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Moral worth: having it both ways[1]

It is commonly recognised that one can act rightly without being praiseworthy for doing so. Consider the following case:

> Arthur has made a promise to his friend Bert to help him move to a new house. When the moving date arrives, however, Arthur realises that honouring this commitment would mean missing out on an exciting football match. He calls Bert, intending to feign illness. Before he can fully showcase the weary tone he's been practising, Bert reveals that his new housemate is none other than Betty, an extremely influential player in Arthur's work industry. Arthur very much desires to impress Betty by showing her what a good and helpful friend he is to Bert. 'I will be there as soon as I can!' he shouts enthusiastically into the telephone.

Many would agree that anyone in Arthur's position would act rightly in keeping their promise to a friend. Yet many would also agree that Arthur's action—for all the good it may do—is lacking in moral worth. That is to say, he is not *praiseworthy* for acting as he does. On the usual view of things, it is not sufficient to be a candidate for moral praise that one act rightly or promote the moral good. One's actions must issue from the right sort of place; a particular *motive* is needed to endow them with moral worth.

The real question, of course, is just what sort of motive is required. Some contenders can be swiftly ruled out; Arthur's purely selfish motive clearly won't do. But it is less easy to say what is ruled *in*. Some—notably, Kantians—have proposed that only a *motive of duty* (on which, more below) is capable of conferring moral worth on our actions. Yet the motive of duty strikes

[1] I am exceptionally grateful to two anonymous referees for *The Journal of Philosophy* for their constructive feedback on the paper. For comments on previous drafts and/or helpful discussions, I am thankful to Adina Covaci, Edward Elliott, David Heering, Nathan Howard, Gerald Lang, Pekka Väyrynen, and Jack Woods. Thanks is also due to audiences at The University of Exeter, The University of Leeds, and The University of Sheffield.

many philosophers as rather morally *unworthy*; some charge that an agent so motivated seems worryingly preoccupied with morality.[2] On this alternative way of seeing things, the praiseworthy agent is better characterised as one who does the right thing for the reasons that explain *why* it is right[3]—because it would help others, or honour a promise, say.[4] It is easy to see the appeal in each of these proposals. There is surely something to be said for acting on the strength of one's moral convictions. But it seems difficult to deny that acting directly on the basis of more concrete moral concerns—for the sake of others' welfare, for example—is admirable as well.

There is no one easy fix for such cases in which we find ourselves pulled in different philosophical directions. But in this particular case, I submit that the proper (though by no means easy) fix is a form of reconciliation. My ambition in this paper will be to develop an account of moral worth that preserves what's appealing in both proposals. It should be admitted, however, that the extent to which one feels that any such reconciliation is needed is likely to depend upon how exactly one fills in each of these initial suggestions. Kantians who

[2] See Nomy Arpaly, "Huckleberry Finn Revisited," in Randolph Clarke, Michael McKenna, and Angela Smith, eds., *The Nature of Moral Responsibility: New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 141–56, at pp.146–49; Nathan Howard, "One Desire Too Many," forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

[3] Following others (such as Paulina Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XCIII, 2 (2016): 393–418), I use 'morally right' broadly to refer not only to actions that are morally required, but also to those that are morally good and supererogatory. I do so because I do not want to rule out the possibility that these morally permissible actions may have moral worth. The permissible actions of interest are, to be sure, those that are morally significant. My intention is not to leave open the possibility that morally indifferent actions—such as choosing whether to touch one's knees or one's elbows, where nothing of moral interest is at stake—can have moral worth.

[4] Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry into Moral Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Julia Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *The Philosophical Review*, CXIX, 2 (2010): 201–42.

regard the motive of duty as a "limiting condition", for instance, are naturally interpreted as making room for other sorts of concerns within an agent's motivational economy. On this way of seeing things, the motive of duty need not prevent an agent from acting on her concern to relieve a friend's burden; there is no insistence that she replace this concern with a desire to do what is right. The motive of duty simply furnishes an agent with a commitment: a commitment to acting on her other concerns only insofar as doing so would be permissible.[5] There is less philosophical distance between this execution of the Kantian view and its typical competitors. However, and as we shall see, the contrast grows starker when one considers recent views of a broadly Kantian persuasion that do insist upon the agent's being explicitly motivated by a concern to do what is right.[6] I share a similar reconciliatory ambition to those who view duty as limiting condition, though the compromise solution that I pursue here works more squarely within the dialectical framework set in place by recent debates on the topic.

I will begin by saying a little more about the prevailing accounts of moral worth (Section I). As we shall see, it is the motive of duty that has been the primary subject of critical attention of late. My primary dialectical burden, then, will be to build a case for including it among the class of morally worthy motives. While I do think that philosophers have pointed towards considerations which speak against taking the motive of duty to be *necessary* for moral worth (Section II), I also think they are wrong to reject it wholesale. The task of Section III will be to present a sustained defence of the moral worth of acting from duty. My arguments, if successful, motivate a *pluralist* conception of moral worth. According to the pluralist proposal developed in Section IV, an action has moral worth when the agent is motivated either by the

[5] Marcia W. Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), at pp.132–33; Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), at pp.13–16.

[6] See, for example, Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge," *op. cit.*, p.394.

consideration that it is morally right *or* by the considerations that explain why it is morally right.

I. COMPETING VIEWS OF MORAL WORTH

What I will refer to as 'Kantian' conceptions of moral worth endorse the following claim:

> THE KANTIAN THESIS
> As far as motives are concerned, it is necessary and sufficient for an agent's action to have moral worth that she act from the motive of duty.

Kantians can and do part ways on the matter of what acting from the motive of duty requires. In the interest of casting my net relatively wide, I will understand the motive of duty to refer to a desire to do what is morally right, where that desire is given a *de dicto* reading: the agent desires to do the right thing, whatever that may be. Put differently, she desires to do the right thing *as such*, or to perform actions that are morally right *under that description*. She does not merely want to do the right thing *de re*—to do something which, as it happens, is morally right. Nor does she only care about doing the right thing instrumentally; she cares about morality for its own sake. (I will add further substance to the latter idea in III.) The motive of duty must, moreover, be active in deliberation, explaining why the agent acts as she does.

While the above strikes me as a faithful characterisation of recent developments of the Kantian conception,[7] it needs to be acknowledged that it is meaningfully distinct from the way in which many Kantians have proposed to understand acting from duty. These theorists do not understand being motivated by duty as the project of setting out to do whatever is right, but in terms of an agent's general commitment "to abide by the moral assessment of [her] proposed

[7] See, for example, Ron Aboodi, "The Wrong Time to Aim at What's Right: When is *De Dicto* Moral Motivation Less Virtuous?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, CXV, 3 (2015): 307–14; Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge," *op. cit*.

actions"; to do as she wishes only insofar as this would be permissible.[8] It is only when there is only one permissible option available to the agent that the motive of duty assumes the role of a "primary motive"; that it forms the basis on which she acts, "the main impetus to action".[9] This having been noted, speaking of a concern to do what is right *de dicto* remains a useful shorthand, and many of the theorists with whom I engage do indeed describe the motive of duty in this way. The reader would, however, do well to keep in mind that such language obscures importantly distinct understandings of acting from duty.

Another choice point for the Kantian conception concerns the agent's epistemic resources. Even if dutiful motives are necessary, they are not sufficient for moral worth. Someone who arrived at moral decisions on the basis of a coin toss or a swift consultation of her daily horoscope would not strike us as particularly praiseworthy. A well-known desideratum for an account of moral worth is that it accommodate the platitude that morally worthy actions are not *accidentally* right. To this end, it is customary to supplement the motive of duty with an *epistemic* condition that an agent must meet to qualify for moral praise. Such a condition must plausibly go beyond the mere requirement that the agent *believe* her action to be right. One may, for example, require that the agent act from moral knowledge.[10]

[8] Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, *op. cit*., p.13.

[9] Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology*, *op. cit.,* p.113. See also Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), at p.60, who distinguishes between an agent's purpose (such as helping) and the grounds for which she adopts that purpose (namely, considerations of duty).

[10] See Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge," *op. cit.*. It should be noted that the epistemic condition is only a start; something thicker is plausibly needed to fully guard against accidentally right actions. One might, for example introduce a broader explanatory condition, which requires that the agent's moral success be properly attributable to her. See Gwen Bradford, *Achievement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

For my purposes, it will not be necessary to take a strong stand on the praiseworthy agent's epistemic situation. To the contrary: it will be best to be as ecumenical as the discussion will allow. In the interests of doing so, I am only going to assume that the agent who φ-s from the motive of duty is (at minimum) justified in believing φ-ing to be right. One way to spell this out would be to require that the agent's moral beliefs fit her evidence, but the reader is free to tinker. All that I ask is that we resist understanding justification along exclusively externalist lines; someone whose moral beliefs were reliably connected to the truth, but whose epistemic success was rationally inexplicable from her own perspective, would plausibly lack justification for those beliefs.

Two final words on the Kantian conception. First, I will often use the phrase the 'motive of duty' in what follows. Though I borrow this from Kant, I make no claim to intending by it precisely what he intended. Nothing that I say should be interpreted as a serious exercise in Kantian scholarship, and the reader should, once again, keep in mind that my using the 'motive of duty' interchangeably with 'desire to do what is right *de dicto*' obscures important distinctions between different varieties of the Kantian view. Second, I will sometimes speak loosely of the motive of duty being *sufficient* for moral worth. This should be taken to mean 'sufficient *as far as motives are concerned*' or 'sufficient on the condition that she has satisfied the other requirements for praiseworthiness'.

The Kantian conception can be contrasted with a rival, Humean conception of moral worth.[11] The latter conception, as I propose to understand it, subscribes to the following claim:

[11] I label this approach 'Humean' largely for expressive convenience (though its ties to the Humean tradition should be clear). Not all of its proponents may identify with the label.

THE HUMEAN THESIS

As far as motives are concerned, it is necessary and sufficient for an agent's action to have moral worth that she be motivated by its right-making features.

The Humean conception allows that acts of moral worth may issue from an agent's sentiments—compassion, say—in the absence of any concern for what duty requires.[12] On this view, the praiseworthy agent does the right thing not *because* it is right, but in response to those features *in virtue of which* it is right. A donation to UNICEF, for instance, would have no moral worth were the agent merely motivated by the consideration 'this is the right thing to do'. She must rather be motivated by the considerations which explain *why* this is the right thing to do—that there are children in need whom she is in a position to help, say.[13] On this approach, the praiseworthy agent may be said to act from a concern to do what is right *de re*.

Sponsors of the Humean conception will of course want to lay out epistemic conditions of their own. There is wiggle room here. Some require that the praiseworthy agent be justified in believing that it would be best to act as she does.[14] This may result from careful deliberation on the details of the case. Or perhaps emotional experiences are capable of conferring justification—sympathy, for example, may provide evidence that a particular instance of suffering merits one's practical attention. Others require that the praiseworthy agent be *aware of* the right-making features of her action.[15]

[12] This view has been defended by Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, *op. cit.*, and Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op. cit.*

[13] This is of course an over-simplification; the fact that there are children in need whom one can help does not fully decide the matter. Whether or not giving to UNICEF is indeed the right thing to do will plausibly depend upon other factors as well; for example, whether doing so would harm other people, and which other options are available to the agent.

[14] Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op. cit.*, p.219.

[15] See Elizabeth Harman, "Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?" *Ratio*, XXIV, 4 (2011): 443–68, at p.465; and Matthew Talbert, "Akrasia, Awareness, and Blameworthiness," in Philip Robichaud and Jan Willem

Two further features of the Humean conception bear mentioning. First, and as both Markovits and Arpaly are concerned to emphasise, the praiseworthy agent must be motivated by right-making features *in the appropriate way*. It won't do if she is motivated by morally relevant considerations in a merely *instrumental* fashion—if she is only motivated by the consideration that her friend needs help insofar as this presents an opportunity to increase her social capital, say. A praiseworthy agent must rather be motivated by others' needs (and right-making features more generally) *non-instrumentally*; she must value the end of helping others for its own sake.[16]

Second, Humeans need not require praiseworthy agents be motivated by the *fundamental* justification for their actions.[17] One's motives need not reflect a criterion of rightness (a concern to maximise utility, say) or what is of unconditional moral value. They need only reflect what is of non-instrumental moral value—what is worth valuing as an end, even if not unconditionally. Moral theorists will of course part ways on the matter of what is unconditionally valuable. However, and as Markovits observes, they tend to agree on questions of non-instrumental value; "…on *any* plausible moral theory, the fact that rushing into a burning house will allow one to save a child from much pain, suffering, and an early death provides a noninstrumental moral reason to rush in".[18]

It is my contention that each of these conceptions of moral worth has succeeded in capturing something important. My aim in what follows will be to develop a proposal that pays due

Wieland, eds., *Responsibility: The Epistemic Condition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp.47–63. (Both take awareness of the *wrong-making* features of one's action to be important for *blameworthiness*; it is not implausible to interpret their arguments as supporting a parallel epistemic condition on praiseworthiness.)

[16] Arpaly, *Moral Worth, op cit*., p.84; Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op cit*., p.230.

[17] See Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op cit*., pp.228–30.

[18] *Ibid*., pp.229–30.

homage to both camps. It is worth acknowledging once again, though, that the degree to which these proposals do conflict or contrast with one another will ultimately depend upon the details of the particular view under examination. There may, for example, be less daylight between Humeans and those Kantians who understand duty as a limiting condition; the latter can make room for morally worthy actions that issue from a concern to help—all that is required is that the agent treat their permissibility as a constraint upon her choice.[19] Matters will also depend upon how we fill in the Humean side of the equation. Markovits, for example, notes that her proposal has the "…implication that someone's actions could have moral worth even if she has no normative beliefs at all".[20] This particular Humean view seems difficult to square with the Kantian conception in most of its guises.

Let me include one final qualification before concluding these preliminaries. I am throughout this paper going to speak as though only *objectively* right actions are candidates for moral worth. This assumption is arguably the orthodoxy.[21] But some do allow that objectively *wrong* actions can have moral worth, provided (roughly) that the agent had noble motives and was epistemically responsible.[22] (Put differently, moral worth may attach to *subjectively* or *prospectively* right actions.) The final incarnation of my proposal will have the resources to be neutral on this issue, and so, I ask that the reader allow me to restrict my focus to objectively right actions for the time being.

[19] See Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology*, *op. cit*., pp.132–33

[20] Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op. cit*., p.217, fn.36.

[21] See, for example, Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, *op. cit*., p.16; Sliwa, "Moral Worth and Moral Knowledge," *op. cit*., p.395; and Paul Benson, "Moral Worth," *Philosophical Studies,* LI, 3 (1987): 365–82, at p.367.

[22] See Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op. cit*., pp.240–41.

II. DOING WITHOUT THE MOTIVE OF DUTY

My organising goal in this paper is to motivate a pluralist conception of moral worth over the prevailing monism. Since it is a concern for rightness *de dicto* that has come under the most suspicion in recent years, the majority of my critical efforts will be devoted to arguing for its inclusion within the class of morally worthy motives. The philosophical pathway of this paper then, is as follows. I will begin in the present section by acknowledging—for the most part, fairly uncritically—the force of Humeans' arguments for the claim that duty is not necessary for moral worth. It is not my intention here to shore up these arguments (though I will touch upon my reasons for being sympathetic to some of them in Section IV). My intention, rather, is to help the reader to get a sense of why recent discussions very much seem to put the Kantian on the back foot.[23] My anticipated critics for the remainder of the paper, then (by which I mean those whose minds I mean to change), will be those who contend that the motive of duty cannot even *suffice* for moral worth; for it is here that I believe Humeans really have gotten things wrong.

Let me, then, offer a condensed review of Humeans' arguments; in particular, their resistance to the idea that dutiful motives are necessary for moral worth. Put bluntly, the chief complaint against the Kantian thesis is that it is ruthless. Commonsense seems to recognise a vast array of praiseworthy actions that do not issue from dutiful motives. But the Kantian thesis takes the motive of duty to be *necessary* for moral worth. As such, it is thought to exclude too much from the sphere of moral praise. To take one example, suppose that someone were moved by compassion to help an elderly man to carry groceries to his car, or that she simply wanted to assist her younger brother with his homework. Compassionate and helpful persons such as

[23] Indeed, Howard, "One Desire Too Many", *op cit.,* §1 has recently described the anti-Kantian position as the "orthodox view".

these tend to strike us as fitting candidates for moral praise. Upon hearing of their moral accomplishments, it would seem somewhat misplaced to reserve judgment prior to having been assured that they acted from respect for the moral law. When we extend moral praise to these people, we are seldom interested in whether they acted from a concern to do what is right.

A second class of cases concern agents who seem praiseworthy precisely because they do *not* act from a desire to do what is right. Consider Williams's example of a husband who is confronted with the choice of saving his drowning wife or a stranger.[24] Many follow Williams in thinking that there would be something morally untoward about a husband who was only spurred into action after having consulted his conscience under such circumstances—after having convinced himself that "…in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's wife".[25] We expect our loved ones to be motivated directly and non-derivatively by love and concern for us. There is something discomforting in the thought that their kindness may be the product of some kind of moral balancing act.[26]

Williams's worries may very well have more force against Kantians who understand the dutiful agent as someone who sets out to do what is right, rather than one who simply treats moral permissibility as a constraint upon her actions.[27] Yet there is a further problem that may very well apply to both camps. Sometimes an agent strikes us as praiseworthy when she does

[24] Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," in his *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.1–19.

[25] *Ibid.,* p.18.

[26] While the pluralism that I defend in IV does not capture the intuition that the motive of duty precludes such actions from having moral worth, it can capture the intuition that acting from duty under such circumstances may be less praiseworthy than acting from love or concern.

[27] For discussion, see Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, *op. cit*., p.42; Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology*, *op. cit*., p.139; Marcia Baron, "Rethinking One Thought Too Many," in Mark Timmons, ed., *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics: Volume 7* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

what is right but believes her action to be *wrong*. Mark Twain's Huck Finn regards slavery as a form of ownership, and so, famously suffers from a guilty conscience when he fails to turn in his friend Jim, a slave whom he helps to escape. In helping Jim, Huck acts contrary to what he takes to be his duty; for he (falsely) believes that turning Jim in is the *right* thing to do. Yet it is intuitive to suppose that Huck is nonetheless praiseworthy for acting as he does; for he seems to act for the right kinds of reasons—compassion, concern, and an appreciation of another person's value.[28]

As it turns out, I do not believe that the Huck Finn case presents the problem that it is typically taken to present for the Kantian conception. Insofar as Huck is a young boy, there is the suspicion that he lacks the psychological resources needed to act from or against duty, properly construed (a suspicion that I develop in III). I do, however, take Huck's case to gesture towards a different set of reasons that we may have for adopting a pluralist account of moral worth. As I will later suggest, we may want a concept of moral worth that is applicable to agents who, though morally immature or misled, are nonetheless capable of moral achievements. If I am correct in thinking that children typically lack the moral maturity needed to act from duty, then we may want other ways of acknowledging the moral worth of their actions. Motives of the kind that Humeans emphasise may be especially helpful in this regard.

Taken together, these considerations speak against the proposal that the praiseworthy agent must act from duty. Our moral lives are rich and varied. We recognise a great many actions as morally worthy that do not have duty at their source. At the very least, then, Humeans have provided some initially compelling reasons for thinking that we ought perhaps to make room for morally worthy actions that are not motivated by duty. Yet many Humeans go further,

[28] See Arpaly, *Moral Worth, op. cit.,* pp.76–77; and Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op. cit.,* p.208.

insisting that duty cannot even *suffice* as a motive for morally worthy conduct. I believe that they are wrong to do so.

III. THE MORAL WORTH OF ACTING FROM DUTY

There has been a great deal of philosophical resistance to the idea that duty can suffice as a motive for moral worth. To my mind, much of this resistance does not so much point to problems with the dutiful agent as it does to problems with how she is portrayed. If we are to give the Kantian a fair hearing, then it is important that we put this bad publicity to the side. I will therefore begin by shaking off some unwelcome associations (Section III.1). Doing so paves the way for a more fair-minded examination of the moral value of acting from duty. In Section III.2, I build a positive case for thinking that duty can suffice as a motive for moral worth—one that centres upon the value of acting *conscientiously*. Humeans have traditionally taken conscientious motives of the kind I favour to be morally suspect. I will address their misgivings in Section III.3.

III.1 Dealing with bad publicity. My present task is to pave the way for a more sympathetic portrayal of the dutiful agent. It will be useful to begin by reflecting upon the following remarks from Arpaly:

> On my view, being committed to the morally right *whatever it is* (when "maximize the beauty of ducks" is a possible candidate for the right moral theory in the agent's mind) is not praiseworthy in the least.[29]

It is not Arpaly's intention here to burden the dutiful agent with conceptual incompetence. Nonetheless, these remarks are instructive. The motive of duty is clearly not a suitable

[29] Nomy Arpaly, "Moral Worth and Normative Ethics," in Mark Timmons, ed., *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics: Volume 5* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.86–105, at p.87, emphasis in original.

foundation for moral worth if the agent lacks any idea of what it *is* to have a moral duty in the first place. One gets no credit for acting from a concern for rightness if one's conception of rightness amounts to a category mistake. If we are to make progress in our discussions of agents who act from a concern for morality, then we must credit them with some tacit understanding of what morality *is*; for example, an understanding that morality concerns what we owe to other people, or whether we can justify our actions to them, or the respect that we must afford them *qua* equals.[30]

One suspects that duty's bad name is also partly owing to the bad company that it keeps. A concern for rightness *de dicto* is easily regarded as the province of the moral fanatic, the self-righteous, or the keenly disapproving. Few people like (let alone esteem) these self-appointed enforcers of the moral order. Though this association is unfortunate, it does nothing to discredit the motive of duty as a legitimate basis for moral praise. Self-righteous actions may lack moral worth, but this is plausibly owing to their self-righteousness rather than the agent's concern for morality.[31]

Care should also be taken not to portray the dutiful agent as a moral ignoramus. The husband in Williams' scenario is easily received in this way. As Aboodi observes, many take it to be *obvious* here that saving one's wife is the right thing to do.[32] The husband's pausing to question the morally appropriate course of action therefore invites a reading on which he is morally naïve.

[30] See Diane Jeske, "A Defense of Acting from Duty," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, XXXII, 1 (1998): 61–74.

[31] See Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology*, *op. cit.,* p.122; Vanessa Carbonell, "*De Dicto* Desires and Morality as Fetish," *Philosophical Studies*, CLXIII, 2 (2013): 459–77, at pp.462–63.

[32] Aboodi, "The Wrong Time to Aim at What's Right," *op. cit.,* p.311.

A related word of caution (one that I expand upon in III.2): we ought to resist an understanding of acting from duty on which it amounts to little more than *blind rule-following*. It does not follow from an agent's failure to be *motivated by* the considerations that justify her actions that she is *unaware of* those considerations or their justificatory power. To illustrate what I have in mind, consider the following example, adapted from Lillehammer:[33]

> Meryl and her husband are going through a difficult period in their marriage, and she is tempted to be unfaithful. Meryl believes that cheating would be downright wrong. She also has a basic sense of why this would be wrong. It has, for instance, crossed her mind that running off with another man would leave her husband devastated. Yet considerations such as these fail to engage her motivations, given her current apathy. What does motivate Meryl to refrain from cheating on her husband is her desire to do what is right (*de dicto*).

I wager that most ordinary agents are like Meryl in this respect—that they typically *do* have some insight into the right-making features of their actions. It is of course *possible* that Meryl has no idea why being faithful to her husband is the right thing to do. Perhaps she has simply memorised a suite of specific moral claims ('extra-marital affairs are wrong', 'donating to charity is morally good', and so on), with which she thoughtlessly complies. But this paints a rather impoverished portrait of her moral agency—and of moral agency more generally. It is highly implausible to suppose that moral agents generally hold a cluster of specific moral beliefs, with no clue whatsoever as to what justifies them. If pressed to explain *why* she believes that it would be wrong to have an affair, it is reasonable to expect that Meryl would be capable of citing a number of relevant factors; the fact that this would hurt her husband's feelings, say.

For reasons to be developed in III.2, I am inclined to think that if Meryl (or any dutiful agent) is to be a suitable candidate for moral praise, then her acting rightly cannot be mere rule-

[33] Hallvard Lillehammer, "Smith on Moral Fetishism," *Analysis*, LVII, 3 (1997): 187–95, at p.192.

following. Even if those reasons ultimately fail to persuade the reader, though, it is worth noting that the stipulation that Meryl has no clue what counts in favour of her actions (morally speaking) risks building in the assumption that she lacks any justification for believing her actions to be right. Meryl, so construed, would do little to discredit acting from duty. The Kantian need not claim that the motive of duty suffices for moral worth, *whatever* the agent's epistemic situation.[34] This observation suggests to me that at least many cases of blind rule-following can be ruled out on a principled basis.

To be sure, blind rule-following can come in different varieties. One variety, suggested above, is found in those who comply with rules without any sense of *why* those rules call for a particular response in their circumstances. Another variety is exhibited by those who do understand why the relevant rules call for a particular response, but have no (non-instrumental) concern for what those rules ultimately stand for; what the agent fundamentally cares about are those rules *qua* rules. As I will aim to show, a plausible understanding of acting from duty need not allow moral worth to attach to rule-following of either variety.

III.2 Huck & Schmuck: A tale of two Finns. I will now proceed to offer a positive case for thinking that moral worth can attach to actions carried out solely from the motive of duty.

[34] One may object that it is possible to be justified in believing one's action to be right without having any idea what makes it right. This possibility is suggested by the phenomenon of moral deference, whereby one forms moral beliefs purely on the basis of testimony—traditionally, the testimony of someone whom one judges to be a moral expert. I am inclined to agree that moral testimony can confer epistemic justification even when one lacks access to the grounds of the testifier's beliefs, and that acting on the basis of testimony can be praiseworthy. Still, it must be emphasised that cases in which a deferrer is incapable of citing any considerations that are likely to bear upon her moral decision are highly atypical. (This is consistent with her failing to see *how* these considerations interact to ground a moral judgment that the action is right or wrong.) Deferrers usually have some reasonable expectations about which considerations a moral expert is likely to draw upon, and these expectations plausibly interact with testimony to produce epistemically respectable beliefs. Moral deference need not entail moral cluelessness.

Though Meryl's case is a good start, some may question its probative value. Perhaps our intuitions here are compromised by the fact that Meryl is only *temporarily* indifferent to concerns such as her husband's feelings; our intuition that Meryl is praiseworthy for acting from a desire to do what is right *de dicto*, then, may ultimately be parasitic upon her once *having been* motivated by a desire to do what is right *de re*. It will therefore be helpful to consider a case where the motive of duty operates alone, in the absence of any muted concern for right-making features.

To this end, I want to contrast the rightly famous Huck Finn with (what I expect will initially be received as) a less savoury counterpart. I will dub this counterpart 'Schmuck Finn':

> Schmuck Finn has been subject to a similar upbringing to Huck Finn, and like Huck, Schmuck helps Jim to escape. But *unlike* Huck, Schmuck believes that this is the *right* thing to do; for Schmuck has had the good fortune of reading some moral philosophy, and the strength of the arguments against racism and slavery have led him to conclude that the values of his society are hopelessly off-track. That said, the conversion is primarily an intellectual one. On some level, Schmuck cannot help but feel disdain towards people of different races, and there is still residual hatred in his heart. He is unable to shake the impression that he is *better* than these people. There is just something about them that does not sit right with him. Indeed, he finds himself struggling with these aversions when he decides to let Jim go free. Fortunately for Jim, Schmuck's concern to do what is right tips the balance in his favour.

When Schmuck helps Jim, he is not motivated by the right-making features of his actions—by the value of Jim's freedom, say. He is motivated by his concern to do what is right (*de dicto*). Schmuck certainly *believes* (albeit in an intellectual, detached, sort of way) that Jim's freedom has value. But that belief simply does not hook up in the right way to his motivational architecture. His deep-seated aversions make it difficult for him to value Jim's freedom for its own sake. It is Schmuck's desire to do what is right *de dicto* that is the difference-maker.

Some may be inclined say that Schmuck Finn is just that—a schmuck. And I may be inclined to agree were we in the business of evaluating his moral character. But that is not our business here.[35] We are asking whether Schmuck is owed moral praise for his actions. And for my part, I do not think that it follows from his inner hatred that Schmuck is not owed praise for saving Jim. Indeed, it would seem that like Huck, Schmuck is owed praise (partly) on account of the parallel battle that he faces; he must grapple with his deep-seated aversions in order to do right by others. And his concern to do right by Jim is sufficiently strong that he triumphs. Schmuck's desire to do what is right is just about all there is to recommend him. And it seems to me that it is *enough* to recommend him—that it suffices to render him morally praiseworthy. (I will do more to defend this diagnosis shortly.)

Schmuck Finn may be the product of philosophical fantasy. But his predicament is certainly not. Many ordinary people harbour aversions that conflict with their explicit moral commitments.[36] Those sincerely committed to equality may harbour implicit racist attitudes, which may be deeply entrenched as the result of a prejudicial upbringing. The downstream effects of these attitudes may make it difficult for them to empathise or identify with all of those who merit moral concern. Nonetheless, it seems that they can still be praiseworthy for overcoming these internal obstacles and acting from their avowed moral commitments.

[35] It is customary to distinguish *moral worth* (a property that attaches to right actions for which an agent is praiseworthy) from *moral virtue* (which concerns an agent's overall moral character). See, for example, Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment, op. cit.,* p.10; and Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons," *op. cit.,* p.240. See also Barbara Herman, "Making Room for Character," in her *Moral Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 2007), pp.1–28, which illuminates the role of character within Kantian moral psychology.

[36] See Anthony G. Greenwald and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "Implicit social cognition: Attitudes, self-esteem, and stereotypes," *Psychological Review,* CII, 1 (1995): 4–27.

Let me emphasise what my claim here is *not*. I am not claiming that Schmuck and his ilk are praiseworthy because the motive of duty is the best they can do. Quite the contrary: I believe that Schmuck is praiseworthy in a way that he *could not be* were he motivated only by *de re* moral concerns. Schmuck's saving Jim is praiseworthy, I want to propose, because it is a notable instance of *conscientious* action—noteworthy in that it requires a rather powerful exercise of conscience. It is this insight that forms the basis for my thinking that duty can suffice as a motive for moral worth.

In what follows, I want to develop the suggestion that it is Huck's acting *conscientiously* that renders him praiseworthy. To say that Schmuck 'acts conscientiously' is not to presuppose that he acts from some robust character trait. Aretaic appraisals are not restricted to actions carried out from particular dispositions but may also be directed at an agent's occurrent motives—indeed, the latter may even be explanatorily primary.[37] When I speak of Schmuck's 'conscience', I merely mean to refer to his sense of right and wrong. One needs to tread with care when speaking of conscience and conscientious action, however; for there are two common ways of thinking about it, only one of which strikes me as morally recommending.

To bring this out, consider the character of Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio*, who serves as the titular character's conscience.[38] The Blue Fairy helpfully provides him with the following job description:

> I dub you Pinocchio's conscience, Lord High Keeper of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong, Counselor in Moments of High Temptation, and Guide Along the Straight and Narrow Path.

[37] See Thomas Hurka, "Virtuous acts, virtuous dispositions," *Analysis*, LXVI, 289 (2006): 69–76.

[38] *Pinocchio*, directed by Norman Ferguson, T. Hee, Wilfred Jackson, Jack Kinney, and Bill Roberts. 1940; Walt Disney Productions.

This might pass as an adequate characterisation of a child's conscience (as it is presumably intended to do—Pinocchio is a young boy). To my mind, however, it constitutes a highly impoverished conception of conscience as it operates in mature moral agency. The phrase "Lord High Keeper of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong" not only carries the dangerous implication that one's conscience is infallible, or a final arbiter on moral matters; it also paints a *static* picture of conscience as a mere repository of information ('rescuing innocents: good'; 'stealing money: bad'). Given this, one could be forgiven for thinking that following one's conscience amounts to little more than blind conformity with moral rules. Further, the role of conscience as a "Counselor in Moments of High Temptation" suggests that a moral agent is best left to her own devices unless desperate times call for desperate measures. It is only when she has trouble keeping herself "along the straight and narrow path" that her conscience's services are required. I will take this cluster of features to constitute *The Jiminy Cricket Model of Conscience* (henceforth, the JC-model).[39] It will be instructive to compare this model to what I will call *The Scrupulosity Model of Conscience* (henceforth, the S-model). The contrast that I have in mind is nicely brought out by Llewelyn:

> When we say that [an individual] is conscientious we are not wishing simply to draw attention to his administrative assiduity. Our intention is also to indicate and usually commend his judgement, honesty and seriousness as a legislator, to record our belief that he endeavours to ensure that the principles he subscribes to are the ones he ought to subscribe to.[40]

As Llewelyn's remarks here make plain, there is an important distinction between mindlessly following rules (a mere exercise in "administrative assiduity") and being invested

[39] The JC-model is similar to what Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment, op. cit.,* pp.26–27 calls an "externalist" model of moral rules.

[40] John E. Llewelyn, "Conscientiousness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, XXXVIII, 3 (1960): 218–24, at p.223.

in those rules and what they stand for. On the S-model, it is the latter that is crucial to acting conscientiously. Following one's conscience is about taking moral rules seriously, and doing one's best to determine what those rules are or ought to be. An agent who takes moral rules seriously, on my understanding, is one who takes the task of morality seriously; at minimum, she recognises the normative significance of others' interests and the claims that they can legitimately make upon her. The conscientious agent is, moreover, open to improving her moral outlook on the world, and to questioning the deliverances of her inclinations or feelings in the process. The S-model thus views conscience as *dynamic*, comprising an evolving body of information. And as we shall see shortly, it does not portray conscience as a fall-back that is only needed in desperate times as the JC-model does. On the contrary, the S-model takes conscience to have wider relevance for one's behaviour.

The S-model seems faithful to our moral experience. Consider someone who, on a particular choice occasion, was rather closed off to the possibility that her moral views may be amenable to improvement, who was not sufficiently cognisant of others' moral claims upon her, and who simply took it for granted that her feelings were an accurate reflection of what she morally ought to do. Such an agent surely *would* fall short of acting conscientiously, in the manner in which mature moral agents are capable. She is more likely to strike us as akin to a child, with diminished capacities for self-reflection, and an inchoate sense of right and wrong.

It should be noted, once again, that I want to resist an understanding on which conscientious action *must be* the manifestation of a conscientious character. Following Hurka, I am inclined to think that an agent can act bravely—that she can stand her ground in the face of danger, be responsive to factors that make standing one's ground called for (and so on)—without being a brave person more generally.[41] Likewise, I think it is reasonable to suppose that one can act

[41] Hurka, "Virtuous acts, virtuous dispositions," *op cit.*

conscientiously—take the task of doing the right thing seriously, make a concerted effort to determine what morality requires, question whether one's initial feelings might be misguided—without being a particularly conscientious person.

In this respect (and others), my understanding of acting from conscience or duty contrasts with that of Baron, though it most certainly owes a profound intellectual debt to it. Following Baron, I think there is much to admire in a preparedness to "…revise one's moral beliefs and one's plans and aims in light of one's reflections…to entertain evidence that tells against one's moral beliefs".[42] However, I resist understanding conscience or duty in the rather demanding terms that she does: in terms of an agent's generally "governing [her] conduct by a commitment to doing what morality asks".[43] On my understanding, acting conscientiously does not require anything so grand; one can act conscientiously without being someone who is reliably devoted to morality.

Admittedly, Baron advances these claims in the context of arguing that there is good reason to focus less upon the moral worth of specific actions, and more upon an individual's character and the moral worth of her conduct more generally.[44] This, however, gestures towards a more fundamental debate; one which concerns what we should want our account of moral worth to do. For my own part, I believe that it should provide us with a framework with which to acknowledge the moral achievements of moral agents of all shapes and sizes. This includes children, who, I have suggested, lack a mature moral conscience, and may therefore not be capable of acting from duty in the fullest sense. It may also include those who are morally

[42] Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology, op. cit.,* p.141. See also Herman, "Making Room for Character", *op. cit.,* pp.24–28.

[43] Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology, op. cit.,* p.113.

[44] *Ibid*., pp.176–177.

flawed; persons whose commitment to morality is inconsistent or not especially robust.[45] I am not here insisting that acknowledging such achievements is an adequacy condition for an account of moral worth—anything approaching this claim would require further argument. Insofar as we *do* recognise these as reasonable functions that we may want an account of moral worth to serve, however, we may have reason to focus less (which is not to say not at all) upon the extent to which the motives that underlie morally worthy actions reflect an agent's overall moral character.

I am now in a position to offer a principled case for ascribing moral worth to Schmuck's saving Jim: in doing so, Schmuck acts *conscientiously*. Schmuck stands back from his inclinations and questions whether or not he ought to have them. He resists acting on these inclinations precisely because he judges that he ought not to, for he recognises that they are regrettable inclinations to have. This, I submit, is an impressive display of moral fitness. Schmuck does not rest content in the thought that he values particular things, but reflects upon the values that he has, and whether or not he ought to have them. He does not act as a mere vessel of his values, but as an arbitrator of them.

One may worry that all this talk of Schmuck's conscientiousness seems a tad overblown. In one respect, I agree. Conscientiousness surely comes in degrees, and Schmuck's conduct is an extreme instance of it. Not everyone (it may be hoped) experiences such a radical schism between their inclinations and their moral convictions. Nor do ordinary agents always probe their moral commitments so deeply. Schmuck is not merely open to the possibility that he could be wrong, but to the possibility that he could be very wrong indeed. Perhaps the average person cannot be counted upon to subject herself to such thorough cross-examination. Though this may well be true, I take the basic spirit of my proposal to apply to less dramatic cases of

[45] See Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, *op. cit*., p.13, fn.20.

conscientiousness as well. Consider someone who must decide between two speakers for a conference: a friend, whose research is only tangentially related to the conference theme, and a stranger whose work is more suited to the topic. In the course of making her decision, she may initially be inclined to extend the invitation to her friend. Following further reflection, however, she may question whether this really is the right thing to do; perhaps considerations of fairness ought to lead her to invite the stranger instead. Though this situation is lacking in the drama and heroism that were present in Schmuck's story, it nonetheless strikes me as a clear instance of conscientious action; one where the individual is prepared to step back from her concrete values (friendship, fairness), and question how they ought to be weighed up against one another.

III.3 Is Acting Conscientiously All it's Cracked up to be? Humeans are reluctant to attach moral worth to following one's conscience. Many of them have sought to justify this reluctance by directing their focus to the conscience that is misguided; to agents who act (objectively) wrongly from a false view of what morality requires. Before proceeding to examine such arguments in detail, it is worth pausing to question this focus upon misguided conscience, and its implications for a fair and balanced discussion.

The focus upon misguided conscience may seem puzzling if we suppose (as I have been for the sake of simplification) that only *objectively right* actions are candidates for moral worth. If the Kantian has already restricted her search for morally worthy actions to those that are objectively right, then she will not encounter (let alone praise) agents who act objectively wrongly from false moral beliefs. Yet to this it may be replied that only the Humean conception can offer a rationale for restricting the sphere of investigation in this way that is not *ad hoc*. If the praiseworthy agent is motivated by the considerations that explain *why her action is right* (as the Humean takes her to be), then, presumably, her action *is* (objectively) right. If she is

merely identified (by the Kantian) as one who is driven by a desire to do what is right *de dicto*, however, then she may very well act on a mistaken moral beliefs.

Yet the foregoing does not seem remotely in keeping with what Humeans themselves have to say. Markovits is explicit that objectively wrong actions can have moral worth.[46] This is not surprising, given that she understands a right-making reason as something that provides *evidence* that an action is right.[47] Someone who acts for a right-making reason, so construed, may act objectively wrongly if her evidence is misleading. Arpaly similarly allows that one can be praiseworthy for acting on only *pro tanto* moral reasons.[48] But there can surely be *pro tanto* moral reasons to do what is all things considered wrong.

The lesson here is that there is nothing *internal* to the Humean's description of the praiseworthy agent that guarantees that her action will be objectively right. If it was their intention to restrict the sphere of investigation to objectively right actions, then, both parties would need to include a success clause (that is, 'an action is a candidate for moral worth only if it is objectively right') explicitly. The lesson is important; for it suggests that any success clause, once removed, is removed for everyone. Humeans have, I believe, failed to fully internalise this point and its implications for their arguments against the Kantian. In what follows, I take care to level the playing field, comparing the morally mistaken conscientious agent with a Humean agent who is mistaken in a parallel way.

Let me begin with Arpaly and Schroeder's concern that a misguided conscience carries the potential for corruption. The morally misguided soul, they warn, may override her morally good sensitivities so as to better conform to her pernicious principles—worse still, she may

[46] Markovits, "Acting for the Right Reasons", *op. cit.,* pp.240–41.

[47] *Ibid.,* p.219.

[48] Arpaly, "Moral Worth and Normative Ethics," *op. cit.,* pp.89–90.

develop "sensitivities to more sinister reasons".[49] I agree that conscience carries the risk of corruption. But I disagree that this does anything to discredit the motive of duty. It should be all too obvious that love and sympathetic concern can have similar corrupting effects. The father who yields to compassion for his frightened daughter at the doctor's room, forgoing her scheduled inoculation, may thereby come to change his moral views on the permissibility of inflicting any pain on her for the sake of her health and well-being. Over time, this outlook may corrupt the father as he becomes overbearing and refuses to allow his daughter to take any risks in life. Presumably, Arpaly and Schroeder would not want us to infer from this possibility that motives such as love are ill-suited to underwrite morally worthy conduct (and nor would I). But then, it is difficult to see why a parallel lesson ought to be drawn for conscientious motives.

Other cases of misguided conscience are more difficult. Whereas Huck's good nature seems to compensate for his bad principles, not everyone is so fortunate. Consider Huck's contemporaries, who believed it morally permissible to keep slaves but lacked his sympathetic temperament. Such persons figure centrally in debates concerning whether moral ignorance can excuse one from blame. Perhaps it is difficult to stomach the idea that it can.[50] Yet it is more difficult still to stomach the idea that conscientious slave-holding has *moral worth*. It is one thing to say that the slave-holder is excused from blame—it is quite another to say that she is owed praise! This may, however, be something that we have to live with if we drop the success clause; if we merely require (for example) that the praiseworthy agent have noble motives and be justified in believing that she ought to act as she does.

[49] Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), at p.186.

[50] See Arpaly, *Moral Worth, op. cit.*; Harman, "Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?", *op. cit.*; and Talbert, "Akrasia, Awareness, and Blameworthiness," *op. cit.*

But perhaps these consequences are not quite as dire as they initially seem. There is good reason to worry about the dialectical and probative value of cases of misguided conscience. Dialectically speaking, such cases fail to identify any advantage for the Humean. As we have seen, one's concrete moral concerns may be just as aberrant as one's morality. There is also reason to question the probative value of such cases. I am inclined to think that we often underestimate just how difficult it is to imagine a slaveholder who *is* justified in believing slavery to be permissible. This will of course depend upon how we understand justification, evidence, and related epistemic notions. But there certainly are understandings on which actual slaveholders had excellent evidence that slavery was in fact morally impermissible.[51]

Let me now proceed to examine a further worry, owing to Arpaly.[52] It is possible that when we credit someone who acts from conscience, we are not really crediting them *for* acting from conscience. Our ascriptions of praiseworthiness might rest instead upon the concrete moral concerns that we ascribe to such actors. Consider someone who acts honestly because she judges this to be the right thing to do. Insofar as we judge her to be praiseworthy, this may be best explained by a further assumption that we make: that she is motivated by an intrinsic concern for truthfulness.

Cases of moral deference may be thought to present a challenge for this diagnosis; for moral deferrers often do not know in advance whether their concrete concerns will be served by the action that an expert testifier (that is, the deferee) advises. But Arpaly is prepared to extend her reasoning to these cases as well. Moral expertise, she warns, has a "Sartrean character": "whom you crown an expert…reflects substantial ethical views that you are already decided on".[53]

[51] See Harman, "Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?", *op. cit.,* pp.461–62.

[52] Arpaly, "Huckleberry Finn Revisited," *op. cit.,* pp.148–49.

[53] *Ibid.,* p.150.

Thus, if one agent (call her Donna) regards another (call her Enid) as a moral expert, this is likely because they have a number of concrete moral concerns in common—a concern for equality, say. Insofar as we take Donna to be praiseworthy when she defers to Enid on moral matters, then, this is not because we take Donna to be acting on a concern to do what is right (*de dicto*). It is rather because we take Donna to be acting from a concern for equality; for this is precisely what led her to crown Enid a moral expert in the first place.

I worry about this diagnosis for a number of reasons. For one thing, there seems to be vanishingly small space on the picture of moral interaction suggested here for Donna to question her own values. We ordinarily take moral agents to be capable of self-directed questions about their moral priorities. ('I value property rights, but *ought I to*?') Given this, we might have imagined that it was an open possibility from Donna's perspective that Enid's advice would prompt a reassessment of her moral commitments (by leading her in a different moral direction than she had anticipated, for example). Arpaly's remarks suggest that this would be expecting too much. But it is *not* expecting too much. We should be ready to reassess our values when someone whom we judge to be epistemically better placed than ourselves invites us to do so. We should be open to the possibility that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our own moral philosophy. Enid may be privy to features of a case that Donna never even considered fitting objects of her moral attention. If I am right that moral agents are capable of this much, then Arpaly's diagnosis seems unlikely to generalise. Even if *choosing* moral experts is Sartrean, *listening to them* need not be.

There is a final, well-known challenge to the moral worth of acting from duty. It is often said that the dutiful agent exhibits a problematic normative outlook. Insofar as she is concerned with the rightness of her actions, she is said to be alienated "…from the ends at which morality properly aims": "honesty, the weal and woe of [her] children and friends…justice, equality,

and the like".[54] Such alienation is thought to point to something amiss in her practical outlook; far from caring about morality, she seems guilty of *fetishising* it.

It is hard not to feel the force of the fetishism charge. However, I want to suggest that its force may well rest upon its implicitly assuming the JC-model as its working conception of conscience. If we adopt a static picture of conscience which sees it as a mere repository of information to be applied in action, then it is easy to worry that conscientious action amounts to little more than blind rule-following. One is, in effect, invited to imagine the dutiful agent as saying, 'Oh, "morality"? That sounds good. Which actions fall under that category? Whatever they are, I want to do them!' It is fair to describe the dutiful agent, *so understood*, as morally fetishistic; for she is merely following moral rules *qua* rules—she is neither invested in nor fully understands what those rules stand for.

It is, however, more difficult for the fetishism charge to gain a foothold when it is the S-model of conscience that is under consideration. The latter credits the agent who acts from duty with a basic understanding of what moral duties are and why they matter. To act conscientiously, on this view, is (*inter alia*) to act in a way that demonstrates a willingness to do one's moral best and an awareness of the claims that others can legitimately make upon us. The dutiful agent, so construed, is far from being fetishistic. Quite the contrary: she will likely strike many as a model of moral rectitude.

IV. A PLURALIST CONCEPTION OF MORAL WORTH

I have argued that actions carried out solely from duty can have moral worth. On this issue, I part ways with Humeans, who deny that duty can suffice as a motive for morally worthy conduct. My arguments (if successful) support the following conjecture: a plausible account of

[54] Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), at p.75.

moral worth cannot hope to get by merely with a concern to do what is right *de re*; it must make room for a concern to do what is right *de dicto* as well. Here is what I propose:

> THE PLURALIST THESIS
> As far as motives are concerned, it is necessary and sufficient for an agent's action to have moral worth that she be motivated either by the consideration that her action is morally right, or by the considerations that explain why her action is morally right.

The pluralist thesis pays due homage to the Kantian, allowing that duty can suffice as a motive for moral worth. But it also respects the intuition that agents can be praiseworthy when their actions issue directly from love or sympathetic concern. It should be noted that the 'or' here is inclusive; an action may have moral worth when it issues from both sorts of motives. (In some such cases, one's acting rightly will be motivationally over-determined.) I shall revisit this possibility in IV.2.

As I have anticipated, some may want to supplement the pluralist thesis with a success clause. Perhaps these motives only confer moral worth *on the condition that* the action is objectively right. Others may want to resist such a move. Perhaps morally worthy actions need only be subjectively or prospectively right. These are difficult questions, but they are not ones that I need to decide here. The pluralist thesis is flexible, and could be paired with any of these proposals.

But we are not done just yet. The pluralist thesis, as it stands, is consistent with one of our motives being afforded a kind of moral superiority over the other. As such, it is not yet the variety of pluralism that I ultimately want to defend: one that places a concern for rightness *de dicto* and a concern for rightness *de re* on an equal footing. To this end, we need to add:

> THE PLURALIST ADDENDUM
> Neither motive is better than the other in such a way that acting on it is *ipso facto* morally worthier.

It is of course consistent with the pluralist addendum that there are *circumstances in which* duty would confer greater moral worth than concrete moral concerns, and vice versa. Defending this addendum will be my task in the sections to follow. In IV.2, I do so by way of arguing that each motive represents ways of being morally oriented that, though distinct, are praiseworthy in their own right. Some may, however, want to resist this egalitarianism. Perhaps all motives are equally worthy, but some are more worthy than others. I will consider this possibility first.

IV.1 Against Prioritising One Motive. The bulk of my case for pluralism has been a case for reinstating the motive of duty in our theorising about moral worth. However, those already attracted to the Kantian conception may find themselves wondering whether a concern for rightness *de dicto* might not confer *greater* moral worth than a concern for rightness *de re*.

One way to establish the moral superiority of acting from duty would be to return to Kant's initial take on the subject. Recall his well-known example of the once sympathetic fellow who suddenly finds himself

> … clouded by a sorrow of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the lot of others and that he still had the power to benefit others in distress, but that their need left him untouched because he was preoccupied with his own need. And now suppose him to tear himself, unsolicited by inclination, out of this dead insensibility and to do this action only from duty and without any inclination—then for the first time his action has genuine moral worth.[55]

These remarks suggest that we ought to be wary of attaching too much value to the well-meaning conduct of the sympathetically inclined. Perhaps the highest form of moral worth cannot be attained simply by playing the hand that the natural lottery has dealt us; perhaps it is

[55] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1785]), at 4:398.

rather something that we must *earn* through overcoming the forces that make moral success difficult to achieve.[56]

On this way of seeing things, an ascription of moral worth is a "battle citation". To say of an agent that her action has moral worth is—to borrow Henson's phrasing—to say that she "…deserves a special citation for gallantry in that she has won a hard battle in the eternal war against evil".[57] These are surely legitimate grounds for moral worth. They are not, however, legitimate grounds for prioritising the motive of duty.

Though overcoming adversity in service of a moral cause is admirable, one need not need act from duty to do so. It is tempting to conceive of the sympathetic person as simply doing what she wants. In one sense, this is true; being sympathetic, she wants to help people. But one need not assume that this is *all* that she wants. It is presumably consistent with being deeply concerned about others' weal and woe that one is also concerned about an upcoming public-speaking event, a missing Amazon order, or paying the monthly rent on time. Moral philosophers often make out as though we are forced to choose between the well-meaning conduct of an agent who cannot help but help, and the heroic struggle of another. But nothing in the Humean conception entails that acting rightly *comes easy*. When presented with the opportunity to donate to charity, my desire to help others may need to do some work if it is to defeat contrary inclinations, such as a desire to spend the money on myself instead.

It is therefore difficult to see how overcoming adversity in service of a moral cause could decide between a concern for rightness *de dicto* and a concern for rightness *de re*. Though

[56] My discussion borrows heavily from Wood's exegetical efforts. (See Allen W. Wood, *Kantian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).) For my own purposes, it is more important that it constitute a plausible proposal than a faithful reconstruction of Kant's argument.

[57] Richard G. Henson, "What Kant Might Have Said," *The Philosophical Review*, LXXXVIII, 1 (1979): 39–54, at p.42.

praiseworthiness does indeed attach to hard-won battles, duty is not the only party fighting the good fight on the battleground. So long as we do not envisage a sympathetic person as one who is constitutionally unable to act wrongly—and we should resist doing so if we are to give the Humean a fair hearing—she is perfectly capable of heroic conquests over contrary inclinations. The Humean need not restrict morally worthy conduct to acts of effortless beneficence. We should not, then, be moved to doubt the moral worth of sympathetic actions on the grounds that doing good comes *too easy* for the sympathetic agent. It if is a battle-citation that we are after, then the Humean can happily oblige.

Before moving on, it should be acknowledged that there is a distinct concern that Kant's sympathetic man has often been thought to present: insofar as an agent is not guided by morality in any capacity, her acting rightly seems to come down to a problematic sort of *luck*. Suppose that an agent helps others (where this is required) and does so because her desire to help is stronger than her desires to pursue more selfish options. This offers us no assurance that she would not have extended help had doing so been *wrong*. The fact that she did succeed in acting rightly therefore seems worryingly *accidental*.[58]

Although my own sense is that such concerns may ultimately be surmountable,[59] a fully responsible treatment of them would require engaging with debates concerning what exactly it means for an action to be accidentally right, and precisely what kind of accidentalness is

[58] See Benson, "Moral Worth," *op. cit.*; and Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, *op. cit.,* pp.5–6. For further discussion of precisely what Kant is aiming to establish with the sympathy example, see Christine Korsgaard, "From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action," in her *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (New York: Oxford University press, 2008), pp. 174–206.

[59] Jessica Isserow, "Moral Worth and Doing the Right Thing by Accident," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, XCVII, 2 (2019): 251–64.

relevant to moral worth—a formidable task that I cannot hope to undertake here.[60] With this formidable task remaining incomplete, it should be admitted that the above arguments will not assuage *all* of the Kantian's worries in the vicinity.

IV.2 Different Routes to Praiseworthiness. I have resisted the proposal that a desire to do what is right *de dicto* confers greater moral worth than a desire to do what is right *de re*. I am also inclined to resist the converse proposal that a desire to do what is right *de re* confers greater moral worth than a desire to do what is right *de dicto*. Rather than afford the latter possibility an independent treatment, however, it will be more efficient to interweave my defence of it with my defence of the claim that distinct kinds of praiseworthiness attach to actions underwritten by each sort of motive.

Let me begin by exploring a suggestion that, though initially promising, is something that I ultimately want to resist. It is tempting to suppose that an action motivated by *both* a concern for morality *de dicto* and a concern for morality *de re* would be more praiseworthy than an action stemming from either motive alone. Surely it would be (uniquely) *most* praiseworthy to do the right thing because it is right *and* for the reasons that make it right? Tempting though this thought may be, I want to caution against it. To my mind, the moral worth of acting from duty and the moral worth of acting on the basis of concrete moral concerns are not straightforwardly additive; something is lost once each ceases to be the agent's only motive.

Consider first those motivated to do what is right *de re*. There is, I propose, a distinct value in being motivated *only* by concrete moral concerns that is lost when we furnish an agent with

[60] For discussion, see Howard, "One Desire Too Many", *op. cit.*; Steven Sverdlik, "Kant, nonaccidentalness and the availability of moral worth," *The Journal of Ethics,* v, 4 (2001): 293–313; and Zoe Johnson King, "Accidentally doing the right thing," forthcoming in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

the motive of duty. We are not alone in the world. Other people exist, and it reflects well on us when they appear on our "practical radar".[61] Indeed, we reserve special admiration for those who are practically attuned to others' needs, and act compassionately with little effort. Such moral achievements scarcely depend upon the agent's careful consideration of what morality requires. Indeed, they may sometimes depend upon the *absence* of any such consideration. It may be characteristic of certain kinds of "human gesture" that they *bypass* one's conscience, and issue from other-regarding concerns directly.[62] Suppose that my only hope of making an incredibly important job interview overseas is to ask a friend to loan me money for the airfare. My friend recognises the obvious importance of the opportunity and immediately obliges. Such a friend is surely praiseworthy. The investment in me and my needs that her gesture expresses certainly seems to confer moral worth upon it. Importantly, my friend also seems far *more* praiseworthy than she would have been, had she instead felt the need to determine that coming to my rescue was morally appropriate prior to taking action. Such an exercise in moral accounting would seem unduly insensitive to my needs. To my mind, the same lesson applies if we merely *add* (rather than substitute in) the motive of duty. A friend who appreciated the significance of the opportunity but also felt the need to weigh up the moral merits of lending me the money would seem to discount my significance *qua* friend. Even if she did resolve to give me the loan, this would not strike one as the sort of human gesture that we usually expect from our friends under such circumstances.

[61] Michael Thompson, "What is it to Wrong Someone?" in R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, and Michael Smith, eds., *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.333–84.

[62] See Bernard Williams, "Morality and the Emotions," in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp.207–29, at p.227.

It may be objected that other cases are not so friendly to my non-additive way of seeing things. Recall Schmuck: perhaps he would be more praiseworthy still, had he more by way of moral motivation than dutiful desires. A more compassionate Schmuck would admittedly have the advantage of a more harmonious moral psychology. Yet it is hard to see why such harmony should invest *his action* with greater moral worth; is an action really more praiseworthy when and because the agent has her moral ducks in row? Schmuck's predicament suggests otherwise. What we admire about Schmuck is his stepping back from, questioning, and ultimately resisting his hateful inclinations, on account of their failure to conform to his considered moral views. Schmuck's moral achievement consists in him overcoming these obstacles; it is in virtue of doing so that he is a suitable target of moral praise. To inject Schmuck with a dose of human feeling, then, would be to divest him of the very quality that made him worthy of esteem in the first place. None of this is to deny that a more compassionate Schmuck could be praiseworthy as well. It is only to emphasise that he would be praiseworthy in a different way.

V. CONCLUSION: BEING INCLUSIVIST ABOUT MORAL WORTH

My ambition has been to motivate a pluralist conception of moral worth over the more partisan views that seem to dominate philosophical consciousness. I hope to have shown that our theorising about moral worth stands to benefit from an approach that incorporates lessons from the Kantian tradition as well as insights from opposing perspectives. A further attraction of pluralism is that it is *inclusive* in a way that reflects our practices of lending praise. This inclusivist impulse is evident in the impressive assortment of agents who have occupied our attention: the compassionate, the principled, the continent, the harmonious, the sagacious, and the morally uncertain. That we are inclined to judge each member of this motley crew a suitable target for moral praise suggests that our ascriptions of praiseworthiness are not at all elitist; we acknowledge a range of motives as suitable bases for moral esteem. But whereas our practices of lending praise are not elitist, much of our philosophical theorising about praise very much

seems to be, restricting moral worth to the efforts of either the duty-bound or those driven by concrete moral concerns. I have suggested that we would do well to leave this dichotomous thinking behind. An account of moral worth does better insofar as it does not paint moral achievements as the province of the precious few.