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ROBERT B. LOUDEN

> Among moral attributes true virtue alone is sublime.
>
> ... [I]t is only by means of this idea [of virtue] that any judgment as to moral worth or its opposite is possible. ...
>
> Everything good that is not based on a morally good disposition ... is nothing but pretence and glittering misery.[1]

In recent years we have heard much about the revival of virtue ethics, of normative theories whose primary focus is on persons rather than decision-making in problematic situations, agents and the sorts of lives they lead rather than discrete acts and rules for making choices, characters and their morally relevant traits rather than laws of obligation. Contemporary theorists are often motivated by a sense of the impoverishment of modern moral traditions, for in placing primary weight on the agent rather than the act (much less the act's consequences), virtue theorists set themselves off against what are often viewed as *the* two options in modern ethics—utilitarianism and deontologism. The traditional whipping boy in the latter case is Kant, for he is widely regarded as deontology personified, the first moral theorist to place a non-derivative conception of duty at the centre of the philosophical stage, the first to establish a non-consequentialist decision procedure through his universalizability test, etc. In addition, virtue theorists also seem to have more historical reasons for disapproving of Kant. For the rise of quandary ethics is often associated with Enlightenment efforts to escape from tradition and the pull of local communities, and a consequent yearning for an ahistorical and universalistic conception of morality. Kant, as spokesman for the Enlightenment, is a natural target of criticism here.

For conceptual as well as historical reasons then, Kantian ethics has suffered badly under the current revival of virtue campaign. Alasdair MacIntyre writes: 'In Kant's moral writings we have reached a point at

[1] The first quotation is from Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), 57; the second from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1963), A 315/B 372; and the third from the essay, 'Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View', in *On History*, Lewis White Beck (ed.) (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 21, Ak. 26.

which the notion that morality is anything other than obedience to rules has almost, if not quite, disappeared from sight'.[2] Philippa Foot chastises Kant as one of a select group of philosophers whose 'tacitly accepted opinion was that a study of the topic [of the virtues and vices] would form no part of the fundamental work of ethics ...'.[3] On her view, Kant should bear a sizable part of the responsibility for analytic philosophy's neglect of virtue. And Bernard Williams is equally critical in his insistent claims that Kantian moral theory treats persons in abstraction from character, and thus stands guilty of misrepresenting not only persons but morality and practical deliberation as well.[4] The underlying message is not simply that Kant is an illustrative representative of the deontological rule ethics perspective, but that his ethics is the worst possible sort of deontological rule ethics, one which is primarily responsible for the eclipse of agent-centred ethics.

Yet some readers of Kant feel that the conceptual shape of his ethical theory has been distorted by defender and critic alike, that his ethics is not rule ethics but virtue ethics. This reading of Kant has had its defenders in the past (he did after all write *The Doctrine of Virtue*), but Onora O'Neill has recently placed it in the context of the contemporary virtue ethics debate. In 'Kant After Virtue' (a reply to MacIntyre's book), she states confidently that 'what is not in doubt ... is that Kant offers primarily an ethic of virtue rather than an ethic of rules'.[5] So whose Kant is the real Kant—hers or the more familiar one of MacIntyre & Co.?

The real Kant lies somewhere in between these two extremes. He sought to build an ethical theory which could assess both the life plans of moral agents and their discrete acts. This is to his credit, for an adequate moral theory needs to do both.

The Shape of Virtue Ethics[6]

What qualifies an ethical theory as virtue ethics rather than rule ethics?

[2] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 219. Cf. pp. 42, 112.

[3] Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 1.

[4] Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp. pp. 14, 19.

[5] Onora O'Neill, 'Kant After Virtue', *Inquiry* **26** (1984), 397. Cf. p. 396. For an earlier interpretation which also stresses the prominence of virtue (but in a less either/or manner), see Warner Wick, 'Kant's Moral Philosophy', in *Kant's Ethical Philosophy*, trans. James Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983). (Originally published as the Introduction to *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* by Bobbs-Merrill in 1964.)

[6] For a more detailed look at this issue, see my essay, 'On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics', *American Philosophical Quarterly* **21** (1984), 227–236.

Agents v. Acts

One hallmark of virtue ethics is its strong agent orientation. For virtue theorists, the primary object of moral evaluation is not the intentional act or its consequences, but the agent. Utilitarians begin with a concept of the good—here defined with reference to states of affairs rather than persons. Duty, rights, and even virtue are all treated by utilitarians as derivative categories of secondary importance, definable in terms of utility maximization. Similarly, deontologists take duty as their irreducible starting point, and reject any attempt to define this root notion of being morally bound to do something in terms of good to be achieved. The good is now a derivative category, definable in terms of the right. The good that we are to promote is right action for its own sake—duty for duty's sake. Virtue also is a derivative notion, definable in terms of pro-attitudes towards one's duties. It is important, but only because it helps us to do our duty.

Virtue ethics begins with a notion of the morally good person which is primitive in the sense that it is not defined in terms of performing obligatory acts ('the person who acts as duty requires') or end-states ('the agent who is disposed to maximize utility through his acts'). On the contrary, right and wrong acts are now construed in terms of what the good agent would or would not do; worthy and unworthy ends in terms of what the good agent would or would not aim at. It is by means of this conceptual shift that 'being' rather than 'doing' achieves prominence in virtue ethics.

Decision Procedures v. Good Character

Agent-ethics and act-ethics also diverge in their overall conceptions of practical reasoning. Act theorists, because they focus on discrete acts and moral quandaries, are interested in formulating decision procedures for making practical choices. Because they have derivative and relatively weak conceptions of character to lean on, the agent in a practical choice situation does not appear to them to have many resources upon which to draw. He or she needs a guide—hopefully a decision procedure—for finding a way out of the quandary. Agent ethics, because it focuses on long-term characteristic patterns of action, downplays atomic acts and choice situations in the process. It is not as concerned with portraying practical reason as a rule-governed enterprise which can be applied on a case by case basis. Virtue theorists do not view moral choice as unreasoned or irrational; the virtuous agent is also seen as the practically wise agent. But one often finds divergent portraits of practical reason in act and agent ethics.

Motivation

A third general area where we are likely to see differences between agent and act ethics is in their respective views on moral motivation. This complex issue is particularly important in any reading of Kantian ethics as virtue ethics. For the duty-based or deontological theorist, the preferred motive is respect for the idea of duty itself, and the good man is the one who does his duty for duty's sake. This does not entail that the agent who does his duty for duty's sake does so grudgingly, or only in spite of inclinations to the contrary, but simply that the determining ground of the motive is respect for duty. For the goal-based or utilitarian theorist, the preferred motive is a steady disposition to maximize utility.

In virtue ethics the preferred motivation factor is not duty or utility but the virtues themselves. The agent who acts from dispositions of friendship, courage, or integrity is held higher than the person who performs the same acts but from different motives. For instance, a virtue theorist might call a man courageous only if, when in danger, it was clear that the man did not even want to run away (and thus showed signs of being 'directly moved' to act courageously), while the duty-based theorist would only call a man courageous if he did not run away out of sense of duty (but perhaps wanted to anyway—though the 'want' is here irrelevant). As the example suggests, matters become troublesome when we bring in reason and inclination. I have not said that one theory asserts we are motivated by reason, another by desire. However, reason and inclination do enter into the motivation issue (particularly in debates over Kant) in the following way. Virtue ethics, with its 'virtue for virtue's sake' position on motivation, is also committed to the claim that our natural inclinations play a necessary role in many types of action done from virtue. Acting from the virtue of friendship, for instance, would require that one possess and exhibit certain feelings about friends. Kant, on the other hand, holds (from the *Foundations* on) that the sole determining ground of the will must be respect (*Achtung*)—a peculiarly non-empirical feeling produced by an intellectual awareness of the moral law. Kant thus appears to deny natural inclinations any positive role in moral motivation, whereas virtue ethics requires it.

Virtue and the Good Will

Kant begins his ethical investigations with a powerful but cryptic proclamation about the good will: 'Nothing in the world—indeed, nothing even beyond the world—can possibly be conceived which

could be called good without qualification except a good will'.[7] From the perspective of virtue ethics, to what extent should Kant's position on the good will be construed as evidence of an agent rather than an act-centred ethics?

As Robert Paul Wolff remarks, it is 'noteworthy that the philosopher most completely identified with the doctrine of stern duty should begin, not with a statement about what we ought to do, but rather with a judgment of what is unqualifiedly good'.[8] And what is unqualifiedly good, according to Kant, is not an end-state such as pleasure or the performance of certain atomic acts in conformity to rules, but a state of character which becomes the basis for all of one's actions. To answer the question: 'Is my will good?' (a question which can never be answered with certain knowledge, due to the opacity of our intentions), we must look beyond atomic acts and decisions and inquire into how we have lived. A man cannot be 'morally good in some ways and at the same time morally evil in others'.[9] Similarly, he cannot, on Kant's view, exhibit a good will one moment and an evil one the next. Steadfastness of character must be demonstrated.

So Kant's opening claim concerning the unqualified goodness of the good will means that what is fundamentally important in his ethics is not acts but agents. But what is the relationship between 'good will' and virtue? Kant defines virtue (*Tugend*) in the *Tugendlehre* as 'fortitude in relation to the forces opposing a moral attitude of will in us'.[10] The Kantian virtuous agent is thus one who, because of his 'fortitude', is able to resist urges and inclinations opposed to the moral law. Kantian fortitude is strength (*Starke*) or force (*Kraft*) of will, not in the sense of being able to accomplish the goals one sets out to achieve, but rather in the sense of mastery over one's inclinations and constancy of purpose.[11]

A good will is a will which steadily acts from the motive of respect for the moral law. But human beings, because they are natural beings,

[7] Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), 9, Ak. 393.

[8] Robert Paul Wolff, *The Anatomy of Reason* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 56–57.

[9] Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Green and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 20.

[10] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 38, Ak. 380.

[11] On strength and virtue, see *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 49–50, Ak. 389, 54/393, 58/397, 66/404, 70–71/408–409. See also *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1974), 26–27, Ak. 147, and the *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infeld (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 73. On the accomplishment of goals, see the *Foundations*, 10, Ak. 394.

always possess inclinations which may lead them to act against reason. Their wills are thus in a perpetual state of tension. Some wills are better than others, but only a holy will (who has no wants that could run counter to reason, and who can thus do no evil) possesses an absolutely good will. This is why Kant holds that 'human morality in its highest stages can still be nothing more than virtue'.[12] Virtue is only an approximation of the good will, because of the basic conflict or tension in human wills. Kant's virtuous agent is a human approximation of a good will who through strength of mind continually acts out of respect for the moral law while still feeling the presence of natural inclinations which could tempt him to act from other motives.

Now if virtue is the human approximation to the good will, and if the good will is the only unqualified good, this does imply that moral virtue, for Kant, is foundational, and not (as one would expect in a deontological theory) a concept of derivative or secondary importance. ('Everything good that is not based on a morally good disposition ... is nothing but pretence and glittering misery.') As Harbison notes: 'the essence of [Kant's] moral philosophy is quite different from what it has commonly been supposed to be, for on the basis of this enquiry one must conclude that it is the concept of the good will that lies at its foundation'.[13]

But there remains a fundamental problem for this particular argument in favour of a virtue ethics reading of Kant. Both the good will and virtue are defined in terms of obedience to moral law, for they are both wills which are in conformity to moral law and which act out of respect for it. Kant begins with the good will in order to uncover 'the supreme principle of morality'—the categorical imperative. Since human virtue is defined in terms of conformity to law and the categorical imperative, it appears now that what is primary in Kantian ethics is not virtue for virtue's sake but obedience to rules. Virtue is the heart of the ethical for Kant, in the sense that it is the basis for all judgments of moral worth. But Kantian virtue is itself defined in terms of the supreme principle of morality. The conceptual commitment to agency and long-term characteristic behaviour rather than atomic acts and decision procedures for moral quandaries is evident here, as one would expect in virtue ethics. But what Kant prizes most about moral agency is its ability to act consistently from respect for law, not in the sense of following specific rules for specific acts, but in the more fundamental sense of guiding one's entire life by respect for rationally legislated and willed law.

[12] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 41, Ak. 382. See also the *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 86–87, Ak. 84–85, and the *Foundations*, 30–31, Ak. 414.

[13] Warren G. Harbison, 'The Good Will', *Kant-Studien* (1980), 59.

Kantian virtue therefore is subordinate to the moral law, and this makes him look more like an obedience-to-rules theorist. However, it is obedience to rules not in the narrow-minded pharisaic manner for which rule ethics is usually chastised by virtue theorists, but in the broader, classical sense of living a life according to reason. The two perspectives of agent and rule are thus both clearly present in Kant's account of the good will. The virtuous agent is one who consistently 'follows the rules' out of respect for the idea of rationally legislated law. But 'the rules', while they do serve as action-guides, are intended most fundamentally as life-guides.

Re-reading Maxims

A second argument for a virtue ethics interpretation of Kant comes from a re-reading of what he means by a maxim. This strategy is particularly prominent in some of the recent work of Onora O'Neill and in a piece of Otfried Höffe.[14] Kant defines a maxim rather tersely as a 'subjective principle of volition',[15] and from this one can infer that a maxim is (among other things) a policy of action adopted by a particular agent at a particular time and place. Because the principle is subjective rather than objective, it must tie in with the agent's own intentions and interests. So why not simply view Kantian maxims as the agent's specific maxims for his discrete acts? This is a common understanding of maxims, but it is also one that easily lends itself to a rule reading of maxims, since here a maxim becomes, in effect, a rule which prescribes or proscribes a specific act. O'Neill rejects the specific intention reading and argues instead that 'it seems most convincing to understand by an agent's maxim the *underlying intention* by which the agent orchestrates his numerous more specific intentions'.[16] Suppose I have invited a guest to my house, and that my underlying intention is to make him feel welcome. On most such occasions, I will have numerous specific intentions by means of which I carry out the underlying intention: I may offer him a beer, invite him to put a record on the stereo, show him my vegetable garden, etc.

O'Neill offers two arguments in support of the underlying intention interpretation of maxims. (1) Usually we are aware of our specific

[14] Onora O'Neill, 'Kant After Virtue', and 'Consistency in Action', in *New Essays on Ethical Universalizability*, N. Potter and M. Timmons (ed.) (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984), and Otfried Höffe, 'Kants kategorischer Imperativ als Kriterium des Sittlichen', in O. Höffe (ed.), *Ethik und Politik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), esp. pp. 90–92.

[15] Kant, *Foundations*, 17, Ak. 401, n. 1; 38/420, n. 8.

[16] O'Neill, 'Kant After Virtue', 394.

intentions for the future, yet Kant frequently asserts that we never know the real morality of our actions. This suggests that maxims and specific intentions are not the same. (2) Sometimes we act without a specific intention (e.g. when we act absent-mindedly), but Kant holds that we always act on some maxim. All action is open to moral assessment. This again suggests a difference between maxims and specific intentions.[17]

Now if Kantian maxims are best seen as underlying rather than as specific intentions, we do have a strong argument for a virtue reading of Kant's ethics. For our underlying intentions tie in directly with the sorts of persons we are and with the sorts of lives we lead. And the sort of person one is obviously depends upon what virtues and vices one possesses. One's specific intentions, on the other hand, are not always an accurate guide to the sort of person one is 'deep down inside'. This connection between underlying intentions and being a certain sort of person is stressed by both O'Neill and Höffe.[18] However, two basic problems confront this interpretation. First, O'Neill's use of the phrase 'underlying intentions' is ambiguous. At one point, she states that adopting maxims is a matter of 'leading a certain sort of life, or being a certain sort of person'; elsewhere she asserts that maxims (or underlying intentions) 'need not be longer-term intentions, for we remain free to change them'.[19] This distinction between underlying and longer-term intentions does not sit well with the asserted identification between underlying intentions and being a certain sort of person. For becoming a certain sort of person is a long-term process. One cannot decide at noon on Monday to be courageous and saintly, and then suddenly become so by Tuesday. And in what sense do we 'remain free to change' the sort of person we have become? I believe there is a strong sense in which such a change can be undertaken, but the effort and time required to carry it out are certainly much greater than are the effort and time required to change one's specific intentions at any given moment. In short, the more 'underlying' intentions are untied from 'longer-term' intentions, the less plausible it becomes to assert that maxims (in the sense of underlying intentions) have to do with leading a certain sort of life and with virtue. For the latter are long-term ventures. One does not initiate, abandon or change them on a daily basis.

One reason for O'Neill's odd insistence on the underlying/long-term intention distinction is perhaps traceable to Kantian texts. In several places, Kant warns that we must not construe virtue as a 'mere aptitude

[17] O'Neill, 'Kant After Virtue', 393–394.
[18] O'Neill, 395; Höffe, 91.
[19] O'Neill, 394, 395.

(*Fertigkeit*) or ... a long-standing habit (*Gewohnheit*) of morally good actions'.[20] His point is that human virtue is an extremely precarious achievement of pure practical reason which must constantly be on guard against heteronomy and empirical inclinations. In making this claim he is unfortunately led into some rhetorical skirmishes against Aristotle which reflect a poor understanding of Aristotle's own analysis of virtue.[21] What Kant wants is a moral disposition 'armed for all situations' and 'insured against changes that new temptations can bring about'.[22] As O'Neill suggests, Kant is aiming at a distinctively modern conception of virtue here, one which is a response to the fragmentation of modern life and the breakdown of communities and institutions. Furthermore, behind his opposition to construing virtues as long-standing habits lies an acute awareness of our powers of rationalization and self-deception in repressing our sense of guilt. Kant might seem to have read his Freud. But nothing in these texts implies that long-term intentions must necessarily turn into mechanical habits, for we have seen already that cultivating a good will is, on Kant's view, an achievement of pure practical reason. So O'Neill's reservations about long-term intentions do not appear to be well-founded.

The second problem with the underlying intentions reading of maxims is that it contradicts several of Kant's own examples of maxims. What he sometimes means by maxims are not life plans or even underlying intentions, but simply specific intentions for discrete acts. Furthermore, the testing of such maxims does not require that they be related to the life plan or underlying intention of the agent. The maxim of the agent who feels forced to borrow money but knows he can't repay it is very specific, and applies only to restricted dire circumstances which may never even arise. Similarly, the maxim which reveals a perfect duty to refrain from suicide is again a specific intention which is not necessarily related to a life plan.

For these two reasons then, the underlying intentions reading of maxims must be taken with a large grain of salt. O'Neill's use of 'underlying' is ambiguous, vacillating between specific and long-term intentions. Second, Kant's own examples of maxims indicate that what he sometimes means by the term is specific intentions for atomic acts. But because 'maxims' for Kant can mean both short as well as long-term intentions, we see again that he possesses and employs the conceptual

[20] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 41–42, Ak. 383, 69/407. Cf. *Anthropology*, 26–27, Ak. 153.

[21] Kant to the contrary, Aristotelian virtue is not a mechanical habit but rather a state of character determined by a rational principle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a1).

[22] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 42, Ak. 383.

tools to evaluate an agent's discrete acts as well as his or her course of life. This is to Kant's credit, for both enterprises are essential for an adequate ethical theory.

Self-perfection and the Doctrine of Morally Necessary Ends

Yet there is one fundamental use of 'maxims' in Kant's texts which unequivocally concerns underlying intentions and the sort of life one leads. This is what Kant calls maxims of ends rather than of dutiful actions—maxims to pursue general, long-term goals (which allow for many different ways of pursuing them), rather than maxims to perform narrowly prescribed acts. The strongest argument for the prominence of virtue in Kantian ethics is to be gleaned from his doctrine of morally necessary ends as presented in the *Tugendlehre*.

Section 3 of the Introduction to the *Tugendlehre* is entitled: 'On the Ground for Conceiving an End which is at the Same Time a Duty'. The core of Kant's argument runs as follows: all acts have ends, for action (by definition) is a goal-directed process. Ends, however, are objects of free choice. We do of course have many desires, wants, and inclinations which are biologically and/or culturally imposed, and nearly all ends that we do eventually adopt are also objects of desires, wants, and inclinations. But ultimately ends are chosen, for we cannot be forced to make anything an end of action unless we ourselves choose to. People can and do renounce even the biological desire for life in extreme circumstances. The adoption of ends is a matter of free choice, and this brings them under the purview of pure practical reason rather than of inclination.

But why assert that ends (which are freely chosen) are also morally necessary? Why claim that there exist ends which agents have a duty to adopt? Isn't this merely a way of implying that all conceptions of the good are not created equal, that reason can discriminate among ends as well as among means—isn't it dangerously unmodern and illiberal? Perhaps, but Kant's position is clear: we must assume that there are morally necessary ends, for if we don't, 'this would do away with all moral philosophy'.[23] His reasoning is that if all ends are contingent, then all imperatives become hypothetical. If we are free to accept or reject any goal put before us whenever we are so inclined, then all commands prescribing maxims for actions are likewise open to rejection once the goal is dismissed. In other words (by contraposition), if there is a categorical imperative, there must be at least one morally necessary end. We cannot accept the claim that reason categorically

[23] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 43, Ak. 384.

requires us to do certain things unless we accept the companion claim that reason categorically requires us to adopt certain ends.

As is well known, Kant goes on to argue in the *Tugendlehre* that there are two ends which agents have a duty to adopt: their own perfection and the happiness of others. The former, for Kant, is the more fundamental of the two, and its connection to moral character is also more direct.

The duty which Kant asserts all agents have to promote their own perfection includes as its most important component the obligation to cultivate one's will 'to the purest attitude of virtue'.[24] We saw earlier that the good will is the only unqualified good in the world or beyond it, that it in turn is the condition for the goodness of every other thing. Our highest practical vocation as finite rational intelligences is to produce a will good in itself as an unconditional end, for such a will is the supreme good and ordering principle for all human activities. We saw also that moral virtue, as Kant understands the concept, is a human approximation to the good will. Humans, because of their biological and cultural make-ups, always have inclinations which may run counter to the moral law.

The duty to develop an attitude of virtue is obviously a duty to oneself rather than to others. And it is also an ethical rather than a legal duty, that is, a duty in which the motive for action is the thought of the law itself rather than threats of external compulsion. But what is most important to note for our purposes is that the duty to develop one's moral character is the linchpin of Kant's entire system of duties. As he remarks in his discussion of duties to oneself: 'if there were no such duties [viz. duties to oneself], then there would be no duties whatsoever, and so no external duties either. For I can recognize that I am under obligation to others only in so far as I, at the same time, obligate myself. . . .'[25]

Without duties to oneself, no duties whatsoever. Why would Kant make such a claim? His chief contention is that what is basic to all duties—legal, moral, or otherwise—is the concept of binding oneself. Take first the familiar notion of a legal duty to others, say, a loan taken out with a lending institution to help pay for one's graduate education. In one sense I am clearly bound to another party (the bank). But Kant's view is that this is so only because I first choose to bind myself to the laws of the government under which I am accountable to the terms of

[24] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 46, Ak. 386. Other components of the duty of self-perfection include the cultivation of one's 'natural powers'—powers of 'mind, soul, and body'.

[25] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 80, Ak. 416. Cf. 17/218: 'All duties, merely because they are duties, belong to ethics'.

the contract. If I don't first choose to view myself as being obligated to obey my government's laws, it is not likely that I will consider myself to have any duty toward the bank. Similarly, consider a moral duty to others, e.g. the Kantian duty to promote others' welfare. Here I am not even accountable to any specifiable others, as was the case in the previous example, but only to my own conscience. We 'owe it to ourselves' to do all we are capable of in fulfilling our moral duties to others.

Once Kant's argument concerning morally necessary ends is considered, it becomes strikingly evident that virtue does indeed have a pre-eminent position in his ethics. Our overriding practical vocation is to realize a state of virtue in our own character as the basis of all action. Without fulfilling such a duty to ourselves, other duties are not possible. Virtue is not only the heart of the ethical for Kant; it also has priority in morals considered as a whole (that is, in *Recht* and *Tugend* taken together). For if there were no ethical duties to oneself, there would be no duties whatsoever.

But again virtue itself is posterior to the supreme principle of morality. Virtue remains conceptually subordinate to the moral law. Kant presents us with a virtue ethics in which the 'rule of law' nevertheless plays the lead role, and in which the theory is designed to assess not only ways of life but discrete acts as well. However, as noted earlier, the priority of the moral law in Kantian ethics does not entail the pharisaic qualities which virtue critics have usually attributed to it. It does not mean that what dominates Kantian ethics is the attempt to construct a decision procedure for all acts, or even to devise determinate rules for a limited set of specific acts. Yet such attempts are generally conceded to be prominent in rule ethics approaches to practical reasoning. Instead, what we do find in Kant's ethics is the categorical command of reason to cultivate a way of life in which all of one's acts (whatever they may be) are in complete harmony with the idea of lawfulness as such. The moral will is subordinate to law in Kantian ethics and is defined in terms of it. But the result is not a legalistic conformity-to-rules morality, current interpretations to the contrary. It is a conception of a life lived according to reason.

Virtue and Emotion

While virtue has far greater prominence in Kant's ethics than many of his readers suppose, it is nevertheless overstating matters to assert baldly that Kantian ethics is virtue ethics. Significant aspects of both the agent and act perspectives are present in his ethical theory, though the former does dominate. Kantian ethical theory seeks to assess not

only atomic acts but also agents' ways of life. And while the sort of person one becomes (rather than the specific acts one may perform and the short-term intentions one may adopt) is central in Kantian ethics, his conception of moral personhood is defined in terms of obedience to law. The Kantian agent commitment is inextricably fused to a law conception of ethics. Each of the three arguments outlined earlier points to these same conclusions, which is not surprising, since they are closely related to begin with. The later material from the *Tugendlehre* regarding morally necessary ends (of which the duty of moral self-perfection is the most important) restates and deepens the earlier material from the *Grundlegung* concerning the good will. The section on maxims establishes that while not all Kantian maxims refer to underlying intentions and agents' life plans, the most significant ones in ethics (maxims of ends) do.

One notorious roadblock to a virtue interpretation of Kantian ethics remains, and it requires an unconventional but (I believe) Kantian reply. Virtue theorists part ways with their deontological and teleological opponents over the issue of moral motivation. In virtue ethics agents are expected to act for the sake of virtue; in deontology, for duty's sake; in utilitarianism, for utility's sake. Now at first glance it would seem impossible to argue that Kant espouses a virtue ethics position with respect to motivation, since he holds that only action from duty can have moral worth. However, as my earlier arguments indicate, Kant's notion of action *aus Pflicht* means in the most fundamental sense not that one performs a specific act for the sake of a specific rule which prescribes it (and likewise for other specific acts one performs) but rather that one strives for a way of life in which all of one's acts are a manifestation of a character which is in harmony with moral law. Action *aus Pflicht* is action motivated by virtue, albeit virtue in Kant's sternly rationalist sense.

But it is precisely on the issue of rationalism and moral motivation that Kant has come under such severe criticism. The motivation problem has been a favourite target of Kantian critics from Hegel onward, and to cover all of its dimensions is far beyond the scope of this paper. The following brief remarks focus instead on Kant's position regarding the role of emotion in action from virtue.

It is generally acknowledged that, from a moral perspective, the most praiseworthy acts are often those which agents truly want to perform. As Foot remarks: 'Who shows most courage, the one who wants to run away but does not, or the one who does not even want to run away? Who shows most charity, the one who finds it easy to make the good of others his object, or the one who finds it hard? ... The man who acts charitably out of a sense of duty is not to be undervalued, but it is the other [i.e. the one who is directly moved and who thus wants to act charit-

ably] who shows most virtue and therefore to the other that most moral worth is attributed.'[26] The sense of 'wants' here needs to be clarified, and I will attempt to do so in a moment. But first, a restatement of the underlying anti-Kantian argument: acting from virtue is (at least sometimes) action motivated by altruistic emotion or desire. Kant, however, holds that action *aus Pflicht* must be defined independently of all natural emotions and desires. Therefore, there is no place in Kantian ethics for acting from virtue.[27]

Now back to 'wants'. Does Foot's agent who does 'not even want to run away' act this way by nature or because he knows (in addition, perhaps, to being naturally inclined in this direction) that it is noble to do so? In Aristotelian terminology, does he act courageously out of 'natural virtue' or from 'virtue in the strict sense', the latter of which involves *phronēsis*, a rational understanding of what one is doing? Aristotle and Kant agree on this fundamental point: acting from virtue in the strict sense means acting rationally. But Aristotle also holds that practical choice is 'reason motivated by desire (*orektikos nous*) or desire operating through reason (*orexis dianoētikē*)'.[28] Desire and reason are both necessary factors in moral choice, but neither on its own is sufficient. How about Kant? Does acting from virtue, as he understands it, entail acting from desires (in addition to reason)?

Kant has so often been tagged as enemy-of-the-emotions that it may seem foolish even to ask the question. On most interpretations, Kant allows room for one (and only one) desire in his account of moral choice—respect or reverence (*Achtung*)—a unique '*a priori* feeling', generated by a pure judgment which acknowledges the claim of the moral law, and then in turn acts as the phenomenal spring to action from appreciation of that law. But the role of emotions and natural inclinations in Kant's understanding or moral motivation is trickier than is often assumed. On the one hand, he does assert unequivocally that 'what is essential in the moral worth of actions is that the moral law should directly determine the will'.[29] This way of talking is often construed as meaning that reason is not only a necessary but also a sufficient ground for moral choice, and that natural emotions (with the sole exception of *Achtung*, which again is an *a priori* feeling and thus not natural) have no positive role to play whatsoever. But while determina-

[26] Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 10, 14.

[27] Two recent examples of this view include Lawrence A. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), and Lawrence M. Hinman, 'On the Purity of Our Motives: A Critique of Kant's Account of the Emotions and Acting for the Sake of Duty', *Monist* **66** (1983), 251–266.

[28] *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.13, 1139b4–5.

[29] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 74, Ak. 72.

tion of choice through reason is obviously necessary in Kantian ethics, it is not sufficient for the attainment of virtue. There are a host of phenomenal emotions (the most important of which are joy, sympathy, and love) which, while not the direct *Bestimmungsgrund* of the will, must be present in a virtuous disposition. These emotions are phenomenal effects which, as Karl Ameriks puts it, have 'noumenal backing', and find their ultimate source in a noumenal acceptance of pure duty.[30] In less Kantian but more Aristotelian terms, these emotions are ones that have been trained *by* reason to work in harmony *with* reason. They are secondary in importance to respect, but they are nevertheless essential components in a morally virtuous life.

Granted, it is difficult to see this if one does not read past the *Grundlegung*. In that work, Kant is engaging in a form of analysis which he compares with a chemical experiment. He discriminates elements in a compound by varying the circumstances, and wants to break the compound into its base elements in the most effective manner. His assumption there is simply that it is easier to determine accurately whether an act was performed from duty if the agent had an inclination to perform the 'opposite' act (e.g. feel antipathy rather than sympathy towards the suffering of others) than it would be if the agent were also inclined to perform the same act that duty requires. (Of course, even when natural inclination seems to be ruled out as an incentive, we still can't determine with certainty what ultimately motivated the agent. Kant holds that our moral intentions remain opaque to us.) In a similar vein, Kant states in the second *Critique* that it is 'risky' to view altruistic emotions as 'co-operating' with the moral law in motivating moral behaviour.[31] The reason, again, is that it becomes all the more difficult to ascertain the true motives of action when, in addition to acting out of respect for the law, one also has a natural desire to act in the same manner as duty requires. Nevertheless, while it may indeed be risky to enlist the emotions, this does not rule out the possibility that proper cultivation of them may still be necessary for human beings who aspire to a truly virtuous life. And Kant explicitly asserts that the emotions have a necessary and positive role to play in moral motivation in his later writings. In the Ethical Ascetic of the *Tugendlehre* (which deals with the cultivation of virtue), he writes: 'what we do cheerlessly and merely as a compulsory service has no intrinsic value for us, and so also if we attend to our duty in this way;

[30] Karl Ameriks, 'The Hegelian Critique of Kantian Morality', 11. (MS. read at the 1984 American Philosophical Association Western Division Meeting.)

[31] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 75, Ak. 73. Here I am following Ameriks, 12.

for we do not love it but rather shirk as much as we can the occasion for practising it'.[32] Here and elsewhere Kant addresses the need to cultivate an 'habitually cheerful heart', in order that the *feeling* of joy accompanies (but does not constitute or determine) our virtue. A parallel passage occurs near the beginning of the *Religion*: 'Now if one asks, what is the *aesthetic character*, the temperament, so to speak, of *virtue*, whether courageous and hence *joyous* or fear-ridden and dejected, an answer is hardly necessary. This latter slavish frame of mind can never occur without a hidden *hatred* of the law. And a heart which is happy in the performance of its duty (not merely complacent in the recognition thereof) is a mark of genuineness in the virtuous disposition. ...'[33]

These and other related passages state explicitly that the enemy-of-the-emotions reading of Kant favoured by so many is a gross misunderstanding. Kant's position is clear: pure practical reason needs to be always 'in charge' of the emotions in a truly virtuous life. The *Bestimmungsgrund* of moral choice must be reason, not feeling. But an integral part of moral discipline or what Kant calls 'ethical gymnastic' is training the emotions so that they work with rather than against reason. Acts in which empirical inclinations of any sort are the *Bestimmungsgrund* lack moral worth, but it doesn't follow that a harmonizing sentiment must cancel all moral worth. On the contrary, Kant insists that it is a good thing.

Kant then would agree with Foot's claim that the agent who does not even want to run away shows more courage than the one who wants to run away but does not, provided that the 'want' in question is a rational want with which the agent's desires are trained to be in harmony. More generally, acting from virtue, on Kant's view, does entail disciplining the emotions through reason so that one comes to want to perform the same external act that reason commands. But again, as Kant warns, there is a risk, for in training the emotions in such a manner it becomes more difficult to assess one's motives for action. One is perpetually flirting with the possibility that one's conduct is not autonomously willed but merely a product of heteronomy, but cultivation of virtue requires that the risk be taken.

Kant's position on the emotions and their role in action from virtue is not inconsistent with a virtue ethics view. It is remarkably close to Aristotle's view, the major difference being that Kant was much more

[32] Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 158, Ak. 484.

[33] Kant, *Religion*, 19, n.; cf. *Anthropology*, 147, Ak. 282, and *Education*, trans. by Annette Churton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 120–121.

aware than Aristotle of the dangers of self-deception by emotional enthusiasm pretending to be moral inspiration.[34]

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