁷⁷ PV, 241f, MS, 300.

This very interest makes moral problems easier to solve than theoretical problems, which are too boring for most people.

Though Kant does not regard it as his duty to give detailed advice as to how get to know one's duty in different situations, he does have some hints for the satisfaction of those who have criticized him for the lack of such. In this respect Kant associates himself with the view current in his time which has only some vague rules concerning the application of moral rules in particular situations.

One rule of application is that it is more urgent to fulfil a perfect duty than an imperfect one.⁷⁸ Thus one has first to fulfil a duty to which another has a perfect right before engaging in charity. An act of a charity or generosity is permissible only if it does not violate anybody's right; if it does, it is wrong. Many people leave undone their basic duties and yet think that they can perform those which will be accounted to them for merit. Such men, Kant continues, are guilty of much injustice in the world: they rob their fellows and then proceed to make bequests to hospitals.

In some cases the order of priority of different rules is self-evident even for ordinary men. The duty of the love of one's parents, for example, ought to be preferred to the duty of the general love of one's neighbour.⁷⁹ But all these kinds of questions belong to casuistry, not to the systematic treatment of moral philosophy.

In connection with casuistry, one further misunderstanding may be pointed out. Broad interprets Kant's categorical imperative to mean that what is right or wrong for somebody in a certain situation would be so for every rational being in the same situation regardless of his personal tastes.⁸⁰ Thus if an agent had to make a proposal of marriage to either A or B, he should not regard his personal inclinations and feelings. But as against Broad, it may be said that Kant has not only assumed but also explicitly said that one's own personal feelings and other personal things may be relevant when one has to decide about actions in some particular situations.

Kant once says explicitly in connection with imperfect duties towards others that one has to take into consideration their social standing (*Zustand*) when deciding what rule should be applied, and to modify one rule by another.⁸¹ In the same connection Kant presents

⁷⁸ LE, 20, 30, 50f, 193—195, 211.

⁷⁹ MS, 200.

⁸⁰ Broad, FT, 124.

⁸¹ MS, 283.

several factors, such as one's social position, level of education, vocation, sex, health, welfare, poverty and so on which may be relevant to the action.

The same view is visible in Kant's theory of punishment. Though he defends a theory of punishment which is similar to the principle of *ius talionis* and demands that the punishment ought to be equal for different people for the same kind of crime, he realizes the importance of different particular personal characteristics.⁸² In the estimate of the equal quantity of punishment, different effects of punishment upon different people should be taken into consideration. A rich or noble man would feel a loss of dignity or reputation as more effective than a fine. Therefore, a loss of reputation would be punishment for a noble equal to a fine for a poor person as punishment for the same crime.⁸³

This and other similar examples show that Kant regarded certain personal characteristics as relevant in the application of the categorical imperative to certain particular situations. But the question as to how far these things ought to be taken into consideration belongs to the faculty of judgment, not to systematic moral philosophy.

5. WAS KANT A PEDANT IN MORALITY?

Akin to the above criticism is the assertion that Kant was a pedant in morality, that he required a conscientious fulfilment of all single moral rules to the point of morbidity.⁸⁴ Accordingly, each detail of our life is full of some duties which we ought always to keep in mind and punctiliously follow.

These criticisms are also based on misunderstanding. In the first place, Kant makes a distinction between duties on the one hand and

⁸² MS, 140f.

⁸³ The question as to what are the effects of different punishments can be solved by pragmatic wisdom based on experience; it must be distinguished from another kind of question, namely, whether one has deserved punishment (*quia peccatum est*). MS, 170.

⁸⁴ Paulsen, SE, I, 371f. Paulsen refers also to the connection between Kant's ethics and life and says that the descriptions of his custom of living punctiliously to an exact timetable like a clock in accordance with his duty — no matter if they are true or not — are not constructive. Paulsen, SE, I, 348f.

indifferent things (*adiaphora*) on the other.⁸⁵ Kant prefers to talk about morally indifferent things, instead of permitted things, as the contrary of duty. The reason is that some morally indifferent things may still be permitted (*erlaubt*) or not permitted (*unerlaubt*) from the point of view of certain technical or hypothetical rules.

The introduction of morally indifferent things means that only a part of human actions ought to be determined by duties. Kant himself ridicules such moral micrology which fills each step with duties without admitting moral indifference.⁸⁶

In several casuistic questions Kant indirectly shows that he is opposed to moral purism. He realizes that sometimes the following of a broad duty may lead to purism or pedantry.⁸⁷ The determination of the limit of temperance, for example, may lead to such pedantry. But the determination of the limit between a right duty and purism is a casuistic, not a philosophical, question. It is, for example, intemperate to take too much intoxicating beverage. On the other hand, abstinence from it may be contrary to the imperfect duty of sociability.

Kant criticizes any extreme position in the demand for the fulfilment of duties.⁸⁸ Moderation which has changed into avarice is not only against one's duty of love towards others but also against duty towards oneself »by depriving oneself of the enjoyment of a pleasant life». To do it »out of the exaggerated discipline of natural inclinations» is against man's duty towards himself. Moral ascetism may sometimes be useful as a kind of diet in order to preserve moral health, but it ought to have nothing to do with the ascetism of monks, which is exercised without any useful purpose.⁸⁹

However much Kant admires the fulfilment of moral duties out of respect for moral law, he warns in his lectures against becoming hypercritical and probing too deeply into one's inability to attain moral purity.⁹⁰ Men should not burden their conscience with matters of negligible importance; for example, whether it is right to tell a lie in order to make an April fool of a person. Such a lie is for Kant *adiaphora*, which again shows that for him all lies are not wrong. The subtler

⁸⁵ GM, 94, PV, 20, 109, MS, 23, 219.

⁸⁶ MS, 219. Kant says even about the categorical imperative that we should allow to it some »trifling and forced exceptions». GM, 73.

⁸⁷ MS, 237, 239.

⁸⁸ MS, 265f, LE, 172.

⁸⁹ MS, 301.

⁹⁰ LE, 65, 134f.

a conscience is in such matters of detail, the worse it is in matters of practical importance. One should not search needlessly for evidence of evil in one's conduct nor keep tormenting one's conscience, which in the long run becomes dulled and ultimately ceases to function. The man who does not wrong himself or another may enjoy as many pleasures as he can and will.⁹¹ There is no merit in suffering ills which we have voluntarily taken upon ourselves. I do not see how Kant's view in his own works written after these lectures is inconsistent with the view presented in the lectures themselves.

Finally, there is one strange assertion which is said to follow from Kant's assumed view that there are no exceptions to single moral rules. As against Kant, Mackenzie says that many actions are right just because they are extraordinary.⁹² A heroic sacrifice of one's life, for example, for some high cause is regarded right just because no one else is expected to will to do that. Another example is that the refusal of anyone to marry would run contrary to the duty of preserving the human race. Therefore everyone who refused to marry because of some high cause »would act inconsistently from Kant's point of view«.

This accusation is wrong and misleading in many respects.

Firstly, according to Kant, the perfect duties are most strictly binding. But their nature is such that their fulfilment is not exceptional. It is not very exceptional, for example, not to commit suicide, kill, steal or break a promise.⁹³ But neither is the fulfilment of such perfect duties meritorious (*verdienstvoll*).

Secondly, exceptionally worthy and heroic acts belong to imperfect duties. It is true that all men ought to perform them also. But imperfect duties are loose in the sense that it is not exactly said what and how much one should do in order to fulfil them. To sacrifice very much for a good cause or to show great heroism gives merit. But such extreme heroism does not form part of everyone's duty. If they were the duties of everyone, then such acts would no longer be meritorious, but rather perfect duties.

⁹¹ LE, 173.

⁹² Mackenzie, ME, 160—162. Field refers also in his criticism of Kant to such things as self-sacrifice which are good though not to be universalized. Field, MT, 38.

⁹³ From the fact that the fulfilment of perfect duties is not exceptional, it does not necessarily follow that there are no difficulties in their fulfilment. The fulfilment of such duties has a great value just because men are tempted to neglect their duties.

Actually Kant, like many others in the tradition of his days, seems to regard the fulfilment of ordinary duties as more important than exceptionally meritorious acts; at least the fulfilment of some imperfect duties is no excuse for neglecting perfect duties. When speaking about the moral education of children, Kant says that it is not good to talk to children about very noble or »overmeritorious» (*überverdienstlich*) actions which characterize heroes in novels.⁹⁴ Friendship, for example, in its purity and perfection, is the hobby-horse of novelists.⁹⁵ In general, educators ought not to give as models those who raise enthusiasm for unattainable meritorious duties at the cost of ordinary duties.

Thirdly, it is misleading to call exceptionally meritorious acts right because they are exceptions. Even the performance of morally indifferent actions is right. It would have been more proper on the part of Kant's critics to call exceptional virtues meritorious rather than right because many non-meritorious acts are also right.

Finally, it may be said about everyone's duty to marry in order to preserve the human race that many moral philosophers discussed this question in the 17th and 18th centuries. The general reply was that it was no longer the duty of everyone to marry because the human race was already so numerous that there were always enough people to marry without this being a duty to preserve mankind.

Kant does not discuss the duty to marry. He must have known, however, discussions about it in the tradition of moral philosophy. It may be guessed that marriage was for him morally indifferent, not everyone's duty. Otherwise Kant himself, as the greatest representative of the ethics of duty, gave a bad example of his teaching to his readers.

POSTSCRIPT

After my paper was written I discovered that the probable source of the erroneous views discussed above was Kant's essay '*On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives*', which was published in 1797 and which is included in T. K. Abbott's translation of

⁹⁴ PV, 241, 246.

⁹⁵ MS, 285.

Kant's ethical works. The reason why I overlooked this essay is that I was ignorant of its existence, because it is not included in the edition of Kant's works edited by Cassirer which was at my disposal when writing this paper.

If I had known it, I would have paid attention to it, of course. On the other hand, even the views presented in that essay do not give me any reason for changing my main points in this paper.

It is true that the reader of that essay may get the impression that, according to Kant, one ought not to lie even in order to prevent a murder. However Kant does not actually say so even in that essay.⁹⁶ Instead he gives some hints about the reasons why lying is usually morally worse than the breaking of many other moral rules.

The main reason for this is that truthfulness is the condition of all laws and duties based on an agreement. All such laws and duties would become uncertain if lying was allowed. And a mutual trustfulness based on mutual truthfulness is a necessary condition of peaceful social life, the value of which Kant especially emphasizes in his philosophy of justice. Therefore Kant often seems to be more concerned to condemn lying than the breaking of many other rules.

It is interesting to note that, while permitting lying as self-defence in his lectures, Kant adds that if I say to a swindler, who has no right to demand that I tell him the truth, that I will tell him the truth, and I do not, then I have done injustice towards mankind.⁹⁷ In other words lying is permissible in certain cases. But it is not permissible to assure someone that you will speak the truth and yet lie. It is easy to see the reasons for this. Mutual trust and the peace based on trust would not be certain if such lying was permitted. But even enemies must trust each other at least when promising to tell the truth, if they want to make peace at all. One does not need to be a moral fanatic in order to agree with Kant's reasons as to why lying is generally worse than the breaking of many other moral rules.

⁹⁶ Elmer H. Duncan erroneously maintains on the basis of this essay: »Kant argued that our moral rules permit no exceptions; lying — defined simply as saying what one knows to be false — is always wrong.» The fact that the article is of so recent a date as 1966 shows that I have not been criticizing dead views. Duncan, RE.

⁹⁷ LE, 227.

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