

# ON ACTING FROM DUTY

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis will argue that, along with reason, emotions play a critical role in both moral and non-moral life. It is argued by Kantian moralists that a moral law can only be based in reason, while Aristotelian moralists believe that emotions cannot be cast aside when considering morality. The goal of this thesis is to utilize the works of contemporary philosophers in order to determine if Immanuel Kant's view of an *a priori* moral law based in reason can be reconciled with a moral theory that also emphasizes the roles of passions and sentiments in moral life.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Kant's concept of duty**

Immanuel Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*<sup>1</sup> (1785) has come to be considered a central work in the subject of ethics. Much discussion regarding Kant's philosophy in the *Groundwork* revolves around his concept of *duty*. According to Kant, for an action to have moral worth, the action must be motivated solely by duty. In the first section of the *Groundwork*, Kant provides examples of moral agents of varying character to illustrate the distinction between acting merely in accordance with duty and acting from duty.

In the first example we have Kant's reaction to a shopkeeper who does not take advantage of 'inexperienced purchasers.'

“Thus customers are honestly served, but this is not nearly enough for making us believe that the merchant has acted this way from duty and from principles of honesty; his own advantage required him to do it. He cannot, however be assumed to have in addition (as in the [next] case) an immediate inclination toward his buyers, causing him, as it were, out of love to give no one as far as price is concerned any advantage over another” (Kant, 10).

Kant here is making the point that since it *just so happens* to be good for a business to not dupe its customers, we cannot be certain that—if honesty no longer provided an advantage—the business would not simply alter its principles accordingly. This is not surprising, as we often hear of happenings of dishonest conduct within local businesses and Fortune 500 companies alike. Kant further points out that just because a business *does* treat its customers honestly

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<sup>1</sup> Although this seems to be the most common translation, it has also been translated as *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

doesn't necessarily mean that they do so because of some genuine sense of fondness, appreciation, or love felt towards each customer. But, what if a merchant actually had such a disposition?

In the next example, Kant reflects on persons who are naturally inclined towards helping others—who are 'happy philanthropists,' of sorts.

“To help others where one can is a duty, and besides this there are many spirits of so sympathetic a temper that, without any further motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work. Yet I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however right and however amiable it may be, still has no genuinely moral worth. It stands on the same footing as other inclinations—for example, the inclination for honour, which if fortunate enough to hit on something beneficial and right and consequently honourable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem; for its maxim lacks moral content, namely the performance of such actions, not from inclination, but *from duty*” (Kant, 11).

Here Kant argues that although acting from an inclination, such as sympathy or honor, may well hit upon what is good and right, the action still lacks moral worth. For Kant, someone who is thoroughly altruistic in their actions and also finds pleasure in acting in such a way does not act from duty, and thus their actions too have no moral worth. Thus, Kant shows again that although action done from well-intended inclinations (i.e. honesty or sympathy) may be commendable, they are only so due to circumstantial reasons (i.e. its being good for business).

In the third example, Kant addresses a 'sorrowful philanthropist' who requires no such beneficent motivations to point him toward the right thing to do.

“Suppose then that the mind of this friend of man were overclouded by sorrows of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of others, but that he still had power to help those in distress, though no longer stirred by the need of others because sufficiently occupied with his own; and suppose that, when no longer moved by any inclination, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without

any inclination for the sake of duty alone; then for the first time his action has its genuine moral worth” (Kant, 11).

This example is offered in contrast to the ‘happy philanthropist’ example from the previous passage. Kant here speaks of a person who is not only unsympathetic towards acting beneficently, but further is not sympathetic of *anyone* whatsoever. Kant maintains that even a person of such a malevolent (or just plain grumpy) character such as the one he describes may yet perform actions worthy of moral praise. For Kant, if such a person, in spite of his inclinations to act differently, ignores the disposition of his sentiments and acts solely from duty, then for Kant, his action indeed has moral worth. Further, not only does the action have moral worth, but ‘a moral worth and beyond all comparison the highest.’ The picture Kant seems to be painting is that the greater the desire one has to act in *opposition* to duty, when one still does act from duty, the more we should esteem that person’s action.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ISSUE

#### **Stocker's possible implications for acting from duty**

In his essay, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories" Michael Stocker examines different prominent ethical theories, focusing intently on the implications of acting according to them. His primary concern is that acting in accordance with these theories may necessarily obstruct certain aspects of life that are generally considered valuable to one's overall happiness—things that constitute a *good life*. Particular elements of such a life, Stocker refers to as "love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community" (Stocker 456). These are of the 'great goods' Stocker will argue to be inaccessible to committed agent's of ethical system's which 'over-concentrate' on moral obligation.

Stocker believes that in order to lead a good life our reasons (or values or justifications) and our motives must be in harmony (he goes on to say such harmony isn't required in *every* instance, but it should be at least present some of the times). In other words, we must *actually* value what our motives seek, and that which we value too must motivate us. Stocker thinks many modern ethical theories over-concentrate on only one half of the picture, and the result is the hindrance of attributes that nurture the wellbeing of one's 'spirit.' Stocker thinks that if we were to actually follow such an ethical theory we would consistently find ourselves in a state of '*moral schizophrenia*.' That is to say that when faced with a moral consideration, and in acting in accordance with these ethical theories, we would often find ourselves overcome with feelings such as "indecisiveness, guilt, shame, [and] self-deception" (Stocker 454). Such feelings



typically arise whenever an agent has some aversion to doing the action performed. This I believe is the central issue Stocker has with ethical theories that over-concentrate on duty. He seems to think that these theories necessitate such feelings in their disregard for important aspects moral life such as “values of personal and interpersonal relations and activities; and also the area of moral goodness, merit, virtue” (Stocker, 455).

Although the primary focus of this essay has to do with the role of duty and Kantian ethics, ethical theories such as egoism and utilitarianism are useful in revealing the essence of Stocker’s concerns, and how they apply to his understanding of what it means to act from duty. Stocker goes on to examine these theories in order to expose how each prevents a dedicated agent from leading a ‘good life.’

### **Paradox of the Rational Egoist**

To further illustrate the feeling of disharmony he has in mind, Stocker considers an agent driven by *egoism*—one who is motivated by self-interest. Recalling that, according to Stocker, among the greatest pleasures in life are “love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community,” an egoist clearly has interest in seeking these goods (Stocker 456). A key part of Stocker’s argument is that in order for us to attain any of the above goods, we must care for the beloved, or friend, and act strictly *for their sake* (i.e. because we love them, not because it’ll give us pleasure). An egoist, however, acts only from the motive of self-gratification, or for the achievement of some pleasure-for-self. Hence, egoism necessitates disharmony in the mind of the egoist, as the egoist must want the great goods of love, friendship, etc. but would have to act outside of the practice of egoism to achieve them. So, our egoistic motive (pleasure-for-self) is in disharmony with our

reason (which tells us to strive for these goods). This is the sort of *moral schizophrenia* Stocker has in mind.

## **Utilitarianism**

Next Stocker considers a theory that could be said to exist on the opposite end of the motivational spectrum: utilitarianism. A utilitarian acts from the motivation of promoting the greatest happiness. It first seems as though utilitarianism would inherently promote those valuable goods we seek. However, although utilitarianism *does* aim at promoting happiness, as far as the theory concerns *who* should benefit from that happiness—utilitarianism is utterly indiscriminate. A consequence of this lack of concern is that people, and their happiness, may be considered to be replaceable. Imagine a homeless man stumbles into a hospital shortly prior to collapsing and falling unconscious. Meanwhile, a number of other patients in the hospital are in dire need of an organ transplant, with little hope of reaching the top of the lengthy donor list. After recognizing the impending death of their patients, the utilitarian surgical unit would be urged to harvest the organs of the unconscious homeless man so that they could save the lives of a number of other patients. Certainly there's something wrong with this. In acting this way, people are treated *externally*—as objects or receptacles for happiness that are essentially expendable. It doesn't matter *who* receives the good just that someone does. Stocker says that this is “dehumanizing” in the very least (Stocker 460).

He goes on to say that treating people externally, or as replaceable essentially precludes the aforementioned feelings of “love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community” (Stocker 461). Hence, achieving these goods under utilitarianism necessitates a *moral schizophrenia* in the

sense that utilitarians, like the egoists, have reason to achieve these goods, as they are essential to the promotion of the greatest happiness, yet the motives their theory instills in them prevents them from being able to achieve these goods. Stocker wants to say that to achieve certain goods such as love, friendship, etc. we must embody certain motives that reflect our value of those goods, and such motives are cut off from an agent of egoism or utilitarianism.

### **Acting from Duty**

Now we move to Stocker's consideration of *duty*. It is clear that he believes that a moral theory built around duty is culpable of many of the same charges put forth in the previous cases against egoism and utilitarianism. In particular, he argues that acting from *duty* may also result in treating others *externally*, which he has shown to preclude many of the great goods he associates with a *good life*. To show this, Stocker offers as his predominate case the example of Smith visiting a friend (whom Marcia Baron has named 'Thompson') in the hospital, a friend who has been bored and lonely. Thompson thanks Smith for being a good friend for visiting her and taking the time to cheer her up. Then Smith replies about how he always tries to act in accord with duty, and it becomes apparent to Thompson that this is the real reason Smith came to visit her. She starts to wonder if Smith really is her friend at all—not to mention she may now be annoyed by Smith's visit, as opposed to being cheered up. The point Stocker wants to emphasize is that Smith went to the hospital not because of his friendship for Thompson, but because of some other reason, and there is something off putting about that. It certainly seems that as impartial observers we would be disinclined to consider Smith a 'friend' to Thompson. For, here is a person with a morally good intention (visiting his friend, in accordance with duty) but it is at least questionable whether the result is a morally good act (i.e. Smith's actions lack moral merit).

As Stocker explains it, the lack of moral worth in this case stems from the agent's motivation: "the wrong sort of thing is said to be the proper motive, and, in this case at least, the wrong sort of thing is, again, essentially external" (Stocker, 462). Did Smith help Thompson by his visit? Did Smith do any good *at all*? It doesn't seem so, at least not from our perspective, and probably neither from Thompson's. In fact, she may even feel worse than before, having previously considered Smith to be a friend and now coming to the realization that to Smith she was basically nothing more than an object on which Smith could exercise his moral righteousness. Again, Stocker thinks that Smith is treating Thompson *externally*, and is thus not as a friend.

Stocker seems to think that although the Kantian concept of acting 'from duty' aims at goodness in theory, in practice it misses the biggest goods of all. In acting in accordance with such theories, "the personalities of loved ones get passed over for their effects, moral action becomes self-stultifying and self-defeating" (Stocker 466). Stocker's primary charge is simple—to treat someone as a friend, one may not treat that person as *external*. To treat someone externally is to embody a motive in acting that does not take into account the person for *who they are*. The person in the hospital isn't just another aching body that equally deserves some relief, but it is Thompson, who went to grade school with you, and grew up with you, and who you would miss dearly if she were gone. Smith may have morally good intention (according to duty), but Thompson expects that her friends visit her just because they are her friends, and not merely because of some moral obligation. Stocker thinks that if we become aware of our friends being motivated solely by duty, when it comes to visiting, we would simply say, "*don't bother.*"

## CHAPTER III

### RESPONSES

#### Hursthouse and Virtue Ethics

In the world of ethical philosophy, the doctrine known as Virtue Ethics is considered by some to be a viable response to the utter lack of recognition of the moral significance of emotions in Kantian ethics.<sup>2</sup> In her work “On Virtue Ethics,” Rosalind Hursthouse examines the philanthropist passage from Kant’s *Groundwork* from the position of a virtue ethicist in order to determine whether or not Kantian ethics are really incompatible with the emotions. To do so, she first provides a central model of virtue ethics heavily grounded in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*. As we will see, Hursthouse will discover that Aristotelians have good reason to agree with Kant’s assessment of the shopkeeper and philanthropists.

Hursthouse notices an interesting distinction made by Aristotle, and that is the distinction between the continent, or self-controlled, person and the fully virtuous person. These represent the state of a moral agent, determined by a harmony (or lack there-of) between an agent’s *reasons* and *desires*.<sup>3</sup> For both Kant and Aristotle, reason tells us to act morally. Thus, the continent agent is one who acts morally, but contrary to their desires. Alternatively, the fully virtuous agent is one who acts morally, and has the desire to do so. With the distinction now made apparent, Hursthouse notices that Kant too makes a similar distinction in the *Groundwork*, but in a seemingly contrary way.

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<sup>2</sup> Hursthouse, p. 92

<sup>3</sup> Hursthouse, p. 92

For Hursthouse and Aristotle, Kant's example of the third 'philanthropist,' (cited in Chapter I), would qualify as a fundamental example of a continent agent. However, Kant appears to frame this person as a moral exemplar, one who is morally superior to agents in previous examples whose desires (or "inclinations") align with acting morally. This outwardly converse application of the continent/fully virtuous distinction serves as principal motivation for resistance to accepting the compatibility of Kantian and virtue ethics, also driven by the Aristotelian claim that 'virtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue.' Although Hursthouse admits she too felt this way about the passage initially, Philippa Foot pointed out an apparent contradiction that convinced Hursthouse to entertain the idea that Aristotle and Kant weren't making contrary distinctions after all.

### **Foot's Puzzle**

"We both are and are not inclined to think that the harder a man finds it to act virtuously the more virtue he shows if he does act well. For on the one hand great virtue is needed where it is particularly hard to act virtuously; yet on the other it could be argued that difficulty in acting virtuously shows that the agent is imperfect in virtue: according to Aristotle, to take pleasure in virtuous action is the mark of true virtue, with the self-mastery of the one who finds virtue difficult only a second best. How then is this conflict to be decided?" (94 [Foot 'Virtues and Vices' 1978, p. 10]).

What Foot has in mind is that in cases where it is hard to act virtuously, we encourage someone stepping up; yet, that it *is* difficult may be a sign of some moral deficiency. So the question becomes, is it that the harder it is for one to act virtuously, the less virtue he shows, or the reverse? Foot answers that either could be true, depending on what it is that 'makes it hard' for someone to act virtuously. Particularly, when what 'makes it hard' is a reflection of something lacking or incomplete in one's *character*, that act deserves less esteem, as the original

continent/fully virtuous distinction applies. However, Foot shows with at least some virtues we can find examples in which the judgment is reversed, and the distinction no longer applies.

## **Courage**

Courage turns out to be a virtue whose merit may entirely depend on the condition of the allegedly courageous person. For example, as Hursthouse points out, parents who find difficulty in helping their children because they fear for their own safety are considered cowardly compared to those who risk their lives for their children without hesitation.<sup>4</sup> It's merely natural that most would agree with such a statement. Hursthouse says that in cases such as this it is the fearlessness that causes us to attribute courageous merit to the act, "since it reflects the agent's values and, thereby, character" (Hursthouse, 96). However, she is not saying that fearlessness in the face of danger automatically equates to courage (although it may, perhaps, to something like bravery). For, in the case of the daredevil or masochist, fear may never be present when facing danger, but certainly we would refrain from calling their actions courageous.

Nevertheless, the Aristotelian picture of courage still seems to show that the harder it is for one to act virtuously the less esteem one deserves. However, there are cases in which the continent/fully virtuous distinction does not apply. Now, imagine a new father who for quite some time has been an ardent alcoholic. But, having a child causes him to reflect on his priorities, and next time he goes out with his friends he fights his urges and orders water instead of a beer—an act which unfortunately can require much courage these days. We should consider the act courageous if *in spite* of his addiction and social pressures to drink he instead thinks of

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<sup>4</sup> Hursthouse, p. 96

his child and avoids giving in. He may know the consequences of no longer drinking (agonizing detox and possible social stigma) and even fear them, but does so anyway. His act is courageous because although the father is fearful, he is not fearful because of a lack of love for his child. Rather, it is exactly because he has love for his child that allows him to overcome his fears. Furthermore, in any such case, the ‘more’ of an alcoholic the man, or the greater the pressure to drink, the more courage it may require not to give in, but we do not draw a line where we say, “you are too far gone.” Rather, the greater the problem, the more elated we are to see someone overcome it. So clearly, courage is a case where it is necessary to qualify the Aristotelian claim that virtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue.

## **Honesty**

Honesty too seems to be a case in which we can find examples in which the continent/fully virtuous distinction applies, and those in which it does not. The returning of lost items to their rightful owner is a consequence of honesty we try to instill in our children from a young age. For young children, it is usually quite easy to tell when the trait of honesty has yet to bloom. Children often need not reach much further than their pure desire to have what another has to motivate them to take it. Children at such a young age also may not understand why they are scolded for taking what does not belong to them. This may be attributed to their lack of understanding of the salient aspects of a situation that adults have. As Hursthouse does, we can imagine a woman who comes across a purse.<sup>5</sup> Now she has a moral dilemma on her hands—return the purse or not. We might be tempted to judge her similarly to how we would judge a child: the easier for her to return what is not hers, the more honest her character is. However,

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<sup>5</sup> Hursthouse, p. 97



Hursthouse points out that there are possibilities that would cause us to refrain from judging such cases so generally. For, if the woman finding the purse is quite wealthy, it may not be hard at all for her to return the purse to its rightful owner, as its contents would have no significant consequence on her daily life. On the other hand, should the discoverer of the purse be very poor—someone whose life would be made much easier by keeping the contents of the purse—we would hardly consider her ‘less honest’ for returning it in the end, even if before doing so her thoughts helplessly wander to the many meals keeping the purse would provide. In fact, Hursthouse points out, that the finder may even have knowledge that the owner of the purse is one who truly doesn’t deserve to have it back. In *Robin Hood-esque* situations such as this some may even venture to say that she is honest to a fault, and in this case should carefully weigh her value of honesty against others. But such cases get messy fast (like the Nazi at the door, requesting to see where you are ‘harboring enemies of the state’) and are not necessary to illuminating Foot’s point. We do not have to go so far to see that honesty, like courage, is a virtue in which it being hard to follow through with an act of honesty both may and may not be a sign of a deficiency of one’s honest character.

### **Charity or Benevolence**

The final virtue examined by Foot is known as charity or benevolence. This example is of particular importance, as it pertains almost directly to one of the philanthropists described in the *Groundwork*. Hursthouse does not fail to notice that in acts of charity, it is quite often the case that such an act is accompanied by a warm sentiment of pleasure. Giving is the right thing to do, and it happens to make us feel good a lot of the time. Further, one with a lack of willingness to give or share may come to be known as selfish, which certainly carries with it negative

insinuations. So, is it not natural to conclude that it must generally be the case that anyone who ‘finds it hard’ to help another in a charitable fashion must only possess some inferior, or ‘continent’ form of this particular virtue?<sup>6</sup> No, says Hursthouse. As previously asserted by Foot, it is when what ‘makes it hard’ stems from some deficiency in one’s character that they are said to be lacking in a particular virtue.

Kant’s ‘sorrowing philanthropist’ is described as overcome with grief and despair. So, for Hursthouse, the source of the difficulty for this fellow to act charitably stems not from something lacking in his character, but from the nature of his sorrow. Hursthouse asserts that both Aristotelians and Kantians alike would agree that there is something ‘particularly estimable’ about one who manages to fulfill a virtuous action in a state that makes it so utterly difficult to do so. Similar cases are not difficult to find in every day life: we can imagine someone who upon after visiting an ill friend in the hospital, doesn’t feel much like giving change to the man dressed as St. Nicholas outside the grocery store, but does so anyway because he knows the few cents may be needed more by the foundation they may aid. Again, this person’s difficulty in giving—on this day—does not stem from moral deficiency, but from his downtrodden attitude after seeing his ill friend (an attitude which is perfectly reasonable after such a situation). Also, we may even feel as though such an act deserves particular esteem—as we may sympathize with his grief. Thus, Hursthouse shows that following Foot, “we may conclude that Kant’s estimation of the sorrowing philanthropist should not be read as a straightforward denial of Aristotle’s weighting of the continent/fully virtuous distinction” (Hursthouse, 98).

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<sup>6</sup> Hursthouse, pg. 97

### **Acting from Inclination**

Hursthouse lastly considers another of the philanthropist examples that concerns action done from *inclination*. This is the first example of the ‘happy philanthropist’ mentioned at the start of this paper. To recap, in the example the philanthropist acts only from his inclination of sympathy towards others, which Kant condemns as lacking of any moral worth. Hursthouse will conclude that, again, Aristotelians have good reason to agree with Kant’s assessment of the happy philanthropist’s actions.

To see why, she first asks us to consider just what it would be like for someone to act ‘from inclination.’ We can imagine a child who (quite fortunately) has the natural inclination to *share*. We may then reasonably assume he takes a course of action such as aimlessly wondering around his daycare distributing toys and snacks to each of the other children, and thereby fulfilling his desire to share. Now, as rational observers, how do we think about a child acting in such a way? As it turns out, with a very young child, we may consider his ‘reasoning’ analogous to a dog’s reasoning when it chases cars—he doesn’t actually have *reason* act in such a way, rather, he does it simply because he wants to. At first, this may not seem problematic. For, what exactly is the problem with acting from inclination if the result is beneficial?

Hursthouse goes on to explain the possible implications of one’s ‘acting’ in such a way. The primary concern in acting from inclination is that there is no guarantee that the action will hit upon something right. I can imagine another child at the daycare who unknowingly offers a toy with very small pieces to another child who is too young for that toy and who may choke on its

parts. Hursthouse notes that we would not condemn a child for such actions, because we know at a certain age he does not understand certain things—he lacks a fully mature faculty of *reason*. Instead we try to teach him *why* certain actions are wrong, or harmful. A fully rational adult is due no such sympathy. In many aspects, a child's ignorance is expected, but for an adult such ignorance speaks volumes. Once we have it, we cannot choose to abandon our reason and from then on act only from inclination. As adults, we are accountable for our actions, as we cannot become unaware that they always may up for judgment.

Stocker argues that consequences arise when embodying the motives of Kantian agents—namely, duty. The shopkeeper and 'happy philanthropist' examples provided in the *Groundwork* reveal Kant's attitude towards action done from non-moral motives, and Hursthouse shows that an Aristotelian would agree with Kant's assessment of each. She shows too that Aristotelians would agree with Kant that there is something 'particularly estimable' about the 'sorrowful philanthropist'. Thus, Hursthouse sheds light on the possibility that the problem may not be one of 'moral motivation' as Stocker suggests.

Hursthouse argues that, because what 'makes it hard' for the sorrowful philanthropist to do the right stems from the nature of his *sorrow*, rather than his *character*, that the original Aristotelian continent/fully virtuous distinction applies (and so too the Aristotelians agree with Kant's assessment of praiseworthiness). However, there is not enough evidence to conclude that—in considering someone for whom what 'makes it hard' to do the right thing *does* stem from his or her character—Kant would not consider such a person *equally* praiseworthy. Thus, we may want

to assume that Stocker's worry is indeed one of motivation, and turn to look at consequences of one's acting 'from duty' specifically.

### **Baron's Reply to Stocker**

As we have seen, Stocker has shown that there are legitimate concerns about what acting from duty entails. In chapter four of *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology*, Marcia Baron directly addresses Stocker's worry, the worry that "action done from duty expresses and perhaps nurtures the wrong sorts of attitudes towards others" (Baron, 118). In doing so, she examines examples given by Stocker in order to determine what is so 'repugnant' about them, and whether or not their repugnancy actually entails anything morally objectionable as Stocker implies.

The Hospital Example provided by Stocker, while revealing, is really not much more than a skeleton of a story in terms of its detail. In other words, there is much about the described situation left open to the imagination, and Baron notices that there are a number of ways we can fill out the little narrative. Again, borrowing from Baron, I will refer to the visitor as 'Smith' and the visatee as 'Thompson.' She first proposes version of Smith who "does not want to visit his friend, but believing it to be his duty to visit her, he forces himself to do so" (Baron, 119). Baron believes it is the fact that we are able to detect Smith's disinclination to visit his friend that most contributes to our suspicion that there is something wrong about his behavior. After all, if a true friend becomes hospitalized, it is perfectly natural to want to be by her side (barring a phobia of hospitals). What then must be determined is whether or not Smith's disinclination is relevant to the 'moral repugnance' of acting from duty.

The idea of friendship has much to do with how we may interpret Stocker's example. Baron notes that a compelling way to read the Hospital Example is from the perspective that Smith is visiting Thompson because he thinks it is his duty *as a friend* to do so. Regarding Smith's attitude, she supposes it to be ordinary for people to act as a friend grudgingly or resentfully, for whatever reason they may have. For example, Thompson and Smith may have had a recent falling out, but friendship still compels Smith to visit his friend in the hospital. However, Baron argues that in doing so, that person may actually be morally objectionable on two counts. First, his attitude may show through, making the visit unpleasant. The problem in this particular case is not Smith's motive for acting, but the actions he took himself. These aspects make it clear that Smith actually *did not* act according to duty. Baron explains that Smith's "duty was not to make an appearance in Thompson's room, but to do her some good by visiting her" (Baron, 121). While for many difficult acts just showing up may be '*half of the battle*,' the other half clearly plays an essential role.

A second way Smith's actions may be objectionable is that even if he successfully conceals his attitude, and Thompson goes on blissfully unaware of Smith's resentment, it is not enough to alleviate all moral concern. Baron argues that although Smith's attitude may not be his own fault or even under his control, "Part of what one morally ought to do is cultivate certain attitudes and dispositions, for example, sympathy rather than resentment or repulsion for the ailing and a cheerful readiness to help and to find ways in which one can help" (Baron, 121-2). Once a friend is hospitalized, it may be good practice to no longer dwell on petty differences and focus on what is best for a comrade in recovery (E.g. a positive attitude, support, companionship, etc.).

Thus, Baron reveals that Smith's resentful attitude—concealed or otherwise—is enough to condemn his actions morally. However, this conclusion does not seem to attribute acting from duty as the main source of our 'moral repugnance.' As Baron points out, rather than condemning acting from duty itself, "it shows that there is something wrong with acting from a false conception of one's duty, a conception that overlooks the importance of the attitudes and feelings one has when one performs certain acts, especially those that are intended to express affection or concern" (Baron, 122). Thus, Baron shows that in acting dutifully *as a friend*, there are certain guidelines regarding our disposition and attitude as to how we should act, and it is when we abandon or neglect these parameters that our actions are morally objectionable. Next, she entertains the possibility that Smith visits Thompson not from his duty *as a friend*, but solely from duty, or persistently thinking only of *what, morally, he ought to do*.

In considering acting from duty alone, Baron further entertains the suspicion that Smith is acting in such a way will "render him cold, cut off from others, alienated from people by his preoccupation with morality" (Baron, 122). A response she provides is that if one is thinking in this way in such a situation, they are acting incorrectly, and the problem again is not their motives, but their execution of their actions. Here, the picture we have of Smith is that he is so overly-concerned with acting morally that he is empathetically blinded by it. So, as before, it is not duty itself that is the issue, but Smith's fixation on it.

In another scenario, Baron imagines that Smith generally has no problem with Thompson, and it is only the uneasiness he feels in hospitals that makes him disinclined to visit her. Further, it is the motive of duty that pushes Smith to go through with the visit. Not unlike Hursthouse, Baron

concludes that such a dependency on duty must be attributed to a flaw in one's *character*. As she puts it, "a person is morally deficient if she is so motivationally depleted that, for actions to which most of us would be moved by sympathy, fellow feeling, or affection for a particular person (the list is not exhaustive), the only sufficient motive she has is her belief that the action is morally called for" (Baron, 123). Once again, duty is not to blame for the 'repugnancy' of Smith's actions in these examples.

Baron thinks that her previous examples, although none point to duty as the source of repugnancy, are not quite strong enough on their own. In an attempt to completely exonerate acting from duty, she proceeds by addressing two primary worries.

*Worry 1:* If one acts from duty, it shows that something must be wrong, or missing from those persons' 'natural affections.' The worry here is that "A truly good person does not need the motive of duty. Anyone who needs it, or at least anyone who needs it often, must be lacking in affection for others" (Baron, 124).

*Worry 2:* In acting from duty, "whatever fellow feeling one has, and whatever other feelings and motives one has that are essential to love and friendship, are undermined—'driven under'—insofar as one acts from duty. One ignores the direct concern one feels for the other, focusing instead on duty. As one strives to act from duty, one becomes resistant to other 'competing' sentiments as they have the potential to be a hindrance to acting from duty" (Baron, 124).

Baron goes on to explain that Worry 1 is ill grounded. She says that this worry assumes duty is to serve only as a back-up motive (e.g. when I don't feel sufficiently sympathetic for my friend in the hospital, the motive of duty supplements my motivation and urges me to visit her). Baron proposes that there is no need for making this assumption. She then offers a two-part proposal to how we should think about duty. First, duty has a regulative function as well as the function of



prompting certain actions. Second, which is presupposed by the first, the motive of duty does not come into play episodically. It concerns not only individual actions, but also conduct over long stretches of time.

To further explicate her point, Baron provides Barbara Herman's distinction between primary and secondary motives. As Herman presents it, "a *primary* motive supplies the agent with the motivation to do the act in question, whereas a *secondary* motive provides *limiting conditions* on what may be done" (Baron, 129). In other words, if duty is considered to be a secondary motive, then upon considering a range of actions, my secondary motive of duty tells me which of those actions are permissible (according to duty).

Next, to address Worry 2, Baron supplements Herman's original distinction between primary and secondary motives with her own modifications. First, Baron asserts that a secondary motive serves a *regulative* function. That is to say, a secondary motive serves the role of governing our *conduct*. However, she points out that one does not govern their conduct if it *just so happens* that one's conduct meets the limiting conditions of duty. In other words, agents must 'regulate' our conduct *actively*—we consciously and frequently 'renew' our aspirations to strive for moral ideals. Next, Baron adds that, "A motive may initially operate as a secondary motive but then, if it conflicts with another motive, assume the role of a primary motive" (Baron, 130). Baron here means to say that in cases where one has the inclination to act otherwise, we may 'call upon' duty to serve as our motivation to do the moral act.

Baron believes that the “sense of duty as a regulative function—together with its capacity to serve as a primary motive if the agent does *x* because morality requires it and despite his inclination to do otherwise—worry 2 is easily defused” (Baron, 130). Baron argues that if this proposed role of duty is acceptable, duty can be once again absolved of any blame for any ‘moral repugnancy.’

How then, would Baron’s conception of primary and secondary motives work? Because duty is now said to serve as a secondary motive, something must be said of the role of primary motives. Something must attract us to an action besides the fact that it is morally permissible. To account for this, Baron argues that in its role as a secondary motive, duty operates as *intertwined* (as opposed to merely ‘alongside’) other motives. Thus, duty is described as becoming engrained in one’s character, becoming part of *who they are*, in a sense (although this is done ‘actively’ as opposed to one’s being of a certain character ‘naturally’). We may then ask, although duty does not conflict with other motives (as it actually is said to *cooperate* with them), is it still possible that it undermines them as suggested by Worry 2?

Baron argues that other motives will not be undermined because there is no essential requirement of the action being done from duty as a primary motive. Rather, “What matters is that the action is in accord with duty and that *it is no accident that it is*: it accords with duty because the agent governs her conduct by a commitment to doing what is right...One can govern one’s conduct by a commitment without it absorbing all or most of one’s thoughts” (Baron, 131). To further this idea, she points out the difficulties in thinking of duty as solely guiding individual actions as opposed to governing one’s conduct as a whole. If duty were intended to govern individual

instances, an agent would have to deliberate on how to act immediately prior to acting. She proposes that this is not the proper time for discerning whether an action is or isn't morally permissible. She compares this to asking a driver to think about the correctness of applying the brake suddenly or quickly turning the steering wheel before performing each action. She concludes, "The second worry assumes that to act from duty is to act from duty as a primary motive. But if it is duty as a secondary motive that is crucial, there is no disharmony between duty and motives of fellow feeling, friendship, or love—except, of course, when the latter motives would prompt one to act wrongly" (Baron, 132). Otherwise stated, if we value duty in the role of a secondary motive (which Baron states includes the ability to assume the role of the primary motive) Worry 2 does not hold water. However, if duty is valued as a primary motive, Worry 2 is legitimate.

I think Baron's original conception of duty's role in morality is a commendable response to the worry that acting from duty is 'morally repugnant.' For, it embodies the human tendency to *strive* for an ideal. It would be (at the very least) quite difficult to suddenly embody moral perfection. In constantly reminding ourselves that at all times we have a duty to do the right thing, it certainly seems that we are likely to hit upon the morally right action more often than if we did not. Thus, over time, we may hope to develop a sort of natural aptitude towards doing the dutiful act. However, Baron's conception may stray quite far from the conception of duty provided in the *Groundwork*. Thus, the next question to consider ought to be whether or not Kant could abide duty serving as a secondary motive.

## Herman and the Kantian Perspective

In the *Groundwork*, Kant makes it clear that for an act to have moral content, an agent can act from but one maxim: *duty*. As we have seen, this central claim has been the subject of harsh criticism. In *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, Barbara Herman offers a defense of the Kantian role of duty in morality, arguing that much criticism stems from the assumption that within the doctrine laid out in the *Groundwork* is also Kant's doctrine of moral virtue. She will show that this assumption is incorrect. Herman also has noticed that people commonly read Kant to be saying that it is strictly the motive of duty *alone* that distinguishes morally correct actions from those that are morally permissible, and argues that such a restrictive reading of the passages isn't necessary.

Herman begins by attempting to show why Kant believes acting from *nonmoral* motives alone can only lead one to act in accordance with duty by fortuitous circumstance. In the *Groundwork*, Kant offers two primary examples, which Herman sees as useful in elucidating his attitude towards nonmoral motives. Both examples are of actions that Kant claims to be in 'accordance with duty,' but actually have no moral worth. The first example is commonly referred to as the *shopkeeper example*. It is aptly named because the case describes a shopkeeper who has a self-serving interest in how he conducts business; in other words, he acts from the motive *to make a profit*. In the example, Kant points out that economic circumstances may advise the shopkeeper that it is in his interest to not overcharge customers, as doing so may cause them to look to his competition for business. In conducting fair and honest business, the shopkeeper certainly acts morally correct, but his actions lack moral worth. To see why, it is important to notice that it is only because of present circumstances that the shopkeeper acts in a way that is morally

permissible. If conditions were different, the shopkeeper may just as easily have an interest in acting dishonestly. If disclosing that his goods are near expiration may cause customers to hesitate from making a purchase, he might not do so to protect his income. Thus, it is clear that acting from a motive such as the *profit motive* is at best unreliable, and offers no guarantee that the action done will be the morally correct one.

Next, Herman examines Kant's example of one who acts from a different motive: sympathy. Herman points out that on the face of things, sympathy seems like one of those motives that should only lead to good. A 'person of sympathetic temper' may say something along the lines of, 'I see a crying child, and I suddenly want to help them however I can; helping people is *just what I like to do.*' Now we return again to the 'happy philanthropist' example provided by Kant. Similarly to Hursthouse, Herman points out that without any concern for the moral permissibility of one's actions, even if guided by sympathy, one can be led astray. Herman asserts that if we allowed the sentiment of sympathy to prompt us to action every time we felt it, we would end up helping people do things like rob banks, or steal fine art. In other words, we feel sympathy when we recognize another's *struggle*, and sometimes alleviating that struggle *can* be contra-moral. We wouldn't want to encourage or enable heroin addicts, simply because we recognize the intensive suffering caused by the detoxification process. She argues that in acting *only* from an inclination, such as sympathy, we are acting only in hopes to satisfy our desire to help, and without worry of acting morally wrong. So, similarly to the profit motive, the sympathy motive is seen as unreliable and only results in one's acting morally correct for circumstantial reasons. Herman notices that both examples are distinguished by the agent's lack of interest in the moral correctness of his actions. Thus, Herman introduces a minimal claim for morality: "For a motive

to be a moral motive, it must provide the agent with an interest in the moral rightness of his actions...an interest that therefore makes its being a right action the nonaccidental effect of the agent's concern" (Herman, 6). In other words, the agent simply must care *at-all* whether his or her action (and not necessarily the outcome) is or is not morally correct. When an agent acts from the motive of sympathy, the interest that agent has in acting is not a moral interest.

So, if it is now clear why acting from a nonmoral motive *alone* does not deserve moral esteem, the question that arises naturally is whether or not we may conclude the same about an agent whose actions are done from duty, *and* who also has nonmoral interests in performing the action? Herman refers to this as the *overdetermination* of dutiful actions. Overdetermination simply refers to the cooperation between moral and nonmoral motives in acting.<sup>7</sup> The issue at hand is that we may have a set of motives that leads us to act morally correctly in one circumstance, but in keeping our configuration of motives the same and altering the circumstances, we may then act differently. Herman thinks that the existence of such a possibility is enough to give rise to the claim that our acting morally *originally* may have only been a matter of luck. In response, she argues that according to Kant, there is but one way we may be certain that an agent's acting morally was not a matter of luck: when they act from *duty*. For, when one acts from duty they necessarily take as their maxim the concern for the moral permissibility of their actions. However, this still leaves the problem of implications of other present motives, and exactly how more than one motive determines an agent's will in acting. Herman asserts that the key to understanding the implications of Kantian ethics on overdetermined cases is in understanding Kant's theory of action.

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<sup>7</sup> Herman, p. 6

For Kant, motives reflect an agent's *reasons* for acting. An *incentive* may represent a practical interest, or a desire an agent has in acting, but it is only once an incentive is taken up into an agent's maxim that it will determine their will.<sup>8</sup> For example, I may have the desire to eat ice cream, and still choose not to because it's unhealthy. I may also have the desire to eat ice cream, and choose to give in and ignore any potential health consequences. In Kantian action, when I choose to eat the ice cream because of my desire to do so, I take that incentive (desire) to be a *reason* for acting; I make it part of my *maxim*. For Kant, what makes up an agent's maxim determines how the action is to be judged, because only a maxim represents what determines the agent's will.

Herman has shown that Kant can be read as not implying that it is the motive of duty *alone* that determines whether an action may have moral worth. So, how then does the presence of other motives determine the moral content of an action? In both the shopkeeper and philanthropist examples, Kant puts much effort into making the point that the presence of nonmoral motives in an agent's maxim disqualifies that act from any candidacy for moral worth.<sup>9</sup> For example, if I return a lost purse because it's the right thing to do *and* because of the possibility I may receive a reward for doing so, such an action clearly has no moral content. However, Herman has already pointed out that *incentives* only determine an agent's will as they are taken up into their maxim. She also argues that it does not follow from Kant's examples that an agent's having an incentive to act, an incentive which *is not* taken up into their maxim, automatically disqualifies that action from having moral worth. She concludes, "one can say both an agent's doing the right thing is

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<sup>8</sup> Herman, p. 11

<sup>9</sup> Herman, p. 12

non-accidental because he acted from the motive of duty *and* admit that he might not have acted from this motive in altered circumstances” (Herman, 12). It is this admission—that an agent may have acted differently in altered circumstances—that calls for a distinction between Kant’s doctrine as one that assesses the moral worth of *actions*, versus being one that addresses *moral virtue*.

If Kant’s doctrine were one of moral virtue, then one may object that under this account an agent’s acting dutifully may still be a matter of luck, due to the possibility that they may have acted differently in altered circumstances. A theory of moral virtue would concern a particular agent’s conduct, or perhaps their ‘aptitude’ for acting dutifully. Consider again someone who finds a purse. This time the purse is empty except for a driver’s license, so the agent easily returns the purse without hesitation. But, if the purse instead contained a large sum of cash, the agent may know returning the purse to be the right thing to do, but instead they may give in to their desire to take the cash, knowing no one else could ever find out. A doctrine of moral virtue would be concerned with how *this* agent would act in each case. Herman points out that there is no such doctrine given anywhere in the *Groundwork*. She argues that Kant’s theory in this particular work only concerns the moral worth of individual actions, and “it is *actions* and not agents that are credited with moral worth” (Herman, 13) It does not address the agent’s history of dutiful action, nor does it concern the outcome of an agent’s acting. Rather, for Kant, it is only the permissibility of an action, along with what makes up an agent’s maxim that determines whether or not an action has moral worth. Thus, Herman may conclude, “when an agent does act dutifully from the motive of duty, when his maxim of action has moral content, it is not a matter of luck that the *action* has moral worth” (Herman, 13). Kant’s doctrine won’t tell us how a



particular agent will act in every situation, though it does tell us how to assess any particular action of any agent. Any action determined to be done from the motive duty, that the action is dutiful can be no accident, regardless of the outcome.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

At this point, I will discuss what I believe is revealed by each author's unique take on a well-established passage, and the consequences of their interpretations for our inquiry. The matter of concern is, according to Stocker, that there may be something disturbing about acting from duty in at least some cases. I specifically chose to consider the charge that arises from Stocker's 'Hospital Example'--that acting from duty is destructive to those indispensable goods called "love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, and community" (Stocker, 456). Each of these authors previously discussed in this paper has addressed this issue by examining the 'philanthropist passage' from the *Groundwork*, as well as other significant passages, through a non-traditional lens. Hursthouse and Baron both write from what is could be described as an (neo)Aristotelian point of view, while Herman's aim is to remain genuine to Kant. As it turns out, each author's perspective turns out to be critical in determining whether or not the ideal Kantian agent is culpable of the consequences mentioned by Stocker.

In describing a view as Aristotelian, I simply mean to assert that the view places significant value in the role of emotions, along with reason, in moral life. In Aristotelian ethics, friendship is valued as having a key role in a 'good life', a life of *Eudaimonia*.<sup>10</sup> Her investigation tells us that contrary to the standard reading of the 'philanthropist passage' in the *Groundwork*, the passage can be read in such a way that one with an Aristotelian model of ethical judgment would agree

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<sup>10</sup> See *Nichomachean Ethics* books XIII and IX for Aristotle's arguments about friendship and its value to a life of *Eudaimonia*.

with Kant's assessment of each philanthropist. It is certainly significant that a model which emphasizes the role of emotions in moral life wouldn't reject what are widely considered to be among the most informative examples that reveal what Kant believes disqualifies action from any potential moral merit. Although such agreement between two ethical models that are—at first glance—so seemingly different is indeed laudable, it is not yet enough to reconcile the issue of whether or not committed Kantian agents are in fact doomed to a life devoid of those great goods essential to happiness.

Stocker's investigation takes issue with the implications of someone visiting an ill friend who does from duty. In considering one alternative, Hursthouse shows the implications of a well-intended friend who acts 'from sympathy,' revealing that acting in such a way is akin to the actions of very young children or animals, and is liable to go wrong in a number of ways. This point sheds light on the possibility that the problem may not be as simple as finding an alternate source of 'moral motivation' for Smith other than duty. However, for argument's sake we may assume that one having the motive of duty *is* the heart of the issue at hand; that the problem is indeed one of moral motivation. For, in the *Groundwork*, it is clear that acting from duty in particular is the primary object under consideration. As we have seen, Marcia Baron directly addresses the implications of an agent's acting from duty.

If we recall from chapter 4, Baron addresses two primary worries. One of which she shows to be 'ill grounded,' and another that is conveniently analogous to those worries put forth by Stocker. Again, for our purposes, the pertinent worry under consideration is:

*Worry 2:* In acting from duty, "whatever fellow feeling one has, and whatever other feelings and motives one has that are essential to love and friendship, are undermined—

‘driven under’—insofar as one acts from duty. One ignores the direct concern one feels for the other, focusing instead on duty. As one strives to act from duty, one becomes resistant to other ‘competing’ sentiments as they have the potential to be a hindrance to acting from duty” (Baron, 124).

I believe Worry 2 nicely encapsulates many of Stocker’s deepest concerns. In addressing this worry, Baron concludes that whether or not Worry 2 is legitimate depends entirely on the value we place on duty’s role as a *primary* motivator. Baron argues that there is no need to assume that it is *only* in its role as a primary motivator that acting from duty has moral value. She argues that what in fact is most important is that “the action is in accord with duty and that *it is no accident that it is*” (Baron, 131). For Baron, the way an agent assures that it is no accident that an action done is in accord with duty is by attributing to duty a role in which it affects our conduct over a period of time, as opposed to one in which it governs our individual actions. In doing so, she describes duty as if (rather than being the object of an agent’s maxim) it were a virtue, such as courage, or honesty; a virtue that an agent may practice and cultivate, thus becoming more prone to acting dutifully. Baron concludes that the role of duty seen in this way absolves Worry 2. However, she is quick to admit that if duty is in fact only valued when it *alone* serves as an agent’s primary motivator that Worry 2 is legitimate. The question then becomes whether or not, according to Kant, duty must be an agent’s primary and sole motivation.

Barbara Herman directly addresses this question in her examination of the role of motives other than duty, as well as duty itself, in Kantian moral action. In considering moral value, Baron was not wrong in placing emphasis on the requirement that an action’s being in accord with duty *is no accident*. Kant argues that moral acts are done from duty *just so* it can’t be an accident that it is. However, if the objective is to remain as genuine to Kant as possible, it is at least questionable

whether or not Baron's conception of the role of duty as 'regulative' completely satisfies the 'no accident' requirement. Herman points out that, according to the *Groundwork*, in order to ensure that an action's accordance with duty is no accident there is but one way to be certain: that the action is done from duty *alone*. An action done from duty *just is* moral action for Kant, and is the only thing that is so. However, she also argues that there is no restriction against the presence of non-moral incentives in agent's acting, as long as they are not taken up in an agent's maxim (as in doing so the agent makes the rational choice to allow that incentive to determine his will, which the philanthropist passage shows to automatically disqualify an action for moral worth). It may seem unclear how exactly an agent goes about 'suppressing' incentives to ensure they are not a part of their maxim in acting. For Kant, the idea is simply that, as rational beings, we are able to choose what motives we act on, and thereby attributing our *reasons* for acting in such a way. But, what seems even more troubling is that the requirement that incentives must be given *any* role of lesser significance in action seems to again give legitimacy to Worry 2, and so too may have dire consequences for love and friendship.

Kant makes it clear that, for an act to have moral merit, duty's role in moral action as being the sole object of an agent's maxim is undeniable. An agent must act from duty *alone* for their action to have moral merit. But, is this really the morally best view? What then are we to make of Stocker's charge that theories as such 'over concentrate' on duty, and in doing so necessitate a state of *moral schizophrenia*? I believe the idea that a committed Kantian agent would find himself at times in a state of *moral schizophrenia* is in no way implausible, nor would it be surprising. A *moral schizophrenia* is but an internal dilemma, but with exceptional salient characteristics. They are of the category of dilemmas (moral or otherwise) in which an agent has

to make a sacrifice *no matter what choice they make*. If the agent's decision now seems arbitrary, Kant wants to argue that among the choices there is yet "a jewel, [that] shines by its own light as something which has its full value in itself," namely, the dutiful action (Kant, 8). But whether duty shines alone is questionable. To see why, we merely need to reflect, asking ourselves what we consider to be the things that matter most in our lives. In other words, what are the things that make life *worth living*? If among those things we answer anything along the lines of 'love, friendship, affection, fellow feeling, or community,' then, even if we maintain that Kant's conception for what constitutes a moral *act* is valid, we would then have good reason to question whether or not Kant's assessment and high esteem for moral *life* is too legitimate.

The strongest objection to this claim comes from those who desire for morality to maintain the utterly indiscriminate and unqualifiedly good nature of Kantian ethics. Alas, this particular dissention is quite potent, and not easily refutable. For, if we look inward, and determine that we do so aspire to embody the ideal of morality, Kant's doctrine may be perfectly suitable. As for myself, I can't help but wonder if pursuing such a life would turn out to be worthwhile.

For, what would someone actually be like who embodied Kantian ideals of duty to the fullest extent? In her essay "Moral Saints", Susan Wolf entertains this question, and concludes that few would consider such a life to be healthy or desirable. By making such a commitment to morality, one makes morality their *passion*. Both Wolf and I are not convinced that morality is suitable for such a dominant role in one's life. This is due to the fact that, in embodying these ideals, one must necessarily commit him or herself to a life impoverished of many of those things we as human beings *ought* to value. Wolf points out that enjoyable, non-moral aspects of life are not

entirely cut off from a moral saint. However, they are only available to a moral saint by ‘happy accident.’ In other words, for a moral saint to justify cultivating (or merely participating in) a non-moral talent, virtue, or act his end in doing so must have moral aims. Wolf has in mind situations such as one’s needing to win a golf tournament in order to secure a donation for a charitable foundation. The point is that, for the moral saint, non-moral interests and skills “cannot be encouraged for their own sake as distinct independent aspects of the realization of human good” (Wolf, 425). However, just because the thought of one’s embodying Kantian ideals are ‘unattractive’ does not force one to conclude that such an ideal is unacceptable.

It is possible that just what makes the thought of a moral saint so unattractive stems from our own “reluctance to criticize ourselves and a reluctance to committing ourselves to trying to give up activities and interests that we heartily enjoy” (Wolf, 426). Basically, we may simply be making excuses for ourselves in order to preserve those non-moral interests in life we desire to keep. If this *is* the case, Wolf admits (and I agree) that such a charge is not enough to condemn the ideal of moral sainthood. However, if among those interests, values, and aspects of life that are inaccessible to a moral saint (other than by ‘happy accident’) we consider any of them to be qualities human life *ought* to have, then there is indeed sufficient reason to discourage pursuing such an ideal.

As Wolf states it, “some of the qualities the moral saint necessarily lacks are virtues, albeit nonmoral virtues” (Wolf, 426). She argues that it would be inappropriate to consider the feats of virtuous (though unsaintly) figures such as Reggie Jackson or Theodore Roosevelt to be unimpressive, and that “in general, the admiration of and striving toward achieving any of a great

variety of forms of personal excellence are character traits [that are] valuable and desirable for people to have” (Wolf, 426). By acknowledging the goodness of ideals that are incompatible with those of a moral saint, Wolf concludes that we may want to think that it is just as good (if not better) for one to *strive* for an ideal such as moral sainthood than for him or her to actually realize it. However, even if this is so, I am not certain that Kant can be attributed any fault, even if his theory indeed encourages the concept of one’s embodying moral sainthood (to the fullest extent).

What would a moral theory look like that didn’t contain within it the components for an ideal of moral sainthood (or perfection)? In response, I find myself in agreement with Wolf that such a theory would be—at most—incomplete. It would be antithetical to a moral theory to place bounds or limits on the amount of ‘moral goodness’ one should strive to bring about. Thus, we could not justify suggesting some alteration to Kantian ethics due to the unacceptable consequence of the theory losing its status as ‘ideal.’ Perhaps then, as Wolf suggests, we should question whether or not moral theories *at all* are able to encompass the human faculty of *intuition*, which one may argue to be the guiding force behind Stocker’s charges against duty and Wolf’s concerns about moral sainthood. As we have seen (thanks to the sympathetic Aristotelian perspective), in order to properly account for *intuitions*, a moral theory must condone making sacrifices to crucial, objective features of its own system—thereby stripping the theory of those features that provided it with its resilience and vigor. Such sacrifices are thus unacceptable, and that they could be necessary points to the possibility that, perhaps, it is only in theory that we can conceptualize a moral *ideal*, and in practice, we may only (or rather, should only) *strive* for a moral idea



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