Evaluating the formula of Universal Law

Evaluating the contradiction in conception test:
1. Works best when the maxim is, in effect, to exploit a social practice unfairly. This involves:
   (i) benefiting from a social practice
   (ii) that would not exist if no one contributed to it,
   (iii) without contributing to it oneself.
E.g. unfairly exploiting the practice of lending money.

False negatives: No duty where there should be one

2. Some maxims could be universal laws, even though there are narrow, perfect duties not to act on them.
   • “Cause gratuitous, but not incapacitating pain to others.”

False positives: A duty where there shouldn’t be one

3. Some maxims could not be universal laws, even though there is no duty not to act on them.
   • “Do not have children, in order to devote oneself to posterity.” (Parfit)

4. Some maxims could not be universal laws, because they depend on the existence of social practices, and even so, there is no duty not to act on them.
   • “Lie to bounty hunters to let slaves escape.”
     The practice of telling the truth to bounty hunters is not valuable.
   • “Buy only used cars.”
     The practice of reselling cars is valuable, but one isn’t exploiting it unfairly.

Evaluating the contradiction in the will test:
1. What is it that we can rationally will?

2. False positives are still a problem. And the contradiction in the will test leads to new false positives.
   • “Don’t be a farmer.”
     Although we can conceive such a world, we cannot rationally will such a world.

3. Handles false negatives that the contradiction in conception test could not.
   • “Cause gratuitous, but not incapacitating pain to others.”
     Even if we can conceive such a world, we cannot rationally will such a world.

4. Also handles some false negatives in ordinary thought.
   • Individually, we think: “What difference does my act make?”
   • But if all of us think this way, the consequences are disastrous.
   • The contradiction in the will test forces us to consider the larger patterns of group behavior of which our individual actions are parts. (E.g. climate change.)

5. But still produces some false negatives:
   • “Don’t use violence—unless others are, in which case kill as many people as you can.”
   • “Serve only white people at your lunch counter.”