

MORAL SELF-REGARD

Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory

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be a persuasive principle probably do not make it especially informative for us; it merely explains part of his reason for thinking it would be useful in bringing the moral law closer to feeling. The comparative ease with which FH allows agents to distinguish duties to oneself from duties to others and the relative familiarity and obvious moral relevance of such notions as respect for persons, however, render FH the least cumbersome or mysterious of the CIs formulations. Given FH's comparative accessibility to humans understanding and intuitions, and Kant's own application of FH to "secure acceptance" of self-regarding duties, FH is the principle most likely to reveal why Kant thinks agents ought to take duties to oneself seriously.

In short, then, my reliance on FH is justified because Kant himself appears to have relied heavily on FH in establishing self-regarding duties. FH's articulation of the "matter" of the CI makes it the formulation of the CI relevant to a doctrine of duties which is also as doctrine of ends, and FH is a comparatively easy to apply and compelling principle.

6. CONCLUSION

We can sum up the key points of this chapter as the following. FH, which demands that each person treat her own and others' ability to will rationally as an end in itself, is a formulation of Kant's supreme moral principle, the categorical imperative. As a version of the CI, FH constrains agents in all acts of willing. Furthermore, FH underlies Kant's ethical duties, whether perfect or imperfect, self- or other-regarding. Indeed, for understanding Kant's duties to oneself, FH is the most useful articulation of the CI to appeal to: Kant himself seems to think of duties to oneself primarily in terms of respecting and fostering one's own rational nature; FH allows agents to distinguish easily between duties to oneself and duties to others; and of the various versions of the CI, FH is the most useful (according to Kant at least) in securing acceptance of the moral law by human agents and in representing certain ends and maxims to agents as morally charged (i.e., as required or forbidden).

Duties to Oneself

I. INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, I explained how the formula of humanity (FH) grounds the ethical duties of Kant's system: FH provides an existent, absolutely valuable, desire-independent end (rational nature), by reference to which all permissible maxims are defined. I also argued that FH is the formulation of the categorical imperative (CI) on which Kant relies most heavily in explicating and arguing for the self-regarding duties of his taxonomy. By condensing my account of Kant's methods of grounding perfect and imperfect duties by FH, and focusing on the portion of FH that commands, "[a]ct in such a way that you treat humanity . . . in your own person . . . always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" (G 429, my emphasis), we can derive the following "test" for identifying duties to oneself.¹

If X is a maxim, a duty to oneself corresponds to X if and only if either
 (a) X is a maxim of action such that its willing expresses disregard for the dignity of humanity (rational nature) in one's own person, or (b) X is a maxim of ends, the adoption of which constitutes a commitment to strive to realize one's rational nature.

One's duty to oneself with regard to X is negative if (a) applies and positive if (b) applies. That is, one has a duty to oneself to avoid acting on maxims of X if X falls under (a) and a duty to oneself to adopt X if X falls under (b).

Clause (a) picks out maxims of actions that can never be willed according to FH. The relevant attitude expressed by maxims that fall under

¹ Also see Dennis (1997, 327-32).

(a) is most clearly exhibited by acts with maxims of using oneself as a means without treating oneself at the same time as an end—e.g., by pursuing the satisfaction of a desire at the expense of one's rational self-governance. Any maxim that subjugates one's humanity to a subjective end, however, fails to convey the minimal respect each agent owes herself as a rational being. Duties justified by (a) are perfect duties. They are exceptionless. Willing on maxims falling under (a) is vicious and entails demerit. Clause (b) involves ends the promotion of which "harmonizes positively" with one's humanity—i.e., ends that one would adopt if one valued appropriately one's end-setting and moral capabilities as ends in themselves. Maxims falling under (b) reflect the agent's commitment to foster, to enhance, or to render effective her rational agency. Maxims that fit the criterion of (b) constitute imperfect duties. If a maxim falls under (b), the adoption of the relevant end is morally required; most actions in promotion of that end are meritorious.

I do not introduce this test as one that Kant intends agents to use in figuring out what to do in particular situations.² I see it instead as an explicating (if abbreviated) articulation of Kant's own way of classifying duties to oneself. Based on the way that FH grounds ethical duties and the way that Kant employs FH in his discussion of duties to oneself, the standards of the FH test introduced above should enable Kant to establish the duties he wants us to accept as duties to ourselves.

In this chapter, I discuss the duties that Kant considers to be duties to oneself. I rely primarily on the *Metaphysics of Morals* as my source for these duties, but I refer to the *Lectures on Ethics* and other of his works whenever they are helpful. My discussion proceeds as follows. First, I explain particular duties to oneself (and classes of duties to oneself) in light of FH. I do this in sections 2 and 3. The explanation entails both explaining Kant's approach in defending, by means of FH, the kinds of duties that he considers duties to oneself, and reconstructing Kant's arguments for particular duties to oneself. My aims here are to show what kinds of self-regarding duties Kant is entitled to derive from FH, to highlight his reliance on FH for that purpose, and to indicate where his arguments for particular duties go wrong. The critical aspect of this discussion is primarily instrumental: Kant's errors interest me less than do the maxims that are justified as duties to oneself by the employment of FH, and Kant's method of justifying them. Second, I consider two key objections to my explanation of duties to oneself in terms of FH. I do this in section 4. Third, in section 5, I draw implications of the arguments of the preceding sections for our

understanding of duties to oneself and their foundation in Kant's moral system.

2. PERFECT DUTIES TO ONESELF

According to the FH test, the maxims that Kant considers vices contrary to perfect duties to oneself should be maxims of action, the willing of which expresses disregard for the dignity of humanity in one's own person. It is by reference to this criterion that I will discuss Kant's classification of lying, avarice, servility, suicide, sexual self-degradation, and excessive use of food and drink, as vices contrary to perfect duties to oneself.

Kant divides self-regarding duties not only into perfect and imperfect duties, but also into duties to oneself as an animal and moral being and duties to oneself as a moral being only. He calls the division between perfect and imperfect duties the "objective" division of duties. It differentiates duties based on the negative, "limiting," prohibitive character of perfect duties and the positive, "widening," commanding quality of imperfect ones (MS 419). Kant calls the latter division the "subjective" division of duties to oneself. A subjective division of duties captures the "relation between a being that is under obligation and the being who puts him under obligation" (MS 412). In the case of duties to oneself, "[t]he subject that is bound as well as the subject that binds, is always *the human being only*" (MS 419). Thus, with regard to duties to oneself, the subjective division classifies duties in terms of how the agent views herself.

When she thinks of herself only as a being capable of morality, according to Kant, the agent will recognize certain principles of action that she must reject as incompatible with willing from pure reason. This incompatibility gives rise to the duties she has to herself as a moral being only: duties to avoid lying, avarice, and servility. When she thinks of herself as a moral being with an animal nature, she will recognize other maxims that threaten her free, moral, and effective use of her humanity. The duties that come from thinking of herself in this light are duties to oneself as an animal and moral being: duties to avoid suicide, sexual debasement, and gluttony and drunkenness. The agent must recognize duties within both of the subjective divisions. To treat her humanity as an end, she must recognize not only the nature and value of her moral capacity, but also the role of her whole, composite nature as the bearer of that capacity. Her moral capacity has to operate through and rely on her natural powers. Therefore, if she considers her rational nature as the supreme limiting condition on her choice of all means, the agent will recognize requirements with regard to her treatment of her animal self.

I will use the FH test as a guide for my reconstruction of Kant's arguments for duties to ourselves both as animal and moral beings and as moral

² Kant does not seem to think that this is how agents must proceed in their moral judgment, nor would it be reasonable to expect agents to evaluate all proposed actions in this way. Kant seems to envision people learning a general set of duties and the principles on which the duties are based, and employing their judgment in casuistry to handle difficult cases—e.g., questions of whether a maxim falls under a certain duty.

beings only. To be successful, Kant's arguments must demonstrate that the allegedly vicious maxims display a willingness to risk, to impair, to destroy, or to hinder the agent's own rational willing, or otherwise show that the agent cannot sufficiently appreciate the value of her rational nature while willing on these maxims. I alter Kant's order of presentation and discuss first duties to oneself as a moral being only. It will be easier to distinguish Kant's main arguments for duties to oneself as an animal and moral being from his expository comments if I have already explained his approach by reference to duties more obviously grounded in FH alone.

2.1 PERFECT DUTIES TO ONESELF AS A MORAL BEING ONLY

According to Kant's taxonomy, one has perfect duties to oneself as a purely moral being to avoid the vices of lying, avarice, and servility. These duties have to do with "what is *formal* in the consistency of the maxims of [the agent's] will with the *dignity* of humanity in his person" (MS 420). They are negative in character, and so serve as "a prohibition against [the agent's] depriving himself of the *prerogative* of a moral being, that of acting in accordance with principles, that is, inner freedom, and so making himself a plaything of mere inclination and hence a thing" (MS 420).

Kant takes the maxims of lying, avarice, and servility to be inconsistent with the dignity of the agent's humanity due to the maxims' form:

These [vices] adopt principles that are directly contrary to the human being's character as a moral being (in terms of its very form), that is, to inner freedom, the innate dignity of the human being, which is tantamount to saying that they make it one's basic principle to have no basic principle, that is, to throw oneself away and make oneself an object of contempt. (MS 420)

Vices contrary to duties to oneself as a purely moral being place the satisfaction of a particular desire above the value of being guided by pure practical reason, devaluing one's capacity for acting on principle. By willing on such maxims, the agent treats herself as (and so in terms of her willing "makes herself") a thing—something without absolute, intrinsic value and appropriately treated as a mere means. Presumably it is from the standpoint of one recognizing the treatment one deserves in virtue of one's rational nature that one feels contempt for oneself submitting to these vices. In any case, Kant's general description of what is wrong with these vices suggests his reliance on FH: these maxims are vicious because willing on them shows disregard for one's inner freedom.

2.1.1 SERVILITY

We can get a better sense of what Kant has in mind with regard to perfect duties to oneself as a purely moral being by considering Kant's arguments for the viciousness of lying, avarice, and servility. Servility provides a clear

example of a vice through which the agent values her own humanity insufficiently. Servility is manifested in maxims of allowing others to treat one as a mere means to their ends, or of encouraging others to look down on one. The servile person may allow herself to be convinced that she is comparatively less worthy of respect and consideration than (at least some) others.³ Alternatively, she may secretly consider herself at least as worthy of respect and consideration as others. Either way, the servile agent hopes to gain some advantage by letting others think of themselves as her superior. And either way, the servile person fails practically to give her rational nature the respect it deserves. She behaves as though she were not others' equal as a rational being, even though she is (on some level) aware that she is. She lets others view her as a mere means, or as less important: she thus degrades her own humanity in order to bolster the self-esteem of others. By acting as though she does not stand in a relation of equality to other rational beings, she allows others to ignore her moral rights to respect and consideration.⁴

The degree to which an individual's subservience to others is vicious may vary substantially. Kant thinks it impossible for knowledge of one's worth as a rational being to be beyond one's reach entirely (G 428-29); one who lacks this basic appreciation of one's absolute worth lacks a feature necessary for moral agency (MS 402-403). And yet it is easy to think of societies in which certain races, members of a caste, or women, are raised to view themselves as intrinsically less valuable (or at least as entitled to fewer rights and considerations) than others. Similarly, people who are emotionally abused as children are made to feel worthless by the people who serve as their first and most crucial sources of self-worth. While people in such situations are agents—and so (let us assume) are not literally incapable of recognizing the dignity of their humanity—their struggles to appreciate their worth are far greater than others'. Their failures to combat the arrogance of others may show a lack of virtue, but certainly would not constitute vice.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find the manipulatively servile agent. When this agent flatters or grovels in front of others in order to influence them, she is vividly aware that she is pretending to be worth less than she is. She does not fail intellectually to appreciate her own worth rel-

³ In "What is Enlightenment?" (e.g., 54-55) and *Religion* (e.g., whenever Kant discusses servile versus pseudo-servile, as on 53), Kant seems to acknowledge that people can be intimidated or confused into a state in which they do not recognize their worth. Even in these cases, however, Kant implies that the agents in question are choosing to settle for certain comforts or to avoid certain difficulties by not asserting themselves. Thus, even here the agent would recognize her humanity's worth on some level, and would practically deny that worth as a means to a chosen end.

⁴ Kant calls servility "false [lying] humility" (MS 435-36). The humility is false not merely because the agent does not genuinely feel humility in comparing herself with the person she flatters, but also because the agent should not feel humility in comparing herself with anything except the moral law. The humility is false when based on a comparison with others because the agent is employing a false standard of worth.

ative to others'. Rather, she fails to take her worth seriously. This manipulatively servile agent fails to integrate her recognition of her absolute worth into her willing and behavior. She acts as though she were worth less than others: she allows—even encourages—others to treat her poorly. Since her obsequious behavior is intended to gain her favor from those whose self-esteem she raises, her servility displays her valuing of her desire-satisfaction over respect for her rational nature. By letting others ignore the worth of her humanity, she wrongs herself; she fails practically to value herself appropriately.

We may wish that Kant had addressed the question of when, if ever, purposefully self-deprecating behavior might be permissible.⁵ Does self-deprecation always constitute the vice of servility? In "Servility and Self-Respect," Thomas E. Hill, Jr. provides a compelling Kantian account of how to draw the line between servility and necessary toleration of disrespect from others. He suggests that an agent "shows too little concern for his moral status as a person . . . if he is willing to deny it for a small profit or simply because it requires some effort and courage to affirm it openly."⁶ Such a vicious willingness to give up one's claim to the respect others owe one, Hill points out, is not found in cases in which the agent suffers some indignity in order to protect the welfare of his family, to preserve his own life, or to buy time until he has the strength to assert his rightful claim. I think, however, both that Kant would say that much of the behavior Hill exempts is wrong (even if not deeply vicious), and that Kant is closer to FH's requirements in urging this tighter constraint on agents' tolerance of disrespect. While we cannot generate a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for when self-deprecation constitutes the vice of servility, the following features of Kant's account of servility seem true to and indicative of its basis in FH.

First, Kant characterizes servile agents as those who "cringe and fawn" in the presence of others (Lect 118); he is repelled by the idea of human beings, with absolute worth, "bowing and scraping" before one another, and even before God (MS 437).⁷ He leaves open, however, the possibility that there are ways of enduring indignities that do not involve objectionable self-humiliation.

Second, Kant does not see the preservation of one's life as necessarily sufficient to make self-deprecating behavior morally permissible: "Life itself ought not to be rated so highly as to warrant our being prepared, in order only not to lose it, to live otherwise than a human being should, i.e. not a life of ease, but so that we do not degrade our humanity" (Lect 119).

⁵ He considers conventional pleasures and manners showing deference at MS 437.

⁶ Hill (1973b, 11).

⁷ Also see KpV 131: "[I]n the order of ends, the human being (and every rational being) is an end in itself, i.e., he is never to be used merely as a means for someone (even for God) without at the same time being himself an end . . ."

Kant would similarly reject many maxims of self-deprecation aimed at helping and protecting one's friends and family (Lect 119). This rigidity follows from the fact that the duty to avoid servility is a perfect—and so exceptionless—duty: *once it is clear* to you that what you would be doing constitutes servility, you are bound not to do it.⁸ According to Kant, preserving the rule of reason requires us to avoid compromising our inner freedom: groveling before others, even to protect the ones we love, is not something that we can do for long without destroying our integrity as agents. The continual pretense of humility before one's equals amounts to a suffocation of one's agency, as well as to a denial of one's worth as a person: one is not being governed by one's own reason, but by another's sense of superiority.

Third, in so far as Kant's position follows FH, it should not entail that one must immediately redress every slight to one's dignity, regardless of the cost to oneself or others. Kant says that if one wants to avoid servility, one must not "let others tread with impunity on one's rights" (MS 436). But we are not always in a position to assert our rights and to defend ourselves. As Hill suggests, there seems to be no servility in temporarily enduring disrespect while gaining the strength necessary to redress the wrongs done to oneself.⁹ We may show pettiness or lack of self-control rather than self-respect if we are too quick to protest against others' attacks on our dignity. The agent must be guided by concern for her integrity in judging how much she can endure without wronging her humanity.¹⁰

In sum, a maxim may instantiate the vice of servility even if its end is good, just as a maxim of killing one (non-consenting) person to prevent others from killing more constitutes murder. But not every sort of endurance or compliance in the face of intimidation need constitute servility. Nor need every way of asserting one's (moral) rights amount to an appropriate reaction to the arrogance of others. FH prohibits as servility maxims of letting others degrade (or disregard) one's humanity in order to achieve some end that one desires: determining which maxims manifest that vice demands casuistry (MS 436-37).¹¹

2.1.2 LYING

Kant provides a complicated characterization of the vice of lying. To begin with, he groups two quite different vices under the same heading: lying to

⁸ This may sound question-begging: after all, the question is how one determines whether a maxim constitutes servility. My point, however, is that this question cannot be answered simply by looking at the end.

⁹ The agent seems quite vulnerable to self-deception here, however. She may tell herself that she will set things right once strong enough, while secretly fearing the potential harm to her well-being that may come from the eventual confrontation.

¹⁰ Of course, this task difficult to stick to in the face of temptation. We know that our integrity as agents does not suddenly dissolve when we violate a command of our own reason—even when that command is as central to our identity as practically acknowledging our absolute worth.

¹¹ Kant himself resorts to examples in clarifying what servility entails (MS 436).

oneself ("inner" or "internal" lying) and lying to others ("outer" or "external" lying). By internal lying, Kant refers to the various ways in which an agent may try to appease her conscience through particular acts of self-deception. An example of this would be when "someone, from self-love, takes a wish for the deed," i.e., when someone gives herself credit for having worked to bring about an end that she in reality only had the right attitude toward (MS 430).¹² This type of self-deception is not the worst kind. Nevertheless, the agent's willingness to overlook her faults is incompatible with inner freedom. If the agent lies to herself about what she is doing and failing to do, she hinders her ability to legislate to herself appropriately.¹³ The rational judgment by which Kant expects agents to regulate their conduct cannot play its guiding and corrective role if agents do not honestly offer their conduct for rational self-appraisal.¹⁴

Rationalizing one's choices to do what one wants (without regard for morality) is a more serious form of self-deception. By treating a thought or wish as though it were the outcome of rational judgment, when one actually wants to avoid subjecting one's wishes to rational scrutiny, the self-deceiver forsakes a genuine outcome of moral judgment for a "counterfeit" one. Stephen Darwall describes this procedure as one in which the "self-deceiver undermines her own moral character and integrity by corrupting the very capacity for independent moral judgment that, in [Kant's] view, makes integrity possible."¹⁵ Self-deception hinders—even if it does not impair—the agent's ability to guide herself by her best moral judgment, and thus prevents her from realizing her rational nature as personality. An agent who values her rational nature would not place a temporary (and false) sense of contentment above her inner freedom. Considering oneself as a moral being only, one can recognize self-deception as unendorable by reason.

"External lies" less obviously display self-regarding viciousness.¹⁶ Yet Kant insists that every outer lie is a violation of a duty to oneself: "it is clear of itself that no intentional untruth in the expression of one's thoughts can refuse this harsh name" (i.e., the vice of lying) (MS 429). The untruth "may

12 Note that for self-deception to be vicious, it must be directed to one's conscience or used to obscure deliberation. Kant allows as "permissible moral semblance" the practice of misleading one's *inclinations*—a practice that he refers to as "deceiving the deceiver in ourselves"—as a way to improve oneself. See Ant 151-53. Much of what he says here pertains to other-regarding conduct as well.

13 Indeed, being honest with oneself about one's "moral perfection in relation to [one's] duty" is sufficiently important for the operation of pure reason that the duty to "know (scrutinize, fathom)" oneself is the "first command of all duties to oneself" (MS 441). It is discussed in section 3.2.

14 See Darwall (1980) for a discussion of the perniciousness of self-deception on Kant's (and any other "institutionalists") moral theory. Baron (1980) is also relevant.

15 Darwall (1980, 416). For a very different account of self-deception—one which makes a case for its role in maintaining integrity and self-esteem—see Rue (1994, chap. 3). Another interesting discussion of self-deception and related topics occurs in Bok (1983, chap. 5).

16 I will not deal with Kant's controversial essay, "On an Alleged Right to Lie from Benevolence," which treats lying as a breach of a duty to others and from the standpoint of right.

be done merely out of frivolity or even good nature; the speaker may even intend to achieve a really good end by it" (MS 430). Maxims of lying are objectionable because "the way of pursuing [the agent's] end is, by its mere form, a crime of the human being against his own person and a worthlessness that must make him contemptible in his own eyes" (MS 430). But how is this so? Kant introduces some comments about lying's being contrary to "nature's purposes" for language. But for a number of reasons, these cannot help his argument.¹⁷ Kant also suggests that the viciousness of external lies rests on their being manifestations of the propensity to falsity, which underlies both self-deceit and outer lies. It is from falsity, "(which seems rooted in human nature itself) that the evil of untruthfulness spreads into the human being's relations with others . . ." (MS 430-31; Rel 32-34). If external lies follow from the violation of "the highest principle of truthfulness" (i.e., dealing honestly with one's own conscience) then telling outer lies would signal that one had abandoned the concern for the rule of pure reason in guiding one's own conduct.¹⁸ This explanation of lying's viciousness seems unsatisfyingly indirect, however. Moreover, it is not obvious why we should share Kant's supposition that to tell external lies one must have given up being truthful to oneself.

Another argument assumes that the ability to communicate with others through language is integrally tied to the ability to think communicable thoughts.¹⁹ Kant calls language the "capacity to communicate one's thoughts" (MS 429). As an extension of the ability to reason, our use of language allows us to represent ourselves to others as rational beings. We express our identity as rational beings by representing accurately our judgments and thoughts through language—i.e., by speaking truthfully. If we intentionally speak in a way that fails to represent what we think, we show a lack of regard for our rational nature. There could be any number of reasons for our lying. Perhaps we do not recognize our right to our own thoughts and our right to assert those thoughts. Perhaps we are too cowardly to defend our views against others. Maybe we place others' acceptance of us above gaining a fair hearing for our own views. We may simply doubt our ability to argue for our beliefs, and prefer to manipulate others (through lies) into behaving in a way that accords with these suppressed beliefs. Maybe we are simply too lazy to defend our beliefs. Whatever our motive, we express thoughts that are not our own.

17 For one thing, consideration of nature's ends belongs only to the discussion of duties to oneself as an animal and moral being. For another thing, purposes of nature are not ends that one may never act against. (See section 2.3.)

18 In Kupffer (1982), Joseph Kupffer offers a broadly Kantian analysis of lying in which he discusses "the self-opposition and internal conflict involved in speaking what one disbelieves" as one of two "inherent disadvantages" found in lying" (103).

19 The argument I suggest here tries to extract what might be useful and unobjectionable from Kant's teleological comments on language.

This account of the vice of lying is comparable with Kant's claim that "communication of one's thoughts to someone through words that yet (intentionally) contain the contrary of what the speaker thinks on that subject" constitutes a "renunciation by the speaker of his personality, and such a speaker is a mere deceptive appearance of a human being, not a human being himself" (MS 429). The argument would be that even when one's end is a good one, promoting it through misrepresenting oneself shows disrespect for oneself as a rational being. But this is too extreme to be plausible. Even if we accept that there is something pernicious or cowardly in hiding rather than asserting one's judgments as a means to arbitrary, desired ends, there are circumstances in which lying is necessary to protect one's thoughts from misuse.²⁰ If you are being tortured and fear that you will reveal the whereabouts of a hiding friend to your torturer, lying seems to be not only a reasonable course of action, but also far from degrading. In such a case, verbal deception may be the only way to wrest control of one's reason away from someone trying to make evil use of it.²¹

Kant's argument about the viciousness of external lies would be more convincing if he were to define the *vice* of lying to others more narrowly, in a way similar to the way he defines the vice of suicide. Not every deliberate, verbal deception would constitute the vice of lying, just as not every act of killing oneself constitutes the vice of suicide. The maxim of a vicious lie would involve using one's linguistic self-representation misleadingly and for the purpose of one's own ease: the agent would then place more importance on desire-satisfaction than on respect for her rational nature. Moreover, as suggested by the preceding discussion of servility (and Kant's definition of the vice of suicide), a good end is not by itself sufficient for the permissibility of a maxim. The maxim must not be one so much of misrepresenting oneself to promote a morally good end, but rather a maxim of protecting one's rational nature from misuse and manipulation (as in the torture example above). As a defense against force and fraud, saying things that do not represent what one thinks seems to constitute a morally viable last resort.

Although Kant never embraces such a narrow understanding of the vice of lying, his comments in the *Lectures on Ethics* suggest that Kant recognizes the intuitive validity of the concept of "the white lie" or "the lie forced upon us by necessity" (Lect 228). He dismisses the usefulness of this category of permissible lies, however, because of the human propensity to make exceptions for (and to deceive) ourselves. If the "white lie" constitutes permission to misrepresent one's thoughts, Kant suspects, "[e]veryone will interpret [necessity] in his own way" (Lect 228). But while human

²⁰ In some circumstances, of course, non-verbal deception—or mere evasion—would work just as well.

²¹ Kant expresses worries about such lies backfiring, but their backfiring is not their showing that you disrespect yourself.

weakness hinders our recognition of duty, Kant goes too far in using that hindrance as a reason to deny the existence of permissible (and even necessary) lies. People's frequent drinking to excess does not entail that all drinking manifests the vice of drunkenness. If it is reasonable to think that there are occasions in which lying is morally permissible, our difficulty in distinguishing moral maxims of lying from desire-based maxims of lying does not negate the existence of the moral maxims. FH's concern with our giving appropriate weight to our own rational nature demands only the narrower understanding of the vice of lying.

I will make two final points about lying. First, given Kant's claim that an untruth "is a lie only if I have expressly given the other to understand that I am willing to acquaint him with my thought" (Lect 228), neither version of Kant's last argument against lying conflicts with the acceptance of such activities as game-playing and acting. Participants in games and audiences at plays understand the nature of these enterprises. It is a publicly known convention that participants in these activities are not speaking in order to acquaint others with their thoughts.²² Thus, untruths in these contexts do not constitute lies. Second, the account of the vice of lying that I advocate does not deny the stringency of the duty in question. It instead defines the *scope* of the vice more narrowly than Kant does. As a result, my version of Kant's argument has a tighter connection to FH. For lying is most obviously contrary to FH when its maxim displays one's willingness to put one's chosen ends above one's rational nature; even when one's end is good, pretending one's rational nature works other than it does is impermissible so long as one is in a situation in which rational, respectful discourse is possible. When one is confronted with manipulation, deception, or coercion, however, one may not be in a position to consent or to refuse to acquaint another with one's thoughts. One is then not being approached as a rational being, but as a mere means to information. This is the type of situation that appears to constitute a lie's being forced on one by necessity—particularly if one has reason to believe that one's (say) coercer will use the information to harm oneself or others.²³ Thus, we have a perfect duty to avoid all maxims of verbally misrepresenting ourselves, unless we have

²² One might suggest that business people and politicians participate in similar conventions. But there is a difference between participating in relationships in which one can assume that others will sometimes lie, but in which all (implicitly if not explicitly) claim to be telling the truth and depend upon being believed, and participating in activities in which truth claims are either not offered or are avowedly strategic. Politics and business seem to be in the former category; games and acting, the latter. (There may be a more ambiguous category consisting of pleasures and other social conventions.)

²³ A different kind of case is that of being in a situation in which one's only way of preventing a horrible wrong is by lying, because the would-be criminal will not listen to reason. Perhaps here one is not misrepresenting oneself in a way that violates one's duty to oneself because one has no chance to represent oneself to this other person as a being to be respected and listened to. (Imagine trying to reason with Nazis rather than hiding Jews (and having to lie about it if necessary).) For an exploration of this and related issues, see Korsgaard (1986b, especially 340–41).

reason to believe that we are having our thoughts wrongfully extracted from us (or our agency abused in some other relevant way). In such cases, our lies protect our rational nature from being degraded to the level of a mere means to another's end: such lies seem consistent with our duty to ourselves, according to FH.

2.1.3 AVARICE

Avarice most easily illustrates the usefulness of the FH test as a criterion for viciousness. The kind of avarice that concerns Kant here is the hoarding of goods that one would benefit from using. Kant sees avarice as "slavish subjection of oneself to the goods that contribute to happiness, which is a violation of a duty to oneself since we ought to be their master" (MS 434). According to Kant's theory of value, the material goods we acquire have worth only insofar as they help us achieve our goals. They have only conditional value as means to (or parts of) our chosen ends. Only rational beings have absolute value as ends in themselves. So avarice gets things the wrong way around: its maxim is that we constrain our ends in order to acquire and to hoard goods rather than that we acquire and use goods insofar as they help us satisfy our ends. We degrade ourselves by elevating what ought to be means to our ends over ourselves (and in particular, over our capacity to set ends according to reason). If we value our ability to will from reason alone, we will not let a principle of hoarding interfere with our ability to use goods in a rational manner.²⁴

From my explications of servility, lying, and avarice, we can extract a general FH-based argument underlying Kant's classification of the duties to avoid these vices as perfect duties.

1. Humanity has dignity and is an end in itself; its worth is absolute and unconditioned.
2. Ends chosen by rational beings in light of their desires are subjective ends. Their worth is contingent on their being valued by a rational being.
3. FH requires agents always to treat humanity as an end in itself. Treating humanity as an end in itself consists in incorporating recogni-

²⁴ Kant has an interesting psychological insight about avarice. Because of the apparently irrational and illogical conflation of means and ends inherent in avarice, Kant supposes that misers rely on self-deception in order to justify their conduct. For example, they may tell themselves and others that they are saving money to support themselves in their old age, or to pass on to their relatives after they die (Lect 180). Thus, avarice not only involves the failure to value one's rational nature appropriately, it operates through a mechanism destructive to one's self-governance. At Lect 181, Kant implies that the miser cannot recover from his viciousness due to his deeply rooted self-deception. That seems unreasonably pessimistic, as well as unreasonably specific to avarice. Most addictions thrive due to the self-deception (or "denial") of the addict and her friends and family. It is hard to believe that every miser is beyond the point of recognizing and correcting her miserly ways.

tion of humanity's absolute, independent, and unconditional worth into one's willing.

4. Certain maxims, such as avarice, servility, and lying, subordinate the worth of the agent's own humanity to her subjective ends.

5. Therefore (from (3) and (4)), willing on maxims of avarice, servility, and lying, is inconsistent with treating humanity as an end with intrinsic, unconditioned, absolute worth; willing on such maxims violates FH.

Kant's arguments for the viciousness of avarice, servility, and lying rest on his showing that their maxims fail to treat the agent's inner freedom as absolutely valuable and as a supreme limiting condition on her use of means. Thus his argument consists in explaining how the vices in question violate the command that, in all her choices of action (even those aimed at good ends), the agent treat her own humanity as an end in itself. If we accept the interpretations of and minor alterations to his arguments that I suggest above, we ought to agree with Kant's general conclusion: lying, avarice, and servility belong in step (4) above and fall under part (a) of the FH test. Even if some acts of willing these maxims do not directly hinder the operation of one's rational self-government, they invariably show that one does not sufficiently incorporate respect for one's rational nature into one's willing.

2.2 PERFECT DUTIES TO ONESELF AS AN ANIMAL AND MORAL BEING

The perfect duties that Kant says that we have to ourselves as animal and moral beings are duties to avoid suicide, sexual self-debasement, and excessive use of food and drink. As with duties to oneself as moral beings only, the principle behind these duties is captured in the dictum "live in conformity with nature" . . . that is, *preserve yourself in the perfection of your nature*" (MS 419). At first glance, it may be easy to accept that preservation of one's health as an animal being would give rise to the duties to avoid killing oneself and eating and drinking too much. Sex, and especially the vices mentioned in the previous section, may not be as easy to understand as bearing upon one's natural well-being.²⁵ At the same time, it may not be at all clear why living in conformity with nature is a useful moral principle at all.

We can solve both these problems by recognizing two things. First, Kant has his own notion of nature—specifically, his own view of human nature—in mind when speaking of the "the perfection of nature." Second, Kant is interested in the preservation of the human being's "moral" health, particularly in terms of "the preservation of his nature in its perfection (as

²⁵ Consider sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy, however.