

Berichte und Diskussionen

Kant's Good Will and our Good Nature*

Second Thoughts about Henson and Herman

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How much does a man's moral worth owe to benevolent feelings, to an amiable temperament, or even to what is good in human nature? Kant's answer is that moral worth owes nothing to those things. Whether someone is good or evil depends on whether his will is good or evil, and to have a good will is to suit one's 'maxims' or practical principles to what Kant calls the 'principle of autonomy'. This is the principle that requires one to act only according to a maxim it is possible to will to hold as a universal law. A person's feelings or temperament may well inspire maxims that happen to be universalizable, and so maxims in keeping with the principle of autonomy, but to act according to these maxims is not to have adopted the principle of autonomy. At best, someone's feelings, temperament and the rest can get him to act *as if* he were under the sway of the principle. And that, Kant suggests, would be a remarkable accident, since feelings or temperament cannot be counted upon to produce good behaviour. There is something unreliable about benevolent impulses, and about the good in human nature. Those things can be no substitute for a good will.

Are such claims credible? It is one thing to denigrate bad inclinations and bad temperaments, but many suppose that Kant goes too far in withholding positive moral worth from even desirable feelings and dispositions. To judge by some of Kant's examples it looks as if it is morally better to do the right thing in defiance of a cold temperament than to do the right thing out of a settled kindness. Yet, intuitively at least, the consistently kind person is a more convincing moral exemplar than the man whose good deeds have to be thawed out. Kant may be right and intuition wrong about who is morally exemplary, but in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*¹ and elsewhere, he claims that his account of moral worth can be *derived* from intuition (from "common reason"); so he cannot take lightly evidence of a break from intuition.

* An earlier draft of this paper was read to the Philosophical Society at the University of East Anglia, in February 1982. I have been helped by comments made in the discussion.

¹ Lewis White Beck, trans., (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1969). Page references are to the Akademie edition.

His conception of moral worth seems to lack initial plausibility, and the question is whether that can be supplied.

Two recent articles suggest that it can be. Richard Henson² thinks that in the *Foundations* Kant's examples do invite counter-intuitive generalization, but he claims that Kant did better in the *Metaphysic of Morals*. According to Henson there are two Kantian understandings of moral worth. One of these gives attributions of moral rightness the force of battle citations: in saying that someone has done what's morally right one is commending the agent for resolving in favour of duty a conflict in himself between the motive of duty and other motives. This is the model Henson thinks is prevalent in the *Foundations*. A second conception of moral worth – drawn from the *Metaphysic of Morals* — suggests that to attribute rightness to actions is to commend the agent for being alive to the motive of duty, whatever else moves him. On this “fitness model” of attributions, duty can be one motive among others for doing the morally right thing. It can be one motive among others so long as it could have brought about right action on its own.

In a later paper,³ Barbara Herman agrees that Kant allowed for the overdetermination of right action, and she agrees that attention to the possibility of overdetermination helps to clear up some common misunderstandings of Kant. But she doubts that Kant had more than one conception of moral worth, and she denies that Kant's examples in the *Foundations* do sustain counter-intuitive generalization. Herman and Henson seem to me to be wrong about the importance of overdetermination,⁴ and wrong as a result in their (different) interpretations of Kant. I want to urge a reading that is simpler than theirs, and that makes Kant's position seem more like the reconstruction of “common reason” it was intended to be. On the preferred reading Kant's good will and our good nature co-exist in a wholesome partnership: they seem independent but compatible.

² *What Kant Might Have Said: Moral Worth and the Overdetermination of Dutiful Action*, *The Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), 39–54. Hereafter ‘Henson’.

³ *On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty*, *The Philosophical Review* 90 (1981), 359–382. Subsequent references are to ‘Herman’.

⁴ Paton does something to encourage attention to the overdetermination issue in *The Moral Law*, (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1956; published in the USA as *The Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964)). Paton says that “Kant's doctrine would be absurd if it meant that the presence of a natural inclination to good actions (or even of a feeling of satisfaction in doing them) detracted from their moral worth” (p. 19). He goes on to say (ibid.) that the issue of whether the motive of inclination and the moral of duty can be co-present in the same ‘moral action’, or whether they can support one another, is not ‘discussed at all’ in the *Groundwork*. In general, the suggestion that the presence of an inclination could detract from moral worth is rebutted by Paton at rather greater length than its claimed ‘absurdity’ would seem to warrant. Perhaps this is because the suggestion is not absurd after all. Take the thought that a feeling of satisfaction in doing right detracts from moral worth: this can be true if the feeling of satisfaction amounts to a kind of self-congratulation for the acuity of one's moral sense.

I

If any claim can be attributed uncontroversially to Kant's writings it is this one: for an act to have moral worth it must be done from duty. That is virtually the formulation Beck's translation gives of the 'first proposition of morality' in Section One of the *Foundations* (399). What the first proposition does not make clear is whether a morally right action must be done from duty alone. The first proposition thus raises the question – Henson's – of whether an act with moral worth can be backed by moral *and* non-moral motives. Henson gives the example of Kant's lecture appearances. These might have been prompted by more than one motive. Perhaps Kant was moved to lecture by the enjoyment of lecturing as well as by a recognition of a duty to communicate valuable ideas. If both motives were present, but if each would by itself have brought Kant to the podium, did Kant's coming to lecture possess, or did it lack, moral worth? Were Kant's account to permit moral worth to attach to the lecturing, then influences like expected enjoyment would not after all be the blemishes on moral motivation that Kant's text seems to suggest they are. The mere presence of such a motive would not be enough to deprive an act of moral rightness, provided the motive co-operated with the motive of duty to overdetermine the act.

Henson says, and Herman agrees, that Kant never pronounced on the moral status of overdetermined acts.⁵ It seems that Henson and Herman are wrong about this, for Kant did realize, what is anyway pretty obvious, that the statute book can provide an extra-moral motive for a type of act morality enjoins. Thus, a legal prohibition on killing often co-exists with the moral one, and the penalty of death or a life sentence can serve as a motive for the omission of killing as much as the motive of duty.

Every piece of legislation creates a duty, Kant says, but only the

"legislation which makes an action a duty, and this duty at the same time a motive, is *ethical*. That legislation which does not include the motive-principle in the law, and consequently admits another motive than the idea of duty itself, is *juridical*. In respect of the latter, it is evident that the motives distinct from duty, to which it may refer, must be drawn from the subjective (pathological) influences of inclination and of aversion, determining the voluntary activity, and especially from the latter . . ."⁶

Where ethical and juridical legislation prescribe or prohibit the same type of act, several questions arise about the worth of compliance with the prohibition or the prescription. First, does a law-abiding choice *thereby* have moral worth? Not necessarily: if I decide against killing only because I fear I will be caught and sentenced to death or life imprisonment, my motive is not the idea of duty but aversion to the legal penalty. Here my motive is broadly speaking prudential rather than moral. But what if I both understand that killing is something I am duty-bound to avoid, *and* shudder at the thought of the gallows or the electric chair?

⁵ Henson, p. 43; Herman, p. 360.

⁶ *General Introduction to the Metaphysic of Morals*, W. Hastie, trans., section III, 'The Division of a Metaphysic of Morals', Akademie ed., p. 219.

Kant considers the related but less vivid case of keeping one's promises. The obligation to keep your promises is a moral one he says, even though (as he thinks) the law that creates the obligation is originally jurisprudential rather than ethical.⁷ So when it comes to choosing whether or not to keep your promise, say by honouring a contract, you have to reckon with the consideration that it is your duty to keep your promises. Keeping contractual promises can also be known to be compulsory at law. "In this case", Kant writes,

"ethics specially teaches that if the motive principle of external compulsion which juridical legislation connects with a duty is even let go, the idea of duty alone is sufficient of itself as a motive."⁸

I take it that Kant is here acknowledging the possibility of one kind of overdetermination of a dutiful act. Keeping one's contractual promises is normally recommended by external compulsion *and* the idea of duty, but in the absence of external compulsion the idea of duty is alone sufficient as a motive. On the other side, to the extent that the obligation to keep promises arises from juridical rather than ethical legislation, external compulsion alone is sufficient as a motive. So where both motives are operative, keeping one's promises is a type of thing one is overdetermined to do.

What does Kant mean by saying that the idea of duty is 'sufficient of itself as a motive'? He does not mean, I think, that the idea of duty alone is enough to *make* you keep your promises. Were this what was meant, Kant would have to regard additional but specifically legal incentives to promise-keeping as superfluous. And of course he does not see them that way. For him legal sanctions and the idea of duty each operate in a distinctive way to counteract the "subjective contingency" of promise-keeping. The idea of duty takes away the subjective contingency as follows. In representing promise-keeping to yourself as a duty, you thereby represent promise-keeping as necessary.⁹ This means that if you do not keep your promises you consciously act contrary to how you think (how reason tells you) you must act. You act irrationally. It is different where you think of promise-breaking as something carrying such-and-such penalties. In that case it is consciousness of the penalties, not consciousness of the content of the law, that makes promise-keeping seem necessary. The thought of the penalties bears on the prospects for the thinker of pleasure and pain. Accordingly, to be activated by the thought is to be activated by a non-moral interest, an interest extrinsic to an interest in duty.

But suppose that someone with an interest in duty is also aware of the penalties for breaking those promises that constitute contracts. That sort of case raises a version of Henson's question. Given that each of the pair of motives is alone sufficient, and given that the relevant promise is kept, is the promise-keeping merely right or is it morally right? I think Kant's answer can be inferred from the following passage:

⁷ Ibid., Akademie ed., pp. 219–20.

⁸ Ibid., Akademie ed. p. 221.

⁹ Ibid., section IV, 'General Preliminary Conceptions Defined and Explained', Akademie ed., p. 222.

“Ethics has no doubt its own particular duties – such as those toward oneself – but it has also duties in common with jurisprudence, only not under the same mode of *obligation* ... [T]he peculiarity of ethical legislation is to enjoin the performance of certain actions merely because they are duties, and to make the principle of duty itself – whatever be its source or occasion – the *sole* sufficing motive of the activity of the will.”¹⁰

If there are normally two sufficient motives for fulfilling a duty shared by ethics and jurisprudence, and if what is peculiarly ethical about the shared obligation is the injunction to make duty the sole sufficing motive, then ethics is in tension with overdetermination. It is as if a plurality of sufficient motives, or a mix of motives, contaminates rather than fortifies a policy of action. This runs counter to Henson's conjecture that in Kant a mix of sufficient motives might be permitted by ethics.

II

On the interpretation I am putting forward, Kant does acknowledge the overdetermination of dutiful acts, but he thinks that overdetermination is out of keeping with what ethical legislation specially enjoins. I have drawn textual evidence from the *Metaphysic of Morals*, but support for my interpretation can also be found in the *Foundations*.

The following comments, from Section One, concern the “third proposition of morality” (“Duty is the necessity of an action executed from a respect for law”):

“... that which is connected with my will merely as a ground and not as a consequence, *that which does not serve my inclination but overpowers it or at least excludes it* from being considered in making a choice – in a word, law itself – can be the object of respect and thus a command. Now as *an act from duty wholly excludes the influence of inclination* and therewith every object of the will, nothing remains which can determine the will objectively except the law, and nothing subjectively except pure respect for this practical law. This subjective element is the maxim that I ought to follow such a law even if it thwarts all my inclinations” (400; my emphasis).

The strong implication of this passage, especially of its second italicized portion, is that inclination has no part to play in the motivation of an act that is morally right. Inclination includes, in Henson's example of Kant's motives for lecturing, the enjoyment of lecturing. So if the enjoyment of lecturing is part of what gets Kant to appear at the podium, then appearing at the podium is dutiful without being done *from* duty. As the passage says, an act done from duty ‘wholly excludes the influence of inclination.’

It may be thought that in the passage Kant is inconsistent about possible influences on acts done from duty. For he speaks of ‘the law itself’ as something which ‘overpowers [my inclination] or at least excludes it from being considered’, and it is hard to see how the law could overpower an inclination that was not a co-present influence on the act. If Kant's talk of an overpowering law is not metaphorical, it is natural to take the overpowered thing as a bad inclination, a motive that conflicts rather

¹⁰ Ibid., section III, fourth paragraph, Akademie ed., p. 220. The emphasis on ‘sole’ is mine.

that co-operates with duty. What is at issue for Henson, however, is whether a co-operating inclination is an ethically permissible influence on the will. My guess is that when Kant disjoins the possibility of the law's overpowering inclination with the possibility of the law's at least excluding the consideration of inclination, he is reserving the latter possibility for the case where the inclination is co-operative. In any case, it is clear from the last two sentences of the passage that the motivation of a morally right action is very confined indeed. *Nothing but* pure respect remains to determine the will subjectively. It is hard to find room here for the co-operating subjective influences that overdetermination of the will would require. Pure reverence for law is all that Kant seems to allow.

None of this should seem surprising, given Kant's frequent and loud insistence on the need for purity in moral theory.¹¹ The question is whether the demand for purity can be made plausible. Barbara Herman thinks the answer is 'Yes', and she supposes that this answer gets support from a neglected line of thought Kant trails at several places in the *Foundations*. Herman asks, "Why is it not possible that . . . non-moral motives give dutiful actions moral worth?"¹² Kant's answer, as she formulates it, is this. "Non-moral motives may well lead to dutiful actions, and may do this with any degree of regularity desired. The problem is that the dutiful actions are the product of a fortuitous alignment of motives and circumstances. People who act according to duty from such motives may nonetheless remain morally indifferent."¹³

I agree that Kant recognizes dutiful actions done from non-moral motives. But he seems to deny that dutiful actions regularly come of non-moral motives. Thus, at 390 of the *Foundations* he says that

"though the unmoral ground may indeed now and then produce lawful actions, *more often* it brings forth unlawful ones" (my emphasis).

The point seems to be repeated in the course of the famous passage (398) in which Kant denies that actions done from a kind and sympathetic temperament have moral worth. He compares the sympathetic gesture to an action arising from the inclination to honour. The sympathetic action, he says,

"is on a level with [actions arising from] other inclinations, such as the inclination to honour, which, if *fortunately* directed to what *in fact* accords with duty and is generally useful and thus honourable, deserve praise and encouragement but no esteem" (my emphasis).

This passage coheres with 390, I think, only if its 'fortunately' and its 'in fact' are taken to signal the irregularity of the connection between the unmoral ground and the lawful action.

Herman chooses to give a different slant to the passage. According to her, Kant's 'fortunately' is meant to indicate the possibility, however seldom fulfilled, of sym-

¹¹ See e.g. the *Foundations*, 410ff.; *Critique of Practical Reason*, 91–92; *General Introduction*, section II.

¹² Herman, 363.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 366.

pathy's leading to a wrong action. She gives the example of a person whose sympathetic temperament leads him to help someone with a heavy burden, someone who unbeknownst to the helper is a thief laden with stolen goods. What explains the possibility of this misguided helpfulness, Herman suggests, is that the person acting on an inclination to be helpful does not have, just in virtue of the inclination, a moral interest in helping. So it is fortunate if the urge to help is engaged in circumstances in which gratifying the urge will accord with duty: the urge to help might be engaged in the course of a robbery. To exclude that unwanted possibility one needs to require with Kant that duty itself (or a specifically moral interest) move an agent.

Herman's suggestion is appealing because it seems to make sense of Kant's claim that inclinations lead only accidentally to the good (411), while detaching that claim from the idea that inclinations do not regularly lead to the good. The idea is certainly plausible: inclinations can lead regularly to the good and yet also, if only occasionally, lead unwittingly to the bad because they operate indiscriminately: it is their possibly indiscriminate operation that makes it an accident that they lead to the good. The idea is plausible: is it a correct reading of Kant?

I suggest that it is not. It is true that Kant wants to confine the motives for morally right actions to those that lead non-accidentally to the good. It is true, too, that for Kant inclinations are not motives of this kind: they violate the 'no accident' principle. The problem is that more than one explication of the 'no accident' principle excludes the inclinations. Herman thinks that the right explication ought to meet two requirements. It should (i) "credit an action with moral worth only if its performance does not depend on an accident of circumstances", and it should (ii) "allow that failure in different circumstances does not require denial of moral worth to the original performance".¹⁴

It is doubtful that Kant accepts the second of these constraints. The explication of the 'no accident' principle *he* is after must make it possible to get a purchase on the idea of a good will. A good will is a will that is absolutely good, and "that will is absolutely good which *cannot* be bad . . ." (437; my emphasis). Kant has in mind a will which could under *no* circumstances form intentions that violated the principle of autonomy. But a will such as Herman describes *could*, if only exceptionally, form intentions whose realization constituted wrong-doing. To take Herman's example, such a will could form an intention which abetted a theft. If such an intention can be formed, its source must be excised from a Kantian good will. The reason is simple. If inclination were allowed to influence the good will, then the good will would intend the right thing only conditionally on the absence of e.g. thieves in need of help. And the good will is supposed to will right action unconditionally. It is not enough for Kant, though it may be enough for us, that a good will actually have good intentions. It must actually have good intentions *and* be unable to form bad ones. Herman's condition (ii), by contrast, respects the intuition that actually having good intentions and acting on them is enough.

¹⁴ Ibid., 369.

It is hard to make Kant's conception of moral worth persuasive, if the conception is made to lean on Kant's idea of non-accidentally right action. Intuitively, it seems that a 'no accident' principle is met when what is actually willed is right, and when something wrong *would* not have been willed in relevant counterfactual situations. Kant's text suggests a 'could' in place of the 'would', and thereby demands more for moral worth than intuition does.

III

To see what is compelling in Kant's account, one has to turn attention away from the 'no accident principle', and toward points that the overdetermination issue pushes into the background. In this connection it pays to linger over the preface to the *Foundations*. There Kant singles out for further consideration a question about moral philosophy. He is concerned with whether the subject overlaps with what he calls 'anthropology'. He asks,

"Is it not of the utmost necessity to construct a pure moral philosophy which is completely freed from everything which may be only empirical and thus belong to anthropology?" (398)

This demarcation question does not look like one that could be settled by 'common reason'. Yet Kant thinks that there is a route from common reason to a positive answer to the demarcation question. As emerges, he is thinking of the way ordinary moral struggle simulates the metaphilosophical boundary dispute:

"Man feels in himself a powerful counterpoise against all commands of duty which reason presents to him as so deserving of respect; this counterpoise is his needs and inclinations, the complete satisfaction of which he sums up under the name of happiness. Now reason issues inexorable commands without promising anything to the inclinations. It disregards, as it were, and holds in contempt those claims which are so impetuous and yet so plausible, and which will not allow themselves to be abolished by any command. From this a natural dialectic arises, i. e., a propensity to argue against the stern laws of duty and their validity, or at least to place their purity and strictness in doubt and, where possible, to make them more accordant with our wishes and inclinations. This is equivalent to corrupting them in their very foundations and destroying their dignity – a thing which even common practical reason cannot ultimately call good" (405).

According to this passage, one's ordinary thoughts about what one ought to do, run back and forth between a respect for duty and a wish to indulge one's inclinations. Yet in the background of such to-ing and fro-ing is this reflection, that tempting and understandable as it is to succumb to inclination or to put its demands before those of duty, it is not good to do so. This reflection does seem to operate in moral struggle, as Kant says. And as Kant implies, the ordinary reflection seems to be the counterpart of a position in metaphilosophy, to the effect that morals must not be adulterated. Moral philosophy must not cash out its idea of duty in terms of inclination; otherwise it may endorse what common sense rightly finds repellent: the substitution of the demands of inclination for those of duty.

Kant's task in the body of the *Foundations* is to make precise and persuasive the thought that common reason shares with metaphilosophy. This is the thought that moral requirements are inescapable: there is nothing one can do to exempt oneself from them, or to diminish the need for a will to act upon them. A philosophical reconstruction of this thought would say what it is that *makes* moral requirements inescapable.

The inescapability must have something to do with the will; but if it had to do only with the human will there would be no explaining the bindingness of moral requirements on beings other than humans.¹⁵ So however inescapability depends on the will, it had better depend on what the human will can have in common with the wills of other beings. It is plausible that the direction of the will toward happiness is constant across different kinds of beings. The trouble with the aim of happiness is that it is indefinite, so that it is a bad adjudicator in cases where one is drawn toward conflicting plans of action. The indefiniteness of the global aim of happiness can even encourage one to sacrifice long-term well being to a pleasure of the moment, and a pleasure of the moment may do an agent harm (cf. 399). It may be that happiness is an inescapable aim, but its inescapability does not make for the inescapability of morals. On the contrary, the indefiniteness of the idea of happiness may engender the thought, in cases of moral conflict, that there *is* no right thing to do, so that the way out of a conflict is to do what one pleases. This runs counter to the common sense thought that the way out of moral conflict should not be the way of self-indulgence.

The inescapability of the aim of happiness cannot underlie the inescapability of morals: what about the inescapability of inclination? Inclinations are presumably part of the endowment of any creatures with a natural constitution, human beings included. The inclinations are inescapable to the extent that human beings are beings in nature. Could that inescapability be at the bottom of the inescapability of morals? Not if inclinations suggest policies of action recognizably at odds with duty. And of course inclinations *can* prompt plans that conflict with morality. But Kant cannot make very much of this point, since the possibility of conflict with duty does not obviously attend all inclinations. There are good inclinations, such as the inclination to honour, the inclination to do the kind thing, and the inclination of sympathy. Suppose *these* were sufficiently entrenched in agents to whom moral demands are addressed: couldn't the need to gratify those inclinations underlie the necessity of doing one's duty? Kant wants an answer in the negative. But a satisfactory such answer must not make good inclinations too much of a special case. There must be something about the need to satisfy a bad *or* good inclination, that is unlike the need to do one's duty: otherwise morals may depend on anthropology by depending on what is naturally benign in human beings.

What, then, distinguishes the need to satisfy an inclination – any inclination – from the need to do one's duty? Kant's answer is that the need to satisfy an inclination is

¹⁵ *Foundations*, 398: "Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to hold morally, i. e., as a ground of obligation, must imply absolute necessity; he must admit that the command, 'Thou shalt not lie', does not apply to men only, as if other rational beings had no need to observe it . . ."

pathological. It affects an agent by way of his brute feelings or sensations. To omit to satisfy an inclination is to experience sensory discomfort. But how far are we at the mercy of sensory discomfort? Are we bound to be moved to relieve such discomfort or to prevent it? We would be if, like the brutes, we were activated only pathologically. In that case the laws of empirical psychology, whatever they were, would ensure that the presence of inclinations culminated in action in accordance with them. But we are not quite like the brutes. We are capable of detachment in thought from our inclinations. That is, we are able to reflect on our inclinations and not just experience their pushes and pulls. When we reflect on them we can locate inclinations within a global system of causes and effects, i. e. nature. More particularly we can reflect on inclinations as contained in a system of psychological causes and effects peculiar to human beings. Under this aspect the demands of inclination can seem parochial, affecting only one kind of being among possibly many others (425, 442). They can seem more parochial still, since characteristic human inclinations (like sympathy; cf. 398) are not necessarily enjoyed by *every* human being. Again under the aspect of states in the causal nexus inclinations do not seem to make demands on us as *agents* (cf. 450): if we 'act' to satisfy them the course we follow is the course of nature. If morality is to apply universally and not merely generally, if it is to make demands of something that is genuinely a will, i. e. something that initiates effects and is not just subject to them, then morality cannot apply to us in virtue of our belonging to a particular natural kind, nor hence in virtue of our place in nature.

IV

We have before us the basis for Kant's claim that a "completely isolated", i. e., pure or unmixed, metaphysics of morals is the "indispensable substrate of . . . theoretically sound and definite knowledge of duties" (410). But Kant goes further to claim that a pure metaphysics of morals

"is also a desideratum of the highest importance to the actual fulfilment of its precepts. For the pure conception of duty and of the moral law generally, with no admixture of empirical inducements, has an influence on the human heart so much more powerful than all other incentives which may be derived from the empirical field that reason, in the consciousness of its dignity, despises them and gradually becomes master over them. It has this influence only through reason, which thereby first realizes that it can of itself be practical. A mixed theory of morals which is put together both from the incentives of feelings and inclinations and from rational concepts must, on the other hand, make the mind vacillate between motives which cannot be brought under any principle and which can lead only accidentally to the good and often to the bad" (410–411).

He is claiming that a mixed philosophy of morals is not only bad as theory but bad for practice: it countenances motives which, because they are incommensurable, encourage vacillation. If the vacillation has an outcome in right action, that is an accident. But neither vacillation nor accidentally right action is on the cards if one's motives are unmixed.

Kant amplifies this point about purity of motivation in a footnote concerning moral instruction (410n). He says that duties should only be represented to children by examples in which agents ignore any possible advantage and “the greatest temptations of need or allurements”. Presumably examples that allowed e. g. benevolent inclinations to figure as motives, would mislead the innocent. But how exactly? Why could not the kind or sympathetic gesture be held up as the sort of gesture children should strive to make second nature? Differently, why could not learning to take pleasure in doing right, be part of learning to do right? Kant seems to disregard an intuitively appealing account of moral development, familiar from Aristotle, according to which the cultivation of virtue depends on acquiring habits of acting, and acquiring the relevant habits is a matter of learning to co-ordinate perception and appetite in ways that make right action gratifying and wrong action repugnant.¹⁶

In matters of moral development Kant's views seem to be one-sided. Can reasons be found for his restricting morally exemplary action to action not “affected in the least by any foreign incentive” (410n), benevolent impulses and the pleasure of virtue included? One reason has already come before us. Not every being who is constrained to do right has, or is able to acquire, benevolent impulses. Again, not every being who is constrained to do right is able to take pleasure in doing right. So if benevolent impulses and expected pleasure are taken as reasons for doing right that reinforce the simple recognition of duty, some beings will have less reason to do right than others. The need to do right will be less potent for some creatures, with the result that morality will have one kind of authority over some finite beings, or most finite beings, but not *all* finite beings. The universality of moral authority threatens to give way to mere generality.

What is more, a merely general morality can create arbitrary moral advantage. If, as Aristotle suggests, it is criterial of being morally virtuous that one feel pleasure and pain at the right things, then certain beings whom nature has not equipped with the basis for the relevant sensitivity, or certain beings whom circumstance has deprived of the relevant sensitivity, will count as morally defective on account of something quite outside their control. Symmetrically, beings who are fortunately endowed, or fortunately circumstanced, will win a moral advantage from a natural or circumstantial advantage. Morality, in Kant's view, must either prescind from circumstantial or constitutional luck, or else not be binding in the same way on everyone. That is why he tries to derive foundations for morality that neutralize the effects of “unfortunate fate” and the sometimes “niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature” (cf. 394).

There is a corresponding view of moral training: it must call upon resources everyone can command, and it must set up as an ideal a way of life or a type of endeavour as much within one being's reach as within another's. The ideal or virtuous life for finite

¹⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, M. Ostwald, trans., (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1962), 1104 b 4–13, esp. 1104 b 9–13: “For moral excellence is concerned with pleasure and pain; it is pleasure that makes us do base actions and pain that prevents us from doing noble actions. For that reason, as Plato says, men must be brought up from childhood to feel pleasure and pain at the proper things; for this is correct education.”

beings such as ourselves is one of perpetual striving toward the model of holiness of will. Finite practical reason is asked

“to make sure of the unending progress of its maxims toward this model and of the constancy of the finite rational being in making continuous progress.”¹⁷

And the enabling condition – what makes it possible for the ideal to be realized – is no more than the possession of finite practical reason. What every finite being is asked unconditionally to do, viz. strive for holiness, is something every finite being is unconditionally able to do. It is different in Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he says more than once that unless one’s activities foster the right sort of habits from an early age, so that there is no question for the agent of not doing right, but only a question of how to do right, the study of how to become virtuous will be profitless.¹⁸ A kind of circumstantial bad luck in one’s youth can put the virtuous life out of one’s reach.¹⁹

There is a difference between Kant and Aristotle over the range of (human) beings to whom virtue must be accessible. There is a difference between them, too, over the kind of person who most vividly exemplifies virtue. In Aristotle it seems to be the man who enjoys *megalopsychia* – greatness of soul, high-mindedness or magnanimity. “High-mindedness”, Aristotle says, “is the crown, as it were, of the virtues: it magnifies them and it cannot exist without them.”²⁰ The high-minded man goes in for “great and distinguished” actions. What he does is prompted by the desire for great honour, but he is moderate in the pursuit of the external marks of such honour, and shuns the accolades of anyone inferior to himself.²¹ He is a sort of noble and heroic figure. Kant dismisses this stylish type as a character fit only for romancing. Anyone intent on promoting right conduct chooses the wrong example, defeats his purpose

“by setting actions called noble, magnanimous and meritorious as models for children with the aim of captivating them by infusing them with enthusiasm for such actions.”²²

The reason those actions are of the wrong type is two-fold.²³ On the one hand they give the novice too much to live up to, and so daunt rather than encourage him. On the other hand, they distract the novice from the sector of morality most likely to matter in ordinary life, namely the “observance of the commonest duty, and even the correct estimation of it”. The same drawbacks attend the promotion of magnanimous acts ‘among the instructed and experienced portion of mankind’.

¹⁷ *Critique of Practical Reason*, Beck, trans., 32. (Page references are to the Akademie edition.)

¹⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095 a 2–11; 1095 b 4–8.

¹⁹ See Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1331 b 30–1332 a l.

²⁰ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1124 a l.

²¹ On shunning the honours of his inferiors, see *ibid.*, 1124 a 9; on the ‘great and distinguished’ actions, see 1124 b 25.

²² *Critique of Practical Reason*, 157; Kant makes the same point, without reference to children, at 85.

²³ *Ibid.*, 157.

The great-souled man may inspire admiration in the experienced and inexperienced alike, but admiration falls short of genuine moral feeling, which is respect for righteousness superior to one's own in a fellow human being, or, what amounts to the same, reverence for the law which the example of superior righteousness in a plain, fellow mortal puts before one.²⁴ The respect aroused by the genuinely exemplary man works a double effect. It both counteracts the morally complacent thought that one has strived for holiness as much as anyone can, and it encourages one to renew one's efforts. Kant chooses his exemplary man carefully: it is not someone whose merits are so large as to put off would-be imitators. It is simply a "humble, plain man in whom I perceive righteousness in a higher degree than I am conscious of in myself".²⁵

Which figure – Aristotle's man of surpassing merit, or Kant's plain, righteous man – is the better suited to inspiring the rest of us to do right? Forced to a choice between the moral aristocrat and the moral peasant,²⁶ one might well opt for the latter on Kant's grounds – that he keeps our eyes fixed on ordinary moral demands, and that the feelings he inspires do not make us think it is impossible to live up to his example. The problem is that more than one moral theory can claim the unassuming do-gooder for its standard-bearer. The figure is open to appropriation by a neo-Aristotelian theory,²⁷ and also by a theory that, in a Humean vein, founds our capacities to recognize and to do right on the wide natural distribution of sympathetic impulses. If Kant's appropriation

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 77, 78.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁶ It is arguable that the choice between Aristotle's morally exemplary figure and Kant's is not the choice between the *megalopsychos* and the unassuming do-gooder, but rather the choice between, in Aristotle's terms, the *sōphrōn* and the *enkratēs*. Aristotle can be read as making exemplary the *sōphrōn*, the man who 'takes no pleasure in what he should not, and no excessive pleasure' in what most men naturally find pleasant (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1110a13). The *sōphrōn* is someone for whom it is out of character to have bad appetites, someone whose morally right actions never occur against the background of a struggle against base impulses. In a sense he is a figure who, presumably through training, does not have to have the 'subjective contingency' taken out of doing the virtuous thing. He sees what it's right to do and is never tempted to do otherwise. Kant's morally exemplary figure on the other hand, is always trying to discipline his endeavours so as to bring them into line with the policies of a holy will. He is always waging a battle against a will that is not wholly good. So, it might be suggested, he is like Aristotle's *enkratēs*, the morally strong person who, though he feels the temptation to gratify base appetites, struggles against the temptation and wins. I doubt, however, that the *enkratēs* is the same type as Kant's morally exemplary man. Kant is not saying that to be morally exemplary we have to overcome base appetites and strive to be continent: he is saying we must make choices independently of *any* appetites, bad or good. That is why he sometimes locates a will like the good will in a man who is reduced to 'dead insensibility' (*Foundations*, 398), someone who neither takes pleasure in anything, nor feels pain at the distress of others. In general, the controlling conception of the morally exemplary man seems to be that of someone who is *both* able to get the better of his base appetites, and who *renounces* (cf. *Foundations*, 432) any helps to right action that are contingently present in his dispositions to act.

²⁷ See Philippa Foot's treatment of two exemplary figures in section II of *Virtues and Vices*, the first essay in *Virtues and Vices*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 8–14, esp. pp. 12 ff. See also the quotation on pp. 4–5.

of this figure is to prevail over, say, Hume's, then we are owed an account of why the attractiveness of the moral peasant derives from his reflective obedience to moral law rather than to the good in his natural constitution.

Kant meets this demand, I think, by distinguishing between two kinds of attraction that the moral peasant can exert on us. He attracts in one way when assumed to be motivated by natural inclination; he attracts in another way when assumed to be under the discipline of law. The first kind of attraction is purely aesthetic; the second is moral. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant says,

"It is a very beautiful thing to do good to men because of love and a sympathetic good will, or to do justice because of a love of order."²⁸

This must mean that disinterested pleasure comes of witnessing the loving or sympathetic gesture. What the action done from duty inspires in us, on the other hand, is respect, and

"Respect is so far from being a feeling of pleasure that one only reluctantly gives way to it. We seek to discover something that will lighten the burden of it for us, some fault to compensate us for the humiliation we suffer from such an example."²⁹

Rather than being beautiful, an action that wrests respect from us is more like (but only *like*) something sublime: we are alternately attracted and repelled, not given positive pleasure.³⁰

These remarks gesture toward a clear distinction between the attractions of a Kantian moral peasant and those of a Humean one. Both do the right thing. But one man's example humbles us, that is, undoes the self-esteem that can curtail our striving to make our wills good; the other, Humean exemplar allows us to indulge in pure spectatorship, and so gives us unwonted relief from the struggle against self-conceit. We are momentarily arrested by the charm of good nature but not goaded by its example. On the contrary, the example of good nature can actually encourage us to take it easy by encouraging us to think that nature itself sees to the development of the good will. The spectacle of good nature can seduce us into thinking that nature, by an endowment of sympathy or love, on its own gets us to will to do the right thing. Kant adverts to this danger at 83 of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, immediately after saying that it is beautiful to do good out of love or sympathy:

"It is a very beautiful thing to do good to men because of love and a sympathetic good will, or to do justice because of a love of order. But this is not the genuine moral maxim of our conduct, the maxim which is suitable to our position among rational beings as men, when we presume, like volunteers, to flout with proud conceit the thought of duty and, as independent of command, merely to will of our own good pleasure to do something to which we think we need no command. We stand under a *discipline* of reason, and in all our maxims we must not forget our subjection to it, or withdraw anything from it, or by an egotistical illusion detract from the authority of the law ..."

²⁸ *Critique of Practical Reason*, 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁰ See the *Critique of Judgment*, § 23.

Kant does not need to deny the attractiveness of good nature. He can and does grant it aesthetic appeal, but not the sort of power over the will that genuine moral force can be expected to exert.

Intuition seems to bear Kant out. That the acts of the good-natured man are attractive, is undeniable. But what makes them attractive? The answer intuition delivers, I think, is that the acts are attractive because they are unstudied, unforced and regular, much as if a kind of warm mechanism produced them. But despite the attraction of right actions that come automatically, intuition seems to demand that the agent be responsible for them, that he control their production. We do not want the kind person's good turns to be the enactment of a complicated computer programme or of a deterministic law. We want a will to operate, and we want the will to be guided by something other than the wish to gratify impulses, even good impulses. These intuitions translate into constraints on what the *inside* of a moral agent must be like. Kant's moral agent and Hume's can both look the same on the outside: they can both present the same appearance of humble, even cheerful righteousness. But turned inside out they are quite different. In the Humean man the good of his good nature works through him. His reactions are the outcome of how he has been constituted. So his actions betoken subjection to the laws of human nature, not the subjection of wilful obedience. And it is wilful righteousness intuition demands. Without wanting to *see* effort and reflective obedience behind another's good turn, and without wishing to *feel* submission behind our own good turns, we seem to require it, or something like it, to be there.

In other words, intuition drives us toward a demand for a good will behind a good nature. To demand this is not to demand that the good will take the place of good nature. To the extent that good acts are acts of men, inclinations (good or bad) cannot but affect agents. As Kant says at 405 of the *Foundations*, there is no legislating away their influence. What there *is* scope for is the recognition by men that it would be better if their good choices were prompted by duty and not by inclination. This recognition by itself diminishes the influence of inclination. For if an agent is moved by something he would like not to move him, he is at any rate unwillingly at the mercy of the relevant impulse, and to that extent the impulse does not move him by way of his will. That is how "reason, in the consciousness of its dignity, despises [incentives other than duty] and gradually becomes master over them". Reason does not eradicate the influence of inclinations. At best it diminishes the influence of inclinations on the will, i. e., on the faculty for making conscious choices. A good will can, then, co-exist with a good nature; only it must operate independently. That is what makes it free.