The Demandingness of a Kantian Duty to Alleviate Global Poverty

Summary:
When focusing on economic justice in a global perspective, questions arise immediately regarding the duty the affluent have to assist the poor in the world. A duty to alleviate global poverty can be defended on different grounds and can have different forms. One type of duty that can be encountered in the debate on global poverty is a general duty to aid that human beings have towards other human beings as such. This type of duty can be understood as an instance of a Kantian duty of beneficence. Even though Kant states that it is impossible to assign determinate limits to the extent of the sacrifices agents have to make on the grounds of their duty of beneficence, he nevertheless provides us with some general restrictions that have to be imposed upon the sacrifices the agent has to make. In this paper I will examine what restrictions can be imposed upon a duty to alleviate global poverty, starting from the restrictions Kant himself makes and supplementing these with others that fit with the Kantian framework. Before doing this, I will start off with an analysis of the duty to aid the poor, focusing on the special nature this duty has.

Introduction
When focusing on economic justice in a global perspective, one of the topics that immediately springs to mind is the gap that exists in the world between those who are affluent in one part of the world and those who are poor in other parts of the world. This raises the question whether the affluent possess a duty to aid the poor. The poor I define here in terms of absolute poverty, meaning they live on $2 a day or less. It is assumed that they cannot easily end their poverty themselves and that the aid of the affluent is needed to help achieving this. The affluent I define as those that are in principle capable of alleviating this poverty and I will be focusing on the individual affluent agent. A duty to alleviate world poverty can be conceived of in many ways. In this paper I will examine in what way Kantian moral theory can further our understanding of this duty and what can be said about the demandingness this duty has for the individual agent.

1. Analysing a duty to aid the poor
When Kant discusses the poor or the needy and the aid we should give to them in the *Groundwork* or

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1 Different definitions of poverty are possible of course. I have chosen this definition, as it seems to capture the most serious cases of poverty in the world.
the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he does this in the context of a duty of beneficence\(^2\), or in the context of a duty citizens have towards their fellow citizens\(^3\). The former is a duty of virtue, while the latter is a duty of justice. This duty of justice should be understood as follows: the state has an indirect right (MoM 6:326), based on the fact that it has taken over the duty of the people, to impose taxes on the people for their own preservation, such as taxes to support organisations providing for the poor. The wealthy within a state have an obligation to the state, as they owe their existence to an act of submitting to the protection and care of the state. On this obligation the state bases its right to contribute what is theirs to maintaining their fellow citizens. How extensive this duty of justice is, is a point of discussion. Libertarian Kantians\(^4\) understand this solely as a duty to prevent force and fraud, while others argue for a much more extensive interpretation of the duties of justice citizens have\(^5\), where these duties are flexible, sensitive to circumstance and concerned with the fundamentals prerequisite to citizenship and agency.

The duty of beneficence on the other hand tells us to adopt the maxim of making other people's happiness our end (MoM 6:452). Happiness is defined by Kant as 'that complete well-being and satisfaction with one's condition' (G 4:393) and he is specifically concerned with the happiness of people in need (MoM 6:453). The duty of beneficence is broader than a duty to aid the poor, but the latter can be seen as an instance of the former. Alleviating poverty is also a way of furthering people's happiness, and one of the most essential ingredients of happiness is not having to struggle for one's means of subsistence. The set of requirements a duty to aid can impose upon an agent is smaller than the set of requirements a duty of beneficence can impose; while the former is focused on ensuring people's subsistence, the latter could, within a certain context, also include the requirement of for instance giving directions to a stranger who is lost in your city.

The duty to aid, and the duty of beneficence for that matter, are duties that human beings have towards other human beings as such. This means that they are not based on any specific relationship that might exist between different human beings, such as a relationship based on family ties, a shared

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\(^3\) In the Doctrine of Right of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, for instance MoM 6:326.


\(^5\) See for instance Sarah Holtman, Kantian Justice and Poverty Relief, Kant Studien 95, pp.86-106, for a defense of this kind of duty towards the poor, specifically p.106.
nationality, or one based on certain acts that have been performed in the past (promises made for instance). The duty to aid as a duty of justice, as discussed above, is also based on a specific relationship, in this case the relationships that exists between citizens of the same state. It could be said that human beings always stand in some sort of relationship towards each other, but this general relationship is not based on any specific characteristic a person has (such as being that person's parent, or sharing the same nationality with somebody), which not every human being possesses.

When examining a duty to aid the poor, I want to examine this general duty to aid that human beings have towards other human beings as such. This choice can be defended first of all by pointing to the fact that even in a globalising era there will be cases of providing aid, where no special relationships are involved (in the case of natural disasters for instance). Second, purely focusing on Kant's duties of justice when discussing world poverty, is complicated as there is no world state and hence no world citizens with responsibilities towards each other. Other arguments (for instance along the lines of Pogge's global institutional order argument ⁶) based on special relations can be used in the discussion of world poverty. However, they do not present the whole story and leave a significant domain in which only the general duty plays a part. This domain opens up in the following cases:

- it cannot be shown that the special relationship upon which the special duty to aid is based is indeed present, either because it is difficult to provide evidence for this relationship (as might be the case with Pogge's special duty), or because it is obvious that this relationship is not present (as is the case when the poverty of complete strangers is caused by a natural disaster; or, in another case, when a citizen within the borders of her nation-state is confronted with a poor stranger, who is a non-citizen).
- the special duties to aid are insufficient to remedy world poverty; in that case a general duty to aid would come into play. They might be insufficient because the scale of the poverty is too grand, or because the duty bearers are not complying with their duty ⁷, or because it is impossible to determine who the specific duty bearers are.

One also has to be aware that the nature of a beneficent duty to aid is a very different one from a duty to aid on grounds of justice. Only the former duty adopts the end of the happiness of others and hence fulfills a very specific role. Focusing only on a duty of justice towards the poor, even though this might be taken as the stronger one, would leave us with a one-sided story regarding the aid to the poor. Therefore, there is reason to mainly focus on a duty to aid as a duty of beneficence and to

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⁷ It can be said that to compensate for those who do not fulfill their duty is a matter of justice, not of beneficence. However, if there is no relationship whatsoever between the agent who compensates and the recipient, this will be a matter of beneficence.
focus on this duty as a general duty to aid.  

Kant defends the existence of the duty of beneficence in different places in the *Groundwork* (4.423 and 4:430) and *MoM* (for instance 6:393 and 6:453). His main defense centres on the idea that a maxim of non-beneficence could not be made into a universal law, without a contradiction in willing. I will not dwell upon this defense as this has been discussed sufficiently by other authors and my aim here is a different one: not to give a defense of a duty to aid in Kantian terms, but to give an analysis of the duty and to examine the demands this duty imposes upon the individual agent.

A duty to aid has a very specific nature and looking at the taxonomy of duties Kant gives a clearer picture emerges of its nature. Not all classifications Kant makes are that clear and sometimes they can be seen as problematic. Here the idea is not to give a lengthy expose on all possible interpretations of Kant’s taxonomy of duties and the problems that are surrounding it. My central focus here is the duty to aid the poor and the Kantian framework I use to get a better understanding of this duty and the demands it imposes upon the agent. I will therefore solely focus on those aspects of Kantian moral theory that are useful for this purpose.

A first important classification Kant makes is that a duty of beneficence, and hence a duty to aid, should be understood as a duty of virtue, that is a duty that is geared towards a certain end (MoM 6:380,6:381), and not towards specific actions (MoM 6:389). For this kind of duty only the maxims of actions can be specified, not the actions itself, as the means to promote the happiness of others cannot be determined a priori. This classification seems to capture an important element of the duty to aid: this duty is geared towards the end of assisting the poor and a wide variety of actions can be performed to achieve this end. Hence, this duty does not prescribe specific actions for the agent.

Another important distinction is that the duty to aid is a wide duty, meaning that the agent has a certain latitude in her judgement on how precisely to fulfil it. This also seems especially fitting for a duty to aid the poor, as there is a large variety of actions that the agent can perform to actually aid the

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8 Approaching a duty to aid the poor from a Kantian perspective sets it apart from the approach some other philosophers take towards a duty to aid as well, even though they also understand this duty as a general one. The fundamental assumptions that are underlying the utilitarian duty to aid that Peter Singer discusses for instance in his famous article 'Famine, Affluence and Morality', (in Philosophy & Public Affairs, 1972) are very alien to the Kantian framework. Less alien, but still distant, is the way rights-based theories understand a duty to aid the poor (see for instance Henry Shue, Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence and U.S. Foreign Policy, 2nd ed., Princeton University Press, 1996).


10 The literature on this is extensive. Well-known neo-Kantians such as Christine Korsgaard and Barbara Herman are for instance interesting sources on this topic. For a historical overview of the classification of duties see Wolfgang Kersting, Das starke Gesetz der Schuldigkeit und das schwachere der Gutigkeit, Studia Leibnizia, Band XIV/2, 1982, 184-220.

poor and therefore it has to be left to the judgement of the agent to decide what the best course of action is within a given context.

Kant differentiates also between duties of virtue that are meritorious and those that are owed (MoM 6:448). Duties that are owed are duties that other people have a right to in some way, even if this right cannot be enforced through external powers, as is always the case for duties of virtue. To meritorious duties people do not have a right, these are exactly duties to do more than what is being owed. This classification has consequences for how failures to fulfill these duties are being understood by Kant: a failure to fulfill a meritorious duty is a lack of virtue, as no one is being wronged in this case; a failure to fulfill a duty that is owed is a vice, as this infringes upon someone's lawful claim. The duty of respect is an example of a duty that is owed; this duty is the maxim of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person, or the maxim not to degrade any other to a mere means to my ends (MoM 6:449, 6:450). Kant thinks duties of respect are always expressed negatively and are narrow, which makes them the odd one out amongst the duties of virtue, of which Kant states that these are all wide. Even though Kant does not explicate this, one could assume that they nevertheless are classified as duties of virtue instead of duties of justice, as giving respect cannot be enforced externally.

A duty of beneficence on the other hand is classified by Kant as one that is meritorious, instead of one that is being owed.

Until now I have followed the classification Kant uses for a duty of beneficence in my examination of a duty to aid the poor, in the sense that a duty to aid should be understood as a wide duty of virtue. I think however that at this point we have to depart from Kant and argue instead that a duty to aid should be understood as a duty that is owed, and not one that is meritorious. The starting point for arguing in favour of a duty to aid as one that is being owed, is to make a distinction between different kinds of beneficence. Beneficence requires us to make the happiness of other people our end, but this can vary to making sure that their means of subsistence are being met, to giving them directions when they are lost. Here a distinction has to be made between the more and less significant forms of beneficence in terms of what they mean for the lives of human beings. It is clear that a duty to aid is a duty that deals with a very significant form of beneficence. It is for those types of duties of beneficence that I want to argue that they are owed, and are not duties that are meritorious. In those cases of beneficence that can be seen as less significant, there is no problem with classifying these as meritorious. As Kant himself makes no distinction between the different types of duties of beneficence, this route was not open to him.

Of the duties of virtue, Kant sees the duties of love (amongst which is the duty of beneficence)
as meritorious duties, while he sees duties of respect as duties that are being owed\textsuperscript{12}. The reason why the latter are taken as being owed I think, is because duties of respect are essential for preserving people’s dignity. It would be insufficient to classify duties of respect as meritorious, that do not carry an accompanying right, given the importance to acknowledge human dignity for all persons. A duty to aid the poor is concerned with human dignity in a similar vein; without the means of subsistence the human dignity of the poor cannot be properly acknowledged. If human dignity is the key factor for classifying duties of respect as duties that are owed, so should a duty to aid the poor be classified as such.

However, it might be the case that even though the two duties are similar in their protection of human dignity, there might be other differences between the two types that explain why Kant thinks one is owed and the other is meritorious. The main differences that might have this effect are: duties of respect are narrow, while a duty to aid is wide; and the former are negative, while the latter are positive. Regarding the first distinction, we can reply that a duty to aid being a wide duty does not rule out that it can be owed; after all, we can owe it to people to adopt a certain end. However, it is not the case that we can point to specific actions that are being owed and hence it is more difficult to assess whether the poor receive what they are owed, without making this impossible. The fact that a duty to aid is a wide duty might imply that the agent does not always aid every single poor person. This in contrast to the duties of respect, that tell us we always have to respect everybody. However, this difference should not rule out the duty to aid being classified as a duty that is owed, as \textit{potentially} the agent owes every poor person assistance. It is only because of the finite nature of human beings that this cannot always be implemented in practice. Regarding the second distinction (duties of respect being negative and a duty to aid being positive), it can be said that it is doubtful whether this distinction is indeed as black and white as it is stated here\textsuperscript{13}. Some duties of respect after all clearly require positive actions, for instance when one has to seek out the truth of what another person is saying, in order to avoid being contemptuous towards that person(MoM 6:463). Another point is that it is not the case that only negative duties can be owed; this can also be the case for positive duties, as we see for instance with the positive duties a parent can owe to her/his child.

Classifying a duty to aid as a duty that is owed instead of one that is meritorious has an advantage as well. Where meritorious duties impose a duty of gratitude upon the recipient, this is not the case for duties that are owed. This seems to establish the right kind of relationship between agent

\textsuperscript{12} For a very interesting article on the differences between duties of love and duties of respect, see Marcia Baron’s \textquoteleft Love and Respect in the Doctrine of Virtue\textquoteright.  
\textsuperscript{13} See for instance the above-mentioned article of Baron, pp. 397–400.
and recipient; not one in which the recipient should be grateful for the received assistance, but one in which the assistance is what is due to her.

The above given analysis of a general duty to aid the poor has given us a better understanding of the nature of this duty. It is a duty that tells us to adopt a certain end, that is to aid the poor, and the agent is allowed latitude in her judgement how to specifically fulfil this duty. Because of the crucial role this duty plays in the preservation of human dignity, it is a duty that is owed and not one that is meritorious. In the following section I will examine how demanding this duty is for the individual agent and what restrictions can be imposed upon this duty within a Kantian framework.

2. Kantian restrictions on a duty to aid the poor
A duty to aid imposes certain demands upon the agent, that is it requires the agent to do certain things to fulfill her duty. These demands could be expressed in terms of sacrifices: those things the agent is required to give up on the grounds of her duty. This is in line with the vocabulary used by Kant. When discussing the limits that can be assigned to what should be done on the grounds of a duty of beneficence, Kant talks about the sacrifices that have to be made because of this duty (MoM 6:393). Even though Kantian moral theory does not calculate the pros and cons of a certain action in the way utilitarianism does, it nevertheless does need to concern itself with the demandingness of duties. Human agents cannot fulfill an unlimited amount of demands and this has to be taken into account by any moral theory.

Regarding the demandingness of a duty of beneficence, Kant states that it is impossible to assign determinate limits to the extent of the sacrifice that is required by a duty of beneficence (MoM 6:393). This depends he thinks in large part on what each person's true needs are in view of his sensibilities, and it must be left to each agent to decide this for herself. I do agree with this, as only within a specific context can we understand what the limits are precisely. However, I do think that at a more abstract level certain principles can be found that impose general restrictions upon the demands a duty to aid makes. These restrictions can only be formulated in general terms and will have to get their concrete specification when applied to a certain context. When examining the demandingness of a duty to aid, it is these restrictions that we should focus on. Once it has been established what these restrictions are, it has also become clear that something can be said about the demandingness of a duty to aid at a general level.

When taking a first look at the demandingness of a duty to aid, it seems that this duty can be pretty demanding for an agent. If trying to alleviate world poverty should be adopted as the agent's end, a huge variety of actions can be required of the agent. In the best possible world, best with regard
to the fulfilment of one's duty, the demands might be small: if the poverty in the world is not severe and easily resolvable, and if every agent that has a duty to aid the poor actually fulfils her duty. But in a worse possible world this picture changes: when the poverty in the world is very severe and/or difficult to resolve, and there are not many agents who indeed have adopted the alleviation of poverty as their end, the picture that emerges is a completely different one. In that case to achieve the end of alleviating world poverty becomes very demanding for the agent.

And there are other demands to take into account as well. Linked to a duty to aid the poor are other, additional duties. Kant for instance mentions that even though we do not have a duty to share the sufferings of the poor, we do have a duty to sympathize actively in their fate. This creates an additional duty to a duty to aid, that is a duty to cultivate the natural feelings of compassion we have. Therefore Kant states we should not avoid the places where the poor can be found, but we should actively seek them out. This will assist us in fulfilling our duty to aid the poor, be it motivationally or epistemologically. Generally speaking, to be able to properly fulfil a duty to aid, we are required to gain proper knowledge about the situation of the poor, to create the appropriate feelings with regard to the poor, and to do our duty from the proper motivation. These requirements create indirect, additional duties that support a duty to aid. So when examining the demandingness of a duty to aid, it has to be taken into account that it is not only this duty that imposes demands, but that demands are also imposed by the additional duties that support it.

One way of restricting the demandingness of a duty to aid is by pointing to the fact that it is a wide duty, that leaves the agent with significant latitude in the judgement on how to fulfil it. The implications this has for the demandingness depends upon one's interpretation of the notion of wide duty. There is considerable disagreement on this. For some philosophers the wide nature of a duty to aid seems to imply that one can also determine when one is going to provide aid, for others it allows latitude only in how much aid one should provide in order to fulfil this duty, or just in how one provides this aid. Thomas E.Hill\textsuperscript{14} for instance holds the first position. He thinks a Kantian duty of beneficence is often being interpreted as requiring too much. He argues instead that the fact that it is a wide duty means that we only sometimes have to do $x$, where $x$ is what is being required of us by the duty. If this is the case for a duty of beneficence on the grounds of it being a wide duty, then it also holds for a duty to aid the poor. However, I do not agree with Hill's position; a genuine commitment to a duty to aid and hence the end to try to alleviate poverty cannot mean that we sometimes have to provide aid to the poor; we should always be focused on opportunities to aid the poor\textsuperscript{15}. If this was not the case, it could

\textsuperscript{15} Note that this does not mean that the agent always has to fulfill her duty to aid; after all, this duty might be (partly)
not be said that we are really committed to the end of trying to alleviate poverty. Support for this can be found in Kant's Vorarbeiten zur Tugendlehre. Here he states that wide, imperfect duties leave it up to the judgement of the agent in what way and to what extent the duty is fulfilled. This clearly refers to the how and to what extent, but not to the when in leaving latitude for judgement.

The latitude that follows from the duty to aid being wide then, has to do with how the agent fulfils this duty and to what extent. As said, there is a large set of actions that could aid the poor; a duty to aid can therefore not specifically prescribe how one should fulfill this duty. The agent has to do as much as possible in terms of alleviating poverty on grounds of this duty, but the latitude of the duty gives permission to limit one maxim of duty by another and because of this it is not clear to what extent the agent needs to fulfill her duty to aid. From this once again, a potentially extremely demanding picture seems to emerge. However, restrictions can be imposed and I will now examine what guidance Kant gives us in this respect.

Even though we have seen that Kant does not assign specific limits to what should be done based on a duty of beneficence, he does say a few general things regarding to what extent we should fulfill this duty. He states that one should not expand so many resources in practicing beneficence that one comes to need the beneficence of others (MoM 6:454). The underlying idea of this comment is not completely clear. Kant might be focusing here on the importance of remaining independent.

At another place Kant seems to become more specific: we should not promote other's happiness at the sacrifice of our own happiness, or our true needs (MoM 6:393). Here happiness is interpreted narrowly as our true needs, instead of the broader definition he gives elsewhere of happiness as 'that complete well-being and satisfaction with one's condition'. Barbara Herman understands the notion of true needs as the material conditions of rational agency; following that interpretation a duty to aid cannot demand of the agent to sacrifice the conditions of her rational agency. Concluding, I would say that Kant provides us with a starting point to examine the demandingness of a duty to aid by giving an indication of some restrictions that should be imposed upon the duty. However, the picture is not yet complete. As said, I think it is possible within the Kantian framework to say more on the

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17 This quote is taken from Wolfgang Kersting's article 'Das starke Gesetz der Schuldigkeit und das schwachere der Gutigkeit'. "Gebietet das Gesetz nun nicht unmittelbar die Handlung sondern nur die Maxime der Handlung lasst er dem Urtheil des Subjects frey die Art wie und das Maas in welchem Grad das Gebotene ausgeubt werden solle nur dass so viel als uns unter den gegeben Bedingungen moglich ist davon zu thun notwendig sey so ist die Verbindlichkeit unvollkommen und das Gesetz nicht von enger sondern nur weiter Verbindlichkeit late obligans" (23,394).

demandingness of a duty to aid and the restrictions that can be imposed upon it. In the following section I will try to establish what these restrictions are.

3. Additional restrictions on a duty to aid the poor

Examining what restrictions can be imposed upon a duty to aid warrants much more space than I can use here; the discussion of the possible restrictions therefore necessarily has to be brief. Before we continue, it is important to introduce some distinctions between the different kinds of restrictions. First, there are those restrictions that still play a part in a world that is the best possible world in terms of being able to fulfill one's duty to aid, and there are those restrictions that only play a part when the empirical circumstances are less ideal. The restrictions Kant mentioned above fall under the first category. I will start with discussing the restrictions that are also valid in the best possible world. When focusing on this type of restrictions, a further classification has to be made between agent-related restrictions and other-regarding restrictions. The former are restrictions that follow from moral considerations directly related to the agent herself, having to do with for instance her ambitions, her projects or her life as such. The latter are restrictions that are grounded in moral considerations we have towards other human beings in general, or to human beings we have a special relationship with. The above-mentioned restrictions given by Kant all fall under the category of agent-related restrictions; they state what the agent cannot be required to sacrifice herself. The second category on the other hand would state what sacrifices the agent could not be required to impose upon others in order to fulfill her duty to aid. I will look into the former category first.

The following three paragraphs are a very brief summary of a part of my thesis, which we have discussed at much greater length the previous time when we were discussing a paper of mine. Therefore, you might want to skip the next three paragraphs.

If we want to determine what agent-related restrictions can be imposed, it is best to start off with that restriction that excludes the least sacrifices; if this restriction can be defended, we can examine whether less exclusive restrictions can also be defended. The final sacrifice the agent can make is the one after which she is no longer capable of doing anything to fulfill her duty to aid. At first sight it could be thought that this final sacrifice would be what Kant calls the agent's true needs. As said, Barbara Herman interprets this as the material conditions of rational agency19. However, being rational in itself is not yet sufficient for fulfilling moral duties. If one is capable of rational deliberation, one is not necessarily capable of moral deliberation. For that reason we should say that the agent has to be a

moral agent in order to be capable of fulfilling her duties. The notion which therefore seems to capture best the final sacrifice that the agent can make is that of moral agency. Only when the agent can still be considered as a moral agent is she capable of fulfilling any demands a duty to aid imposes upon her. Focusing on moral agency alone is not sufficient here; the conditions necessary for this moral agency have to be taken into account as well, as without these moral agency is not possible.

The agent-related restriction this gives us is that a duty to aid cannot require of the agent to give up her moral agency and/or its conditions. This restriction can be defended by showing that the maxim 'give up your moral agency and/or its conditions if you can thereby aid the poor' cannot be made into a universal law. This is the case because agents cannot will such a law, but also because this law would conflict internally. On the one hand the duty to aid requires us to be moral agents, as otherwise we would not be capable of fulfilling it. On the other hand, this duty requires us to give up our moral agency and/or its conditions, thereby undermining the preconditions for its own fulfilment, or put even stronger, the conditions for its existence as such, as without moral agents there will be no duties. Another route that could be taken to argue for the exclusion of moral agency from the demands of a duty to aid, is that requiring the agent to sacrifice her moral agency would mean treating the agent not as an end in itself, but purely as a means. Properly treating an agent as an end would mean that her moral agency is to be respected.

It is difficult to find an argument with the same strength that excludes more extensive sacrifices, as in these cases the possibility of actually fulfilling one's duty are not undermined. Another possible candidate for sacrifices that cannot be demanded of the agent is for instance the sacrifice of one’s possibilities for further development, that is the development above and beyond that which is needed for one's moral agency. A maxim including these sacrifices does not entail the same internal conflict when made into a universal law as we saw being the case with moral agency. At a general level it is therefore only moral agency and/or its conditions which are sacrifices that can never be required of the agent. More extensive sacrifices might sometimes be excluded, but this will depend on the circumstances.

But it is possible to say a little more about sacrifices that sometimes might be excluded, by focusing on the relation between the sacrifices of the agent and the gains these give to the poor. An argument can be given that these should be linked in some way and this can lead to another agent-related restriction. A possible candidate for this restriction is that some sort of priority should be given to the agent over the poor in terms of what the agent is required to do for herself and what she should do for others. This priority can be defended by pointing to the special and unique position the agent has towards herself, that she does not have towards other people. This provides a ground for defending
that the agent has special duties towards herself, duties that are also acknowledged by Kant. Assigning priority to the agent relative to the recipient hence can be defended on the grounds that the agent possesses special duties towards herself, that she does not possess towards the poor, and that (partly) override a general duty to aid the poor. In cases where it is only possible to either alleviate one's own poverty or that of others, we can give priority to ourselves, on the grounds that we have a special duty to aid ourselves, but only a general duty to aid others. Here is it is assumed that a special duty gets priority over a general duty, if both have the same subject matter, for instance to alleviate poverty. Matters become more complicated however, if the subject matter of the duties differs. In cases where the subject matter of the special duty towards ourselves is not to alleviate poverty, it is more difficult to determine whether the special duty towards ourselves overrides the general duty to aid the poor. In that case the underlying values of these duties have to be assessed, but it will be difficult to say anything about this at a general level, barring some easy cases. This will have to be resolved within the specific context, using the agent’s judgement.

So far, I have only focused on agent-related restrictions, not on other-regarding restrictions, that is those restrictions that are grounded in moral considerations we have towards other human beings in general, or to human beings we have a special relationship with. The first type of other-regarding restrictions limits what an agent has to do unto others in order to fulfill her duty to aid. For instance, an agent cannot be morally required to murder someone if this would alleviate world poverty\(^{20}\), nor is it morally permissible to do so. It seems to be the case here that duties of right restrict duties of virtue. However, while this may be right for most cases, one can wonder whether in some cases it should not be the other way around. If I would break a promise to return the money today which I have borrowed from a wealthy friend, in order to use the money to save the lives of ten poor people for certain, this could be considered the morally right thing to do. I would therefore like to argue that duties of virtue, such as a duty to aid, could sometimes restrict duties of right. This is not in line with Kant’s ideas on this at all; his well-known example of the murderer who enquires where our friend is, tells us that we should not lie to the murderer in order to aid our friend.

However, it can be wondered whether one wants to follow the same strict line Kant takes. Without lapsing into some sort of consequentialism, it should be possible to take into account the significance of the underlying considerations of the different duties agents have. In that way one could defend that it is morally permissible, and maybe even morally required, not to keep one's promise in order to aid some poor people. In that case the maxim of a duty to aid is able to limit the maxim of such

\(^{20}\) Note that this also imposes an agent-related restriction, as the agent's moral agency would be affected if he committed such a crime. In this part however, I solely want to focus on how the other is being affected.
a duty of right. How and when one maxim can limit the other is something that largely has to be determined within a specific context. I also do not think that all duties of right can be limited by a duty to aid; all those duties of right having to do with inflicting harm on another will be overriding. In general it can be said that the maxims of duties of right will limit the maxims of duties of virtue, as the former are perfect and narrow and allow for less latitude. In some cases however one should argue differently I think. That this is so might sometimes be obvious, but in the majority of cases it will be difficult to establish this.

This point definitely requires much more argumentation than I have given it here! I am still thinking about how to deal with this properly.

It is also possible that an agent has a general duty to aid and also possesses another general duty of virtue, which she cannot fulfill both. Their both being wide duties, Kant agrees that the maxim of one can be limited by the other. As a duty to aid in most of these cases will deal with things that are more significant for human beings as such, it is likely that the maxim of a duty to aid will limit the other maxim. Again in this case, the judgement of the agent, taking into account the specific context, will play an important part.

The second type of other-regarding restrictions that has to be taken into account are those restrictions based on the special relationship the agent has with for instance her relatives, friends, or compatriots. In line with agent-related restrictions, we can argue that priority should be given to the near and dear based on the special duties the agent has towards them. An agent has a general duty to aid the poor, but when her near and dear are living in poverty she has an additional special duty, based on the relationship she has with them, to alleviate their poverty. From this additional special duty follows that she should give priority to her near and dear when aiding the poor. If the agent would not give priority to aiding her friend over a stranger, assuming the situation of the two is fully equal, this would undermine the idea of having special relationships as such.

However, it has to be taken into account here that even within the realm of absolute poverty some variations in the severity of poverty are possible. It can therefore be the case that the poverty of a stranger the agent can help is more severe than that of her near and dear. In that case it has to be determined how much priority one can be allowed to give to one’s near and dear, in a similar vein as has to be done when the agent has special duties towards her near and dear, which are other duties than duties to alleviate their poverty. This priority deals more with what it is permissible for the agent to do, than with what the agent is required to do. The latter we were focusing on when discussing a general duty to aid the poor being limited by the special duty to aid the poor near and dear. Establishing the former type of priority in a precise manner is not possible at a general level. What can be said about it
at a general level however, is that the agent at the one hand has to have a serious commitment to the end of alleviating poverty, while on the other hand the conditions for relationships with the near and dear should not be undermined. As alleviating poverty is such an important goal to achieve, the priority given to the near and dear can only be a limited one.

In the beginning of this part, I have made the distinction between restrictions that still play a part in a world that is the best possible world in terms of being able to fulfill one's duty to aid, and restrictions that only play a part when the empirical circumstances are less ideal. I now want to focus on the latter type of restrictions. Kant is aware of the role the circumstances the agent finds herself in can play when she has to fulfill her duty. He writes for instance that for a rich man it is not meritorious to do his duty of beneficence, but for a person with limited means the virtue of doing this duty is much greater. Neo-Kantians such as Barbara Herman and Onora O'Neill\textsuperscript{21} also emphasise the importance of the specific contexts of action in relation to a duty of beneficence. Discussing the general duty of beneficence, Herman points to the epistemological aspects, saying that what we can make of another's ends will vary with our situation and our relationship to them\textsuperscript{22}. O'Neill points to the fact that the needs of other people can vary wildly and this I think holds even when we are focusing on the poor only, as variations in the level of poverty are possible. The background against which poverty exists also makes a difference; as O'Neill points out the requirements of a duty to aid the poor are different in a wholly unjust world than in a world that is just (FoH 146)\textsuperscript{23}. In the former world, there is much more scope and need for helping the poor, as a duty of beneficence in part has to take care of what is normally taken care of by justice.

The examples given above show us that empirical circumstances do play a part in how well the agent can fulfil her duty, how extensive this duty can be, and the moral worth the fulfilment of this duty has. Further, it shows that it is possible to discuss this at a general level, without straightaway entering the domain of casuistry. This indicates that it is important to take these circumstances into account when examining the demandingness of a duty to aid the poor. Much help from Kant cannot be expected here, as he does not want to deal with empirical circumstances specifically, but it should be possible to stay in line with the Kantian framework when examining this.

A range of different factors can be identified that are part of the empirical context and that can affect the demandingness of a duty to aid. The first factor is that of the level of compliance with the duty. It might be the case that the majority of those people that possess a duty to aid does not fulfil it.


\textsuperscript{22} Barbara Herman, 'The Scope of Moral Requirement', p.234.

\textsuperscript{23} Onora O'Neill, \textit{Faces of Hunger}, p. 146.
As a duty to aid is a duty geared towards the end of alleviating poverty, the demandingness of this duty will indirectly increase in a situation of non-compliance, as for the individual agent the available set of actions for achieving this end is now much larger. Hence, in a situation of non-compliance the demandingness of a duty to aid increases. Second, the capacities of the agent play a role; these do not affect the demandingness of a duty to aid as demandingness is defined in terms of sacrifices, which can capture the subjective differences that exist between agents with regard to the efforts a particular action requires. The rich man might for instance be required to donate ten times more money than the poor, while what they are required to do in terms of sacrifices is equal. Third, as pointed out above by O'Neill, the level of poverty of the poor affects the demandingness. The lower the level of poverty, the lower the demandingness of a duty to aid. Fourth, there might be empirical difficulties that complicate fulfilling her duty for the agent, or make it more extensive, such as in the unjust world O'Neill was talking about. These will increase the demands the duty to aid imposes upon the agent. Finally, the epistemological difficulties have to be taken into account that were amongst others pointed out by Herman; it is more difficult to aid someone if we have limited knowledge of how and when to aid them. In this case the demandingness of the duty to aid will be lowered.

Conclusion
In this paper I have first given an analysis of a duty to aid the poor in Kantian terms; this analysis served as the basis for examining the demandingness of this duty. A duty to aid is a duty that is geared towards a certain end, namely to alleviate poverty, it has a wide nature and it is a duty that is owed. The demandingness of this duty at first sight seemed to be extensive. However, it became clear that different kind of restrictions could be imposed upon a duty to aid, limiting the demands it can impose upon the agent. The primary distinctions that I have made between the restrictions are those that are agent-related and those that are other-regarding on the one hand, and those that still play a part in the best possible world for fulfilling a duty to aid and those that only play a part in specific empirical circumstances.

We have seen that agent-related restrictions tell us that the agent can never be required to give up her moral agency and/or its conditions, and that on the grounds of the fact that she is an I she is allowed to give some priority to herself over others, the extent of which has to be determined in the context. Other-regarding restrictions allow the agent to give some priority to her near and dear, but not so much that this makes it impossible for her to be seriously committed to the end of alleviating poverty. In a less ideal world for fulfilling one's duty we have seen that there are several factors from the empirical world that possibly might have an effect on the demandingness of a duty to aid. In a
situation of non-compliance a duty to aid becomes more demanding, while the demands might decrease when confronted with empirical or epistemological difficulties, or lower levels of poverty.

Concluding, it can be said that a duty to aid the poor is quite demanding for the individual agent under unfavourable circumstances, but that these demands are being restricted by considerations that are linked to the value moral agency and special relationships have for the agent. Another way in which the demands might be lowered, which has not been discussed in this paper, is by the individual agents organising themselves collectively, thereby fulfilling their duty to aid in a more efficient manner. To take this into account, we have to take into account the collective level, which surpasses the aim of this paper just to deal with the individual level.