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MORAL WORTH*

Sometimes a person does the right thing without earning our admiration. The reader of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*[1] is told of the protagonist:

> She sewed clothes for the poor, she sent wood to women in childbirth; and on coming home one day, Charles found three tramps eating soup in the kitchen. Her little girl, whom her husband had sent back to the nurse during her illness, returned home. She wanted to teach her to read; even Berthe's crying no longer irritated her. She was resigned, universally tolerant. Her speech was full of elevated expressions. She would say: "Is your stomach-ache any better, my angel" (*ibid.*, p. 155)?

Flaubert does not admire Madame Bovary for her charity, referring to her as "indulging" in "excessive charity." But why? It is hardly morally wrong for her to do so much. But Madame Bovary's good works are taken up, briefly, after a long illness brought about by the traumatic end of her first extramarital affair, and she loses her interest in orphans as soon as her next lover comes along.

Madame Bovary's actions appear motivated by a mere infatuation with morality. Perhaps her actions are "indulgent" in that, even though she desires to be moral and performs her good works because they are moral, she has an ulterior motive of sorts. Like the romantic who is in love not with her lover but with love, Madame Bovary seems to be in love not so much with morality as with the romance of morality. To desire to become the kind of person who cares about

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[1] Paul de Man, trans. (New York: Norton, 1965).

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morality may be a worthy motive, but something about Madame Bovary's dwelling upon the long-trimmed trains of these ladies' long gowns, something about the quasi-sexual passion with which she kisses the image of Christ seems suspicious. Why the same actions prompt us to praise—or blame—some agents much less than others is what I shall call the *question of moral worth.*

I. A FEW CLARIFICATIONS

The moral worth of an action is the extent to which the agent deserves moral praise or blame for performing the action, the extent to which the action speaks well of the agent. I shall speak interchangeably of a *morally praiseworthy action* and an *action which has positive moral worth.* In deviation from the Kantian use of the term 'moral worth', I shall also speak interchangeably of an action with *negative moral worth* as an action for which the agent is blameworthy and as a *morally blameworthy action.*

Obviously, the extent to which an agent deserves praise or blame for her action depends substantially on the action's *moral desirability*: whether it is right or wrong, or how grave a wrong it is, or whether it is the best possible action. But two actions that are equal in moral desirability may be of different moral worth. To give a simple example, two people may donate equally to Oxfam, but one of them may do so out of compassion, while the other does so purely at the urgings of her accountant. Even if the two agents' deeds are equally morally desirable, it is not true that both deserve the same praise. Similarly, a person rude to her colleagues due to the stress caused by grave news may merit less blame than a genius rude to her colleagues due to her indifference to "lesser minds."

While this distinction between *moral desirability* and *moral worth* appears trivial, it is often ignored. One hears that "Kantians are concerned with the motives for our actions, while utilitarians only care about the results," but paying attention to the distinction between moral desirability and moral worth reveals the falsity of the classroom cliché. When it comes to moral desirability, Kantians are interested in whether the action, under a certain description, is permitted by a universal law. Recall Immanuel Kant's prudent grocer, who prices his merchandise fairly because a reputation for honesty tends to increase his profit. Despite the prudent grocer's unimpressive motive, Kant never denies that the grocer does *the right thing.* In this sense, Kantians care about more than motives alone. On the other hand, when it comes to moral worth, utilitarians are free to be as concerned with motives as Kantians. In fact, just as John Stuart

Mill[2] repeats the claim that the rightness or wrongfulness of actions has nothing to do with the agent's motives, he also repeats the claim that motives are relevant to our moral evaluation of the agent:

> ...the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent.... The motive, that is, the feeling which makes him will so to do, if it makes no difference in the act, makes none in the morality [of the act]; though *it makes a great difference in our moral estimation of the agent* (*ibid.*, pp. 17-18; italics added).

As the moral worth of an action is the "estimation" merited by the agent for the action, it is not implausible to think of Mill as allowing motives to be relevant to the moral worth of actions, even if they have nothing to do with rightness or wrongfulness. More important, putting interpretive issues aside, it is quite consistent to view the moral desirability of actions as depending entirely on their consequences, and the moral worth of actions as depending partly on motive. One can believe that giving to charity is desirable because it promotes happiness, but that an agent giving to charity out of a desire for this end merits more praise than does her counterpart who is merely concerned with her tax situation.[3]

II. RESPONSIVENESS TO MORAL REASONS

Consider again the prudent grocer. One need not know the details of Kant's discussion to agree that a grocer motivated solely by concern for profit is not particularly praiseworthy for pricing fairly. One is happy the grocer does the right thing, but feels it is a mere accident, for which one is not inclined to give the grocer moral credit. But what, exactly, makes it accidental? It is *not* simply the fact that the profit motive does not reliably produce moral actions. We can imagine a world in which some invisible hand makes the profit motive reliably produce morally right actions, place Kant's grocer in that world, and still not free ourselves from the sense that there is something accidental in his acting well. It is accidental in the same way it is accidental that a person reading Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* for the love of scandal reads an aesthetically superior book. The scandal lover is attracted to *Lolita* for reasons that are of no interest to the aesthetician, and Kant's grocer is attracted to fair pricing for reasons

[2] *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979).

[3] Note that the moral worth of an action is the extent to which the agent deserves praise or blame for the action, not the extent to which the agent should be morally praised or blamed for it. The purpose of this work is to capture the conditions under which praise or blame is *warranted*, not those under which it is *required*. See my "Hamlet and the Utilitarians," *Philosophical Studies*, XCIX (2000): 45-57.

that are of no interest to the ethicist. The salient feature of Kant's case is that the grocer's action does not stem from any responsiveness on his part to moral reasons. In pricing fairly, the grocer acts for a reason that has nothing to do with morality, or with the features of his action which makes it morally right. His *reasons for action* do not correspond to the action's *right-making features*, suggesting:

> *Praiseworthiness as responsiveness to moral reasons*: for an agent to be morally praiseworthy for doing the right thing is for her to have done the right thing for the relevant moral reasons, that is, the reasons making it right.

Kant appeals to this idea when he argues that only the good will is necessarily good, and Aristotle appeals to it when he explains that defending one's city would not be virtuous if motivated by desire for fame. Thus, it may look tempting, or even trivial, to move to the more elegant Kantian claim that morally praiseworthy actions are all and only those right actions performed "from duty," or the venerable Aristotelian view that to act virtuously, one needs to perform fine actions "for the sake of the fine." But as these claims are often understood, this would be an error. Usually, "acting from duty" and "acting for the sake of the fine" are taken to indicate acting for reasons *believed* or *known* to be moral reasons; but it can be shown that moral worth is fundamentally about acting for moral reasons, not about acting for reasons believed or known to be such.

III. MORAL RESPONSIVENESS VERSUS CONCERN FOR MORALITY

Consider the Kantian claim that all and only morally praiseworthy right actions—or, in his language, all and only dutiful actions that "have moral worth"—are performed from duty. In her "On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty," Barbara Herman[4] phrases the doctrine of the motive of duty in the following way:

> For a motive to be a moral motive, it must provide the agent with an interest in the general rightness of his actions. And when we say that an action has moral worth, we mean to indicate (at the very least) that the agent acted dutifully from an interest in the rightness of his action: an interest that therefore makes its being a right action the non-accidental effect of the agent's concern (*ibid.*, p. 6).

But for a right action to have (positive) moral worth, it is neither sufficient nor necessary that it stem from the agent's interest in the rightness of his action. To see that it is not *sufficient*, one can look at cases in which an agent does the right thing out of concern for doing

[4] In *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1993), pp. 1-22.

the right thing, and still the fact that he did the right thing appears accidental. This can happen when the agent has a mistaken view of morality. Consider:

> "The Extremist": after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, some Jewish extremists expressed the opinion that the murder was horrible mostly because it involved a Jew killing a Jew. Imagine for a moment that Ron is such an extremist, believing deeply that killing a person is not generally immoral, but that killing a fellow Jew is. Ron would very much like to kill Tamara, but he refrains from doing so, because he wants to do the right thing, and he believes the right thing to do is not to kill Jews like Tamara.

Here Ron does the right thing—refrain from killing Tamara—because he wants to do the right thing and believes, rightly, that refraining from killing would be the right thing to do. He does not, however, do the right thing for the relevant moral reasons, Tamara's ethnicity being morally irrelevant—hence the impression that it is merely *accidental* that Ron does the right thing. Ron is not morally praiseworthy for his inaction, for he is unmoved by the morally relevant reasons, but rather by reasons he mistakenly believes to be morally relevant.

The story of Ron shows that for an agent to be morally praiseworthy for acting well it is not sufficient that she act on a desire to do what is right. One might suggest instead that one is morally praiseworthy for acting well if and only if one acts on a desire to do what is right and has moral knowledge, or knowledge of the virtues. Perhaps this formulation would better capture Kant's view, and it certainly appears to be Aristotle's. But even if acting on a desire to do what is right assisted by knowledge of the right is sufficient for granting one's good deeds moral worth, it is not necessary for it. Consider cases in which a person does the right thing for moral reasons, but does not in any way act out of a desire to do the right thing. It is exactly ignorance of the virtues, or lack of moral knowledge, that can lead a person to this state. The same ignorance that led the extremist to mistake racist reasons for moral reasons can sometimes cause a person to mistake moral reasons—for which he acts—for something else.

Consider first what I have called *inverse akrasia*,[5] a term referring to the phenomenon in which an agent does the right thing, but does so against her best judgment. Donald Davidson[6] points out that, contra Aristotle, akrasia does not always involve an agent's doing something

[5] "Praise, Blame, and the Whole Self," *Philosophical Studies*, XCIII (1998): 161-88.
[6] *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford, 1980), see p. 31.

she should not do—it need only involve an agent's doing something that she thinks she should not do. If we were to believe that the average person *should* brush his teeth every night, Davidson's well-known case of the man who decides not to brush his teeth but brushes them anyway would be a case of inverse akrasia.[7] Some cases of inverse akrasia are quite clearly cases in which an agent accidentally does something that happens to be right, that is, cases of right action without moral worth. But some cases of inverse akrasia are also cases of morally praiseworthy action.

In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,[8] Huckleberry befriends Jim and helps him escape from slavery. While Huckleberry and Jim are together on their raft, Huckleberry is plagued by what he calls "conscience." He believes, as everyone in his society "knows," that helping a slave escape amounts to stealing, and stealing is wrong. He also believes that one should be helpful and loyal to one's friends, but loyalty to friends is outweighed by some things, such as property rights, and does Miss Watson, Jim's owner, not have property rights? Hoping to find some excuse not to turn Jim in, Huckleberry deliberates. He is not very good at abstract deliberation, and it never occurs to him to doubt what his society considers common sense. Thus, he fails to find a loophole. "What has poor Miss Watson done to me," he berates himself, "that I can see her nigger go away and say nothing at all?" Having thus deliberated, Huckleberry resolves to turn Jim in, because it is "the right thing." But along comes a perfect opportunity, and he finds himself psychologically unable to do it. He accuses himself of being a weak-willed boy who has not "the spunk of a rabbit," and decides that being moral is such a hard and thankless task that he might as well give up and remain a bad boy. Obviously, Huckleberry does the right thing, but does he merit praise? The answer to this question depends on our reconstruction of his motives, but, on at least some, Huckleberry is morally praiseworthy for his action. If Huckleberry were to help Jim because of the operation, within himself, of some purely atavistic mechanism—akin, perhaps, to the human tendency to favor animals with infantile appearance

[7] Other cases of inverse akrasia are described in Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge, 1988); Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is Akratic Action Always Irrational?," in Owen Flanagan and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, eds., *Identity, Character and Morality* (Cambridge: MIT, 1990), pp. 379-400; and Robert Audi, "Weakness of Will and Rational Action," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, LXVIII (1990): 271-81. The case of Neoptolemus as described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* also counts as a case of inverse akrasia, so long as we have a Davidsonian and not an Aristotelian concept of akrasia in mind.

[8] *The Works of Mark Twain*, Volume 8 (Berkeley: California, 1988).

(big eyes, and the like)—we would not regard his action as morally praiseworthy, because he would not be acting for reasons at all. This is, perhaps, what Kant thinks about when he talks of acting out of "mere inclination," and it is the interpretation favored by Jonathan Bennett,[9] who sees Huckleberry as merely squeamish, soft-hearted, unable to see a man in chains. In this interpretation, Huckleberry is a racist boy who accidentally does something good. There is a version of the story, however, in which Huckleberry is morally praiseworthy for his action.[10] In this scenario, his visceral experience of black people is inconsistent with his "official" racist views. There are people who sport liberal views but cross the road when a person of a different race appears. Huckleberry, on this reading, is the opposite: racist in conscious opinion but viscerally more egalitarian. This discrepancy widens during the time he spends with Jim. Talking to Jim and interacting with him, Huckleberry constantly perceives data (never deliberated upon) that amount to the impression that Jim is a full person, just like Huckleberry himself. While he never deliberates on his perceptions,[11] they prompt him increasingly to act toward Jim as a friend. Twain makes it very easy for the boy to perceive that Jim is very similar to him: Jim shares Huckleberry's language, knowledge, ignorance, and superstitions; and all-in-all it does not take the genius of Mill to see that there is no particular reason to think of one of them as inferior to the other. That Huckleberry begins to perceive Jim as a fellow human being is suggested when Huckleberry finds himself, to his surprise, *apologizing* to Jim—an action unthinkable in a society treating black men as subhuman. Contra Rosalind Hursthouse,[12] my point is not simply that Huckleberry does not have the belief that his action is moral on his mind while he acts. He does not have the belief that what he does is right *anywhere* in his head—this moral insight is exactly what eludes him. Yet when the opportunity

[9] "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," *Philosophy*, XLIX (1974): 123-34.

[10] For an alternative, sophisticated treatment of Huckleberry Finn, see Thomas Hill, "Four Conceptions of Conscience," *Nomos*, LX (1998): 13-52. Julia Driver also takes for granted that Huckleberry's action is meant to be understood as praiseworthy, but her account of this praiseworthiness is completely independent of Huckleberry's motives and reasons; see her "The Virtues and Human Nature," in Roger Crisp, ed., *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues* (New York: Oxford, 1996), pp. 111-30.

[11] There is nothing very unusual about perceiving fairly sophisticated truths without perceiving that one is perceiving them—as when the confession of a cheating spouse is surprisingly unsurprising. I argue for this conclusion in detail in "On Acting Rationally against One's Best Judgment," *Ethics*, CX (2000): 488-513, and it is often presupposed by cognitive scientists.

[12] *On Virtue Ethics* (New York: Oxford, 2000).

comes to turn Jim in, and Huckleberry experiences a strong reluctance to do so, his reluctance is to a large extent the result of the fact that he has come to perceive Jim as a person, even if his conscious mind has not yet come to reflective awareness of this. To the extent that Huckleberry is reluctant to turn Jim in because of Jim's personhood, he *is* acting for morally significant reasons. This is so even though Huckleberry knows neither that these are the right reasons nor that that he is acting from them. On this reading, he is not a bad boy who has accidentally done something good, but a good boy with imperfect knowledge.

Huckleberry is not an isolated case. Inverse akrasia is not unlike a more common sort of behavioral inconsistency: the person whose explicit moral or political views are terribly wrong, but who in practice "cannot hurt a fly." We all have friends, family members, or acquaintances of this sort: the likes of a student who, waving his copy of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* in one's face, preaches that one should be selfish, and then proceeds to lose sleep generously helping his peers. Were philosophers right in believing that only actions following from one's conscious moral principles are done for moral reasons, we should view these people as bad people with moral luck. More commonly, however, we treat these people as fundamentally good people who happen to be incompetent abstract thinkers. While such people may be baffling—note the fascination with the character of Oskar Schindler—they are as commonplace as their opposite numbers, people with wonderful convictions who act immorally. The idea that we can sometimes act for moral reasons without knowing that we act for moral reasons is not strange when posed against the background of epistemology and psychology, where many have maintained that we can know without knowing that we know, believe without believing that we believe, or act for a reason without knowing that we act for a reason. It is only strange when posed against certain traditions in ethics and action theory, wherein we are used to viewing people as divided neatly into the faculty of reason and that shady realm of emotion, inclination, and instinct. I argue against this picture elsewhere;[13] here, I would just like to point out the following: on the reason/inclination picture, an agent who is pulled into action by "inclination" can be blamed only indirectly—for failing to restrain his desires and emotions properly—and can be praised only indirectly—for managing to train his desires and emotions so that they appear in the right time and place. One may attempt, with difficulty,

[13] "On Acting Rationally against One's Best Judgment."

to force the plethora of different cases in which one condemns the viscerally racist liberal or the child-beating Christian into a picture in which it is only a lack of self-control that one condemns. But Huckleberry Finn, Oskar Schindler, and our *Atlas Shrugged*-toting friend are obviously not praiseworthy for any kind of self-training or character-building on their parts. They are praiseworthy because some of their moral common sense—their responsiveness to moral reasons—is intact.

IV. BLAME AND MORAL UNRESPONSIVENESS

To recapitulate: some people do the right thing by accident, while others do the right thing in response to moral reasons. Those who do the right thing in response to moral reasons are those who are morally praiseworthy for their actions. It stands to reason, then, that something similar would be true of people who do the wrong thing. Sometimes, the fact that one did the wrong thing appears to be accidental, while at other times it seems to stem from what can be called "ill will," or from a deficiency of good will. If good will is responsiveness to moral reasons, deficiency in good will is insufficient responsiveness to moral reasons, and ill will is responsiveness to sinister reasons—reasons that, in their essence, conflict with morality. Imagine, for example, that Jeanne is very rude to Joseph and hurts his feelings. Many scenarios can be imagined which fill in her motives. Perhaps she comes from an aggressive culture in which "shut up" is a commonly used phrase, and has not met people who find it offensive. In this case, the fact that she did something hurtful is, in a clear sense, accidental. Perhaps, on the other hand, she has no such excuse, and she acts the way she does because she desires to vent the tensions of a long day by saying exactly what comes to her mind, which happens to be offensive to Joseph in an obvious way. In this case, she is blameworthy, because her action indicates a failure to respond to morally relevant considerations—she should be motivated by the fact that Joseph is likely to be hurt by what she says, but she is unmoved. A third possibility is that she is rude to Joseph because she enjoys inflicting suffering on others and wishes to hurt Joseph. In this scenario, she is even more blameworthy than in the previous one, as her action not only expresses a deficiency of good will, but also expresses ill will. There is nothing about the desire to vent one's feelings which essentially conflicts with morality. Like the more celebrated motives of love and money, it can sometimes conflict with morality, while at other times it leads to morally good or neutral actions. On the other hand, a desire to inflict suffering for its own sake is essentially in conflict with morality. To do something purely

because it would inflict suffering on a fellow human being is to act for sinister or "antimoral" reasons. Other things being equal, a person is more blameworthy for a given wrong if she acts out of ill will (from sinister reasons) than she would be if she were to act out of a lack of good will (out of neutral reasons, while ignoring moral reasons to the contrary). This does not, however, imply that a sadist or a proponent of a sinister ideology is always a worse person than an opportunist. A chilling, profound indifference to moral reasons, the kind compatible with, say, killing for profit, is much worse than a predilection for the mildly immoral, such as a taste for unnerving one's underlings.

Consider again the person who fails to respond to relevant moral factors. There seems to be more than one way one can lack this responsiveness. Sometimes, one is deficient in moral perception—blind, as it were, to some moral factors. Some people, for example, do not seem to be able to grasp the idea of personal autonomy. Imagine here the sort of parent who not only fails to see that anything could be wrong with her extremely paternalistic treatment of her adult son, but cannot understand the concept of "paternalism" even after it has been explained over and over. ("But if no one tells you what to do, how will you know?" she asks in bewilderment.) More often, however, one perceives all the morally relevant features of a situation, but is not sufficiently moved by them. One need not be an amoralist for this to happen; it is enough that one be a more common, though much less discussed figure—the human, all-too-human person who cares about morality, but *not very much*. Mary may realize that, if she does not promptly return a friend's book, she will break a promise and cause unnecessary distress; and she may still not send it, because it is freezing outside or because it would be nice if she finished the novel she is writing before her birthday, and so she cannot really spare the time to make a special trip. Not being an amoralist, it is not the case that she is indifferent to the institution of promising or other relevant moral factors. She cares about these things—enough to feel morally guilty for her course of action and enough not to commit more serious breaches of trust, but not enough to motivate her to go to the post office. The first kind of morally unresponsive person is analogous to the person who does not notice it when his clothes do not match. The second kind is analogous to the person who notices very well when his clothes are unmatched, but does not care about appearances enough to make sure that he is never stuck with nothing to wear but his orange shirt and purple pants. Deficiency of perception and deficiency of motivation are, admittedly, hard to tell apart. Many people have wondered if a spouse does not *see* the dust on the floor or does not *care* if it is there, and the diagnosis is hard because there

is often a combination. Similar things apply to the person of mediocre moral sensibilities. A person who does not care much about morality may not give much thought to some things to which a more morally concerned person would pay more attention, and thus in fact may be less competent in perceiving other people's feelings, putting herself in their shoes, and so on.[14]

IV. DEGREES OF MORAL CONCERN

The above discussion of moral unresponsiveness has brought to the foreground the idea that, given that a person is motivated by moral (or antimoral) reasons, she can be motivated by them more or less powerfully. Let us go back, for a moment, to the realm of praise. Kant's prudent grocer and his ilk demonstrate to us that moral praise is warranted for the agent who acts for moral reasons, as opposed to others. But suppose we know that an agent acts for moral reasons. What bearing should the amount of concern that he has for moral considerations have on our assessment of his action's moral worth? I suggest:

> *Praiseworthiness as responsiveness to moral reasons (revised version)*: for an agent to be morally praiseworthy for doing the right thing is for her to have done the right thing for the relevant moral reasons—that is, in response to the features that make it right (the *right reasons* clause); and an agent is more praiseworthy, other things being equal, the stronger the moral concern that has led to her action (the *concern* clause). Moral concern is to be understood as concern for what is in fact morally relevant and not as concern for what the agent takes to be morality.[15]

I take concern to be a form of desire: for a person to be concerned with morality is for her to have an intrinsic desire that people (herself included) do that which is, in fact, moral. Much work has been devoted to the study of desire, and very different views have been defended by philosophers of mind.[16] Giving a full account of concern

[14] By distinguishing, at least at the phenomenal level, the motivational from the perceptual side of responsiveness, I do not preclude the possibility that failing to care about morality is always irrational (after all, failing to care about one's health or bank account may be irrational as well), nor even the view that moral factors when noticed are always *somewhat* motivating. All that I assume here is that two agents can be motivated by the same moral reasons exactly—but one of them may be motivated by them much more than the other.

[15] One can, if one is so inclined, apply Michael Smith's discussion of the distinction between concern for morality *de re* and *de dicto* in *The Moral Problem* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

[16] For a sense of the diversity of prevailing views, see, for example, Fred Dretske, *Explaining Behavior* (Cambridge: MIT, 1988); Robert Stalnaker, *Inquiry* (Cambridge: MIT, 1984); Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality* (Cambridge: MIT, 1994).

in general or moral concern in particular would require choosing a theory of desire, which is not my aim here.[17] What I shall do instead is, first, sharpen our intuitive idea of concern by making a few points about what depth of concern does *not* amount to, and, second, to point out what I take to be important markers of depth of concern.

Strength of concern does not amount to a type of *reflective endorsement.* Erica and I may reflectively endorse the same kind of political action, but she may be more concerned with it than I am, which may explain why she is at a demonstration while I am writing. It is also natural to say that I am less *committed* to political action than Erica is, and this may tempt some readers to think of caring in terms of *commitment*—reflective endorsement with some sort of emotional back-up, perhaps. This would also be misleading, as we may deeply care about things that we do not reflectively endorse at all. Lisa may care deeply about Todd and her relationship with him even though she believes she should not do so, or even though she is utterly unaware of her deep concern, ignoring it in practical deliberation. Strength of concern also does not amount simply to *intensity of feeling* at a given moment. I may care about the well-being of my friends more than I care about drinking soda, even though now, thirsty as I am, I experience my desire for soda considerably more intensely than I experience my concern for my friends. Yet intensity of feeling is not disconnected from depth of concern either.

Surges of emotion are not what constitute depth of concern, nor are they infallible indicators of it. Yet they strike me as one of three modestly reliable indices of concern, the other two being cognitive dispositions and motivational dispositions. Lacking a satisfactory consensus theory of desire, these signposts will have to suffice. As for emotions, the more one cares about morality, the more it colors one's emotional world, other things being equal (though other things are rarely equal when it comes to people's emotional lives). The morally concerned person tends to find the thought of doing wrong distressing—that is, she feels *guilt.* She also feels anger when reading about atrocities in the news, sadness when wondering, as Kant did, if "anything straight can be fashioned from the crooked timber of humanity," admiration for moral heroes, and so on. The *cognitive/perceptual* signs of moral concern are more subtle: a person concerned with

[17] *A fortiori,* I shall not try to develop a fully-fledged positive view of what it means to be concerned about something in the first place. I do not, here, equate concern with caring as understood by Frankfurt, but I am not sure that I say anything here with which it is incompatible, given the assumption that wanting to have a desire does not entail thinking that one *should* have it.

morality is, to that degree, other things being equal, "morality conscious," noticing morally relevant things others might not. It is a feature of the human mind that we learn more about things of more concern to us: other things being equal, a bird lover will notice a bird on the roof while a person who does not care about birds might not. If one cares about morality, one is more apt to notice, for example, that a fellow human being is showing the signs of distress, or that a joke has the potential to offend certain people. Finally, *motivation* is an obvious guide to depth of concern. The more you care about something, the more it takes to stop you from acting for its sake (again, other things being equal). I shall focus here on motivational and emotional factors, but this is for convenience of discussion only.

Imagine a person who cares so much for her fellow human beings, or for what she rightly takes to be her moral duty to them, that she would act benevolently even if severe depression came upon her and made it hard for her to pay attention to others. Now imagine benevolence's fair-weather friend, who acts benevolently so long as no serious problems cloud her mind. Last, imagine the person who acts benevolently as a whim. It is Sunday morning and she is awakened by a call from a charity asking for a donation. Our agent thinks, "Oh, why not?" and is moved to do something right, so long as her credit card happens to be close enough to the bed. The first agent is more praiseworthy for her actions than the second, I hold, because of the first's greater moral concern, revealed by her persistent devotion to moral issues even in hard times. Kant, though, would have offered a different explanation, holding that the first agent is more praiseworthy than the second because she acts out of one motive, duty, while the second one acts out of a motive called "inclination," a basically hedonistic motive. This, however, need not be the case. My second agent, unlike Kant's own happy philanthropist, is not someone who "gets her kicks" out of doing good deeds (like Jane Austen's Emma in *Emma*), and her disposition need not be particularly sunny. She is just an ordinary person who does good for moral reasons, but whose moral concern is not deep enough to override some other concerns when they appear. Certainly, she sometimes feels a sense of satisfaction with herself, but one needs to be quite a psychological hedonist to think that any action that results in pleasure is motivated solely by it. There is no reason to say that her motives are different from the motives of the first agent, any more than there is a reason to say that the person who is truly devoted to her exercise program goes to the gym for different reasons than the person whose devotion is somewhat weaker. Both may go to the gym for health reasons, but one cares more about her health. Similarly, my first and second philan-

thropists both act benevolently for moral reasons, but one of them cares more. The contrast is *not* that happy philanthropists are less praiseworthy for their actions than sad philanthropists, but rather that *fair-weather*, frivolous philanthropists deserve less praise than those whose concern for morality or for the well-being of others is more *serious* or *deep*. The third agent—the person whose concern for morality is skin deep—may be called the *capricious* philanthropist, and should not expect much praise for an action that almost seems accidental, attributable to the charity's call and the location of the credit card more than to her depth of concern for her fellow human beings. Still, there is no reason to doubt that she acts for moral reasons. When a person whimsically asks for milk instead of cream in the coffee she has with her chocolate cake, one need not doubt that she does it for health reasons, one merely doubts the seriousness of her concern.

A natural question concerns Kant's misanthropic philanthropist who, in ordinary circumstances, must force himself to help people despite having no inclination to do so. Neither the misanthropic philanthropist nor the sorrowing philanthropist just discussed enjoys his action very much, which makes it deceptively easy to see them as similar instances of "acting out of duty." But each has a different story behind the fact that he drags his feet on his way to charity. The sorrowing philanthropist drags himself to action because he cares about the welfare of others so much that his concern moves him even when sorrow tempts him to stay home. The misanthropic philanthropist has to drag himself to his good works because his philanthropy, even at the happiest times, is *halfhearted*. This could mean that he cares about the good of others just enough to wish he cared more, or this could mean that his concern for morality is offset by essentially conflicting attitudes,[18] such as disdain for humankind. The fact that one's concern, whether for humanity or for one's wife or one's art, is enough to motivate one—albeit barely—even though one is grief-stricken, is a testimony to the strength of one's concern. The fact that

[18] By 'essentially conflicting attitudes' I am referring to attitudes which conflict because of their content, and not merely because some accidental factor that makes it hard or impossible to act in accordance with both of them. For example, love of sports and love of philosophy may conflict accidentally if it so happens that one has to choose between a philosophy talk and a basketball game. The conflict here is a contingent one—it has to do not with the nature of sports or philosophy but rather with the fact that scheduling and the like do not permit one to divide one's time between the two. On the other hand, there is an essential conflict between one's love of philosophy and a craving to live the life of a "simple soul," between standard forms of Christianity and lust, and so on.

one's concern, in the best of times, is barely enough to motivate one, shows a deficiency of concern or a half-heartedness. Thus, under many descriptions, the misanthropic philanthropist is less praiseworthy than he would be if it were not for his misanthropy. The picture becomes complicated, however, when one remembers how underdescribed Kant's case is. I have followed Hursthouse in taking the coldness of this philanthropist's heart to be a sign of halfheartedness. But truly, many different things can cause a person to appear cold or to experience himself as indifferent, and these things differ in morally significant ways (recall that what one cares about most is not always what one feels about most strongly and warmly). Also, while one's philanthropy may be halfhearted, it may be a part of a serious effort to habituate oneself into being a better person, a praiseworthy effort all by itself.[19]

What about blameworthy actions? There are two types: those done for sinister reasons, and those done for morally neutral reasons as a result of some indifference to moral considerations. It stands to reason that a person who acts for sinister reasons is more blameworthy the stronger the ill will indicated by his action. Consider, however, a misdeed motivated by moral indifference. If philanthropists are judged by the depth of concern for relevant moral considerations that their actions express, wrongdoers can be judged by the depth of indifference to moral reasons that they reveal. The more moral concern required to take the right course of action, the less blameworthy an agent is for not doing so. Imagine that in a certain situation, it is right to act charitably and wrong to act uncharitably. Imagine also that, in this situation, it is much harder to act charitably if sad than if cheerful. The person who is charitable in sorrow shows herself to be more praiseworthy for her action than the person who is charitable generally, but not in sorrow. Likewise, it does not take a great deal of moral indifference to be uncharitable while sorrowing, but it does take a lot of such indifference to be uncharitable while happy. Thus, if the sorrowing philanthropist is more praiseworthy than the happy philanthropist, the sorrowing failed philanthropist is less blameworthy than the happy failed philanthropist. Hence, for example, the use of 'She was under stress' to excuse minor wrongs. In a more dramatic vein, if one wonders if actions such as hiding Jews from the Nazis are required by morality or are supererogatory, one

[19] My discussion of the philanthropists owes a lot to Rosalind Hursthouse, "Ethics and the Emotions," in Daniel Statman, ed., *Virtue Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 1997), pp. 99-118; and Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: California UP, 1978).

compromise suggestion is that such actions *are* required; but performing them requires a degree of moral concern so rare that the person who fails to perform them shows hardly any measure of moral indifference, and thus is not particularly blameworthy.

If depth of one's concern for the right-making features of one's action changes an action's moral worth, how does Huckleberry measure up? He merits praise for helping Jim, because he is acting for the right reasons—he performs his action because of its right-making features. But can he be said to be acting out of deep concern for the right-making features of his action? Yes—at least in the scenario imagined above. Recall that concern does not amount to reflective endorsement and does not have to be conscious. Let us compare Huckleberry to another inverse akratic, whose action I take not to be morally praiseworthy. Joseph Göbbels, as is evident from his diaries and some of his public speeches, suffered from surprisingly frequent attacks of what he called "weakness of will," which he attributed to fatigue and stress, and which consisted in feeling compassion for the victims of the Nazi regime. Göbbels repressed and overcame them with relative ease, the way a civil person may overcome a desire to be rude at a family dinner. Let us suppose that on a certain occasion, Göbbels, tired at the end of a long day, finds himself momentarily unable to resist his compassion. Against his best judgment, he makes a low-risk compassionate gesture, such as permitting a Jewish acquaintance to leave Germany. Assume he acts for the same reasons as Huckleberry. Still, his action does not impress us as Huckleberry's does. Göbbels's inverse akratic compassion strikes us as shallow or capricious, not so much because of the short time his attacks last, but because of the ease with which they are overcome. His compassion is also offset by the strength of his essentially conflicting attitudes—his deep racism and so on. His action seems the product of fatigue or stress more than anything else. We can imagine his friends using this as an excusing condition from blame, and for us it is "excusing" from praise. Things appear to be different with Huckleberry. He does not need fatigue or alcohol to help Jim. As he is described in the novel, one gets the impression that he helps Jim because his concern for his fellow human beings in general, and for Jim as a particular human being, is strong enough to make him act despite reservations. The strength of his concern for Jim as a person is a testimony to the shallow nature of his racist attitudes, not the other way around. Thus, even though both Huckleberry and Göbbels act—imagine—for the right reasons, and both of them act against their best judgments, we view them differently. One of them appears to be a good (though imperfect) boy who performs a morally praiseworthy action, while the

other appears to be a bad man who, thanks to fatigue or stress, performs a morally desirable but negligibly praiseworthy action.

VI. CHARACTER?

It is tempting to rephrase what I have said about Huckleberry in terms of character. His human concern seems to be a deep feature of his character, while his racist convictions seem not to be. It is no accident that talk of character comes naturally here. Just as the idea of doing the right things for the right reasons, or out of concern for the right-making features of one's action, accounts for the appeal of the doctrine of the motive of duty, the idea that deep concern for these features is worth more than shallow concern for these features accounts for the appeal of the Aristotelian idea that right (or fine) actions are only praiseworthy (or virtuous) if they follow from the agent's *character.*

Consider Aristotle's treatment of bravery. For an instance of defending one's city in war to be praiseworthy, it is not enough for Aristotle that it is performed for the right reasons. However pure his motive is, if he is capable of defending his city only because he is pathologically fearless, drunk, or such a skilled soldier that war does not frighten him, an agent's action will still not be morally praiseworthy. If, like Kant's misanthropic philanthropist, he needs the aid of soldierly self-control to drag himself to action, he is only partially virtuous. The *fully* morally praiseworthy agent is the man who defends his city because he fears moral disgrace more than he fears death: he cares more for what is right than for his life. Such deep concern for the right-making features of defending one's city is to be found in the *brave* person—the person in whom risking his life for the sake of doing the right thing expresses a virtue of character. The virtuous person is different from others in possessing the markers of moral concern. He has a *die-hard disposition* to do what is fine (defend the city): he has a different *emotional* life from that of the nonvirtuous person (the thought of moral failing disturbs him) and he has an ability to *recognize* the right occasions for certain kinds of action which a mere theoretical knowledge of ethics does not give us.[20]

Why should Aristotle, or anyone else, believe that the praiseworthiness of an individual action depends on the character from which it stems? If one thinks of character as a stable disposition of some sort, the idea may seem strange. Why should the moral worth of the action that Steve performs on November 13, 1999, be any different if he has

[20] For a discussion of related themes, see John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist,* LXII (1979): 331-50.

performed similar actions for years and will most likely continue to do so?

The answer is that the mere frequency or predictability of an action does not matter at all to the moral worth of the actor, but these things may be signs of something relevant: *deep moral concern.* The pathologically fearless man or the well-trained soldier may have just as stable a disposition as the brave man to defend his city, but fearless or merely well-drilled actions do not express courage.[21] Consider Steve, a teacher, who has not missed class in twenty-six years. This says something good about him precisely because it is a sign of his devotion to his students and his job. Such evidence, however, can be overridden. Imagine, for example, that Steve's disposition to is due to a blind adherence to a work ethic which would be manifested even if he were the manager of children working in an unsafe fireworks factory. If so, we would no longer be inclined to think that Steve's disposition says anything particularly good about him. His devotion to his students is his virtue: his actions over the last twenty-six years are mere evidence—incomplete, defeasible evidence—of this virtue. If we wish to be neo-Aristotelian, we might want to say that Steve's coming to class on November 13 despite his severe migraine is especially praiseworthy because it stems from a virtue of character. This is untenable if "stems from a virtue of character" means only "stems out of a stable disposition," but makes perfect sense if it means "stems out of a markedly deep morally relevant concern"—in this case, deep devotion to his students. Note that "deep concern" does not automatically mean "long-lived concern." It happens to be empirically true that deep concerns do not generally change overnight: Dr. Jekyll is science fiction. On the rare occasions when deep concerns do undergo rapid change, the resulting actions are not capricious, but on a par with those produced from long-standing concern. For example, if it were known to us that that a teacher, previously indifferent to his students, underwent a conversion of sorts, after having read Bel Kaufman's *Up the Down Staircase,* and developed a genuinely deep concern for his students, we would have no reason to regard his devotion to his students as any shallower than Steve's, even if the conversion happened only a few months ago. We might say that the person's character changed. Of course, nobody knows for sure if such a person's new concern is deep or not, and so we tend to postpone our judgments until we see if it lasts; but the "test of time"

[21] The connection between virtue and depth of concern is evident, though never quite explicit, in Foot.

is only that—a mere *test* for the depth of a concern, and an imperfect one at that. Longevity does not make a concern deep any more than its lack makes a concern shallow—in a comfortable climate, one may be a fair-weather friend for many years. Thus, the idea that character matters for the moral worth of individual actions makes sense if one takes character to be about depth of concern and not about predictability or frequency. Many traditional objections to character-oriented views lose their force in this way. To give only one example, suppose that as the Nazis come to power, your long-time fair-weather friend, who has never done you wrong before, cheerfully informs on you. A traditional objection states that virtue ethics is committed to excusing his action as "out of character." But if "in character" does not mean "predictable," or "in keeping with historical trends" then "unpredictable" and "out of keeping with trends" does not always mean "out of character," either. In defense of the critics of virtue ethics, however, it can be said that virtue ethicists themselves have focused on predictability and stability, to their own detriment.

Unfortunately for traditional virtue ethicists, even stable, deep concern for morality (or concern for anything else) results in little predictability or stability of behavior, as has been shown by various psychological experiments[22] but as can also be deduced from more intuitive evidence. A corrupt lawyer may be more likely to return your book on time than an activist whose life is devoted to global justice, and soldiers who are brave in battle often fear public speaking. Likewise, one cannot infer the degree to which busy university faculty value friendship or conversation from their willingness to chat in the halls: some grouchy professors are merely nearing tenure decisions, some talkative professors simply have more time as a result of being on leave, and so on. Even a talkative person nearing a tenure decision is not certain to be displaying her strong desire for affiliation: a childhood in which strict norms of politeness were imposed upon her might be a much stronger factor. In a world in which people are rarely allowed to act on their hearts' desires, one's actions do not always reflect one's concerns very well.

While these tales show problems for the traditional notion of a character trait, they do not show that there is no fact of the matter about moral concern. The person who loves more is not always the person who says "I love you" more often, but some people do love

[22] See John Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (New York: Cambridge, forthcoming); and Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, XCIX (1998-99): 315-31.

more than others. The person who comes to class more often is not always the person who is more devoted to his students, but some people are more devoted to their students. And the connection between depth of concern and moral worth is an important truth aimed at by talk of character.

VII. A FEW MORE CLARIFICATIONS

This account of moral worth raises a tremendous number of questions. In this final section, I attempt to answer a few of the most pressing ones concerning self-control, misguided conscience, and moral knowledge.

First, is there not some merit in self-control, which characters like Huckleberry lack? The fact that he helps Jim despite his convictions might show that Huckleberry has very little self-control; or it may show that his concern for Jim's humanity is so strong that it overwhelms normal self-control, and I was assuming the latter, which would make Huckleberry paradoxically similar to Aristotle's brave person. The brave person's desire to avoid disgrace is stronger than his fear of death. Huckleberry's well-motivated desire to help Jim overrides his attachment to his misguided convictions. The brave person's desire to defend his city is strong enough that it does not need the aid of self-control to win his inner struggle. Similarly, Huckleberry's concern for Jim's humanity is strong enough that it does not need the aid of unusually weak self-control to win the inner struggle. In the cases of both Huckleberry and the brave person, it is a virtuous concern that wins the struggle, and that is all that matters to the moral worth of their actions.

What of misguided consciences?[23] Can there be anything praiseworthy about a person's devotion to a morally wrong cause? The conclusion that seems to follow from my view is that there cannot be. Moral praiseworthiness is rooted in responsiveness to what in fact are moral reasons, not to whatever it is that one takes to be moral reasons, and so the fact that the advocate of the bad cause thinks she is acting for moral reasons does not by itself redeem her. The reasons to which the advocate of the bad cause responds are in fact antimoral reasons, in which case she acts malevolently, or at best reasons which accidentally conflict with morality, in which case she shows moral indifference. How can there be anything good in this?

There could be none, if it were true that being an advocate of an ideology entailed having the beliefs required by the ideology, and if being an advocate of a person or a country entailed being an advocate

[23] Hill, "Four Conceptions of Conscience," *Nomos*, LX (1998): 13-52.

of what the person or the country really are. Things are much more complicated than this, however. Klaus Mann provides us in *Mephisto*[24] with the character of Hans Miklas, a young, uneducated, naïve man who becomes a member of the Nazi party while it is still a fringe group. Yet the reader gets the impression that Miklas is not really a bad man. His attraction to Nazism appears to rely a lot on his desire for social justice and his disgust with corruption. In his mind, he associates "German honor," not with conquering other countries, but with a public life free of corruption. After Adolf Hitler comes to power, Miklas, despite being promoted and respected due to his long-standing party membership, quickly discovers that not only has social injustice remained ubiquitous, but it has in fact increased, and so has corruption. He is so devastated that he consciously destroys himself by publicly denouncing the regime. This action authenticates the suspicion that, from the start, his attraction to Nazism was a morally mixed bag, containing an element of true attraction to justice. Can one really act for a mix of morally good and bad reasons? It seems Miklas does, because some frustration and hatred have obviously affected his infatuation with the Nazi movement instead of some other workers' movement and made him all too willing to believe anti-Semitic propaganda—but a true concern for justice surely contributes to his great disappointment with the Nazi regime. (To complicate the character even further, Miklas's Nazism is also the result of his ignorance and cognitive limitations, which makes it hard to tell innocent false beliefs from irrational, motivated prejudice.) It may seem, from a Kantian[25] point of view, that one either is motivated by morally relevant reasons or is not, without the possibility of mixed motives, but this is not the way we think when we judge people's motivations. Granted, in some contexts, it may seem as if it is. To borrow an observation from Christine Korsgaard,[26] if a student tells us that he has decided to study calculus for the sake of the intellectual challenges involved, but we learn that it is also a required class, we tend to take a cynical attitude toward his claim. But consider a student who had always wanted to take calculus but been afraid of doing so because she doubted her abilities. Upon entering college, she discovers a degree requirement can be met by one of a few classes, one of which is calculus. She decides to take calculus, thankful for the requirement at the same time as she fears it. While this student would not have taken calculus if it were not required, it would

[24] Robin Smyth, trans. (New York: Random House, 1977).
[25] See Herman.
[26] *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge, 1996), p. 105.

be unjust on the part of her math professor to treat her as on par with her peer who is dragged, kicking and screaming, into the required class. Moral motives admit of the same complications.

Finally, what of the view that there is something especially good in having knowledge of the virtues, correct moral convictions, and the ability to deliberate well on moral matters? If acting for moral reasons is not the same as acting for what we take to be moral reasons, and depth of moral concern is not the same as conscious commitment to moral principles, how can this be true? I have conceded earlier that Huckleberry would be a better person if his conscious moral convictions were not appalling. But some will argue that, in addition to this fact, there is something especially regrettable in the fact that Huckleberry's character deficiency is located specifically in his ability for moral *deliberation*, as opposed to somewhere else. I believe that there is something to this claim, but that the goodness of having the ability to deliberate well about morality can be maintained without denying that Huckleberry's action is morally praiseworthy. First of all, an agent who does not know his virtues from his vices is likely to try to make himself a worse person, whereas the person who knows his virtues from his vices is likely to try to make himself a better person. More importantly, there are certain types of morally desirable actions that are very hard to perform if one does not have the right moral principles, or at least the ability to deliberate well on moral matters. For example, it is very hard to vote for the right political candidate if one cannot deliberate well on moral (and other) matters. While some of those who voted for Hitler were obviously bad people, others strike us as morally average people (or, in the case of Miklas, somewhat better) whose unreflectiveness, simplicity, and incompetence at deliberation made them easy prey to a candidate who promised jobs, national pride, and order in the streets. Given the complex moral decisions that even the most mundane life has to offer, it seems that we have a moral duty not to allow ourselves or our children to be too stupid, unreflective, or uninformed, especially with regard to morally relevant issues, and thus the fact that a person—even a good person—cannot deliberate very well or is ignorant when it comes to morally relevant matters has a special sadness to it.

It has been my goal here to sketch a quality-of-will based theory of moral worth, and show that such a view is potentially useful in understanding some facts of moral life. On my view, people are praiseworthy for acts of good will and blameworthy for acts of ill will or the absence of good will, and the amount of praise or blame they deserve varies with the depth of their motivation or the extent of their indifference. But since, I hold, good will is wanting to perform actions

that have whatever property it is that makes actions right, a full account of moral worth is impossible until we know what property it is that makes actions right. Other gaps remain in my account, such as the significance of my view for moral responsibility and autonomy.[27] I leave these topics for another occasion.

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[27] As a view of blameworthiness and praiseworthiness which does not rely on the concept of freedom my view is a potential basis for a compatibilist theory of moral responsibility. I discuss moral responsibility and autonomy in the fourth and fifth chapters of my forthcoming book *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency* (New York: Oxford, 2002). I plan to give an extended treatment of free will per se in future work.