

Part IV

Virtue: Love, Respect, and Duties to Oneself



Beneficence and Other Duties of Love in *The Metaphysics of Morals*

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Important though Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* is, the work for which it serves as the groundwork, the *Metaphysics of Morals*, surely deserves at least as much attention as the *Groundwork* itself.¹ "Intending some day to publish a metaphysics of morals, I issue this groundwork in advance," Kant writes in the Preface to *Groundwork* (G 4:391). Mysteriously, Kant's readers often neglect the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

Why it is not nearly as well known as the *Groundwork* (and was not even translated into English until about forty years ago) is beyond the scope of our essay. Fortunately, it is now beginning to receive its due. We say "fortunately" not only because it is a major work of Kant's and is the culmination of his ethical writings, but also (and relatedly) because most of the widespread myths about Kant's ethics – For example, that it concerns actions, not character or how to live; that it is all about applying a rule to generate a clear decision about how we should act; that it is rigid, leaving no room for hard cases; that it is not sensitive to the particulars of the situation and to the nuanced character of moral life; that it does not take into account any feature of persons other than their rationality; that the Categorical Imperative not only is not based on anything empirical but is supposed to be applied in such a way as to ignore empirical facts—lose whatever semblance of plausibility they might otherwise have once one reads the *Metaphysics of Morals* (in particular, Part II).

The *Metaphysics of Morals* divides into two parts, the *Rechtslehre*, or *Doctrine of Right* (also translated as "*Metaphysical Principles of Right*"), and the *Tugendlehre*, or *Doctrine of Virtue* (also translated as "*Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*"). Our focus will be on the latter, and specifically on the duties of love. Duties to self and duties of respect for others are discussed in Allen Wood's contribution to this volume.

Duties of love are ethical duties (as opposed to juridical duties) and therefore they do not entail corresponding rights to exercise compulsion (MM 6:382).²

Moreover, as “duties of virtue,” duties of love have as their objects ends. Indeed, as Kant states it, the duties of virtue *are* the ends: “Only *an end that is also a duty* can be called a duty of virtue” (MM 6:383). Duties of virtue are first and foremost duties to have certain ends and to adopt, correspondingly, certain maxims.

Just what does this mean? First, duties that have as their objects ends are not primarily duties to perform certain kinds of actions. More generally, “Ethics does not give laws for actions . . . but only for maxims of actions” (MM 6:388; see also MM 6:390). Ethics (as opposed to *Ius* – Law or Right) requires us to adopt certain policies or ways of conducting ourselves (maxims of actions), for example, treating others with respect, and developing our natural talents, but it does not give us “laws for actions.” Although there are some implications for the permissibility of particular actions – for example, killing oneself is almost always impermissible³ – it is a mistake to expect Kant’s ethics to tell us (and is a mistake to think that it purports to tell us) with respect to every action we might consider performing whether the action is required, permissible, or impermissible. What it tells us is that a particular maxim is, or is not, permissible (or that it is, or is not, required). It thus speaks more to our way of conducting ourselves than to isolated actions. Second, and more positively: Kant’s ethics tells us that certain ends are obligatory, and that we must act accordingly. But, as noted above, just what it is to act accordingly is (intentionally) left somewhat open. Some of our duties are narrow (such as, duties of respect for others); others are “wide” (such as, the duty of beneficence to others), meaning that they allow us greater latitude. Just how much latitude is an issue to which we will turn later.

The Obligatory Ends

The two obligatory ends are one’s own perfection and the happiness of others (MM 6:385). Since the focus of this essay is the duties of love, the end of particular interest to us is the happiness of others. Some attention to the other obligatory end is in order, however, because we need to understand the obligatory ends in relation to each other. Of foremost importance is that the obligatory ends of perfection and happiness “cannot be interchanged” (MM 6:385).⁴ Others’ happiness is an obligatory end for me but my own is not; my own perfection is an obligatory end for me but the perfection of other people is not. The asymmetry is especially prominent in the original German. In response to his question, “What are the ends that are also duties?” (a question that appears as the heading), Kant replies in an uncharacteristically short, simple (and partially rhyming) sentence: “*Sie sind: Eigene Vollkommenheit–fremde Glückseligkeit*” (“They are *one’s own perfection* and *the happiness of others*”) (MM 6:385).

Kant’s explanation of why one’s own happiness is not a duty is as follows:

[One’s] *own happiness* is an end that every human being has (by virtue of the impulses of his nature), but this end can never without self-contradiction be regarded as a duty. What everyone already wants unavoidably, of his own accord, does not come under the concept of *duty*. (MM 6:385–6)

He explains why the perfection of others is not an obligatory end for the agent as follows:

[I]t is a contradiction for me to make another's perfection my end and consider myself under obligation to promote this. For the perfection of another human being, as a person, consists just in this: that he himself is able to set his end in accordance with his own concepts of duty; and it is self-contradictory to require that I do (make it my duty to do) something that only the other himself can do. (MM 6:386; see also MM 6:381)

Anti-paternalism and the Duty of Beneficence

Kant's denial of a duty to perfect others is a reflection of the emphasis he places on self-government: we are to perfect ourselves; others are not to do it for us. Indeed, the end of one's own perfection might more aptly be termed "self-perfection"; this brings out the idea that it is not just a goal to be attained by one means or another, but involves the agent perfecting herself. (The idea in holding that one cannot be perfected by others presumably is not that one could not get some help from one's friends, but that one must initiate the process and take charge. Friends can help but only by helping the agent attain her ends.) We see this in his insistence that we have no duty to perfect others – or put differently, in the end being self-perfection rather than perfection – in his rejection of moralistic paternalism. While a good parent will employ various tactics in order to shape and direct the conduct and character of a child, to treat an adult in this manner – even from strictly altruistic motives – shows a lack of respect for her as a rational being.

Opposition to paternalism is also evident in Kant's clarification of the duty to promote others' happiness. The duty of beneficence is nicely summarized in the following statement: "To be beneficent, that is, to promote according to one's means the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return, is everyone's duty" (MM 6:453). This prompts at least two questions: Happiness understood how? And how narrowly should we understand "in need"? Our focus in this section is on the first question.

Although Kant does not spell out fully just how happiness is to be understood, one thing is clear: happiness is not to be understood paternalistically:

I cannot do good to anyone in accordance with *my* concepts of happiness (except to young children and the insane), thinking to benefit him by forcing a gift upon him; rather, I can benefit him only in accordance with *his* concepts of happiness. (MM 6:454)

In seeking to promote others' happiness – the happiness of (sane) adults, that is – we are not to impose on them our conception of what their happiness consists in. "It is for them to decide what they count as belonging to their happiness." (MM 6:388)⁵

So far, this sounds straightforward and unequivocal. But in fact the story is somewhat complicated. Kant immediately adds this qualification:

[I]t is open to me to refuse them many things that they think will make them happy but that I do not, as long as they have no right to demand them from me as what is theirs. (MM 6:388)

He also urges a different, and more moralistic, sort of caution; he mentions that the “happiness of others also includes their moral well-being . . . and we have a duty, but only a negative one, to promote this.” To this end,

it is my duty to refrain from doing anything that, considering the nature of a human being, could tempt him to do something for which his conscience could afterwards pain him. (MM 6:394)

A related qualification is that we are not to promote any impermissible ends. “The duty of love for one’s neighbor can . . . also be expressed as the duty to make others’ ends my own (provided only that these are not immoral)” (MM 6:450). (See also MM 6:388 and, for a slightly different qualification, MM 6:480–1.)

These qualifications notwithstanding, the starting point for understanding what it is to promote another’s happiness is to conceive of it as constituted by those ends that the person in question regards as constituting it. The point of beneficence is thus decidedly not to try to improve others by promoting what we think they should – but at present do not – have as their ends. We may choose which of their ends to promote by taking into account which ones *we* think will make them happy (though Kant does not say that we have a duty to choose in this way).

A quotation three paragraphs above has a parenthetical qualifier that needs to be borne in mind: “I cannot do good to anyone in accordance with *my* concepts of happiness (except to young children and the insane)” (MM 6:454). On Kant’s account of beneficence, paternalism towards the (severely) mentally ill and towards (young) children often is permissible. An important way of promoting the happiness of children is to help them be able as adults to set ends for themselves and promote their ends. To that end, we may need to further their (future) happiness by promoting for them ends (such as to be able to have a satisfying career) that they may not at present endorse.⁶

Beneficence: The Finer Points

Kant’s discussion of beneficence offers some additional indications of how we are to go about promoting others’ happiness. The discussion is noteworthy for its sensitivity to the many ways that kindhearted intentions to benefit another may fail to benefit her, as well as ways in which desires to aid may be tainted by superciliousness, wishes to feel superior to another, or wishes to put another in one’s

debt. The following passage is one of many that reflect such sensitivity (sensitivity that belies those textbook depictions of Kant's ethics as concerned just with mechanically applying a principle, as contrasted with Aristotle's ethics, so rich with attention to the particulars). Kant writes:

Someone who is rich (has abundant means for the happiness of others, i.e., means in excess of his own needs) should hardly even regard beneficence as a meritorious duty on his part, even though he also puts others under obligation by it. The satisfaction he derives from his beneficence, which costs him no sacrifice, is a way of reveling in moral feelings. He must also carefully avoid any appearance of intending to bind the other by it; for if he showed that he wanted to put the other under an obligation (which always humbles the other in his own eyes), it would not be a true benefit that he rendered him. Instead, he must show that he is himself put under obligation by the other's acceptance or honored by it, hence that the duty is merely something that he owes, unless (as is better) he can practice his beneficence in complete secrecy. (MM 6:453)

This passage brings to mind the Aristotelian idea that acting well involves not just doing a virtuous action, but doing it in the right way, and with the right tone and gesture. It is not enough that we render aid; we need to do it well. Depending on the nature of the aid, we may do more harm than good if we humiliate the person we are (supposedly) trying to aid. (See Baron, 2001, pp. 608–12.)

Kant also suggests that beneficence on the part of the rich towards the poor may not even deserve to be called beneficence at all, since the uneven distribution of wealth is “for the most part” due to social and political injustice.

Having the resources to practice such beneficence as depends on the goods of fortune is, for the most part, a result of certain human beings being favored through the injustice of the government, which introduces an inequality of wealth that makes others need their beneficence. Under such circumstances, does a rich man's help to the needy, on which he so readily prides himself as something meritorious, really deserve to be called beneficence at all? (MM 6:454)

We can see that in promoting others' happiness we need (a) to avoid being paternalistic, (b) to avoid leaving those we aid with a sense of being beholden or inferior to us, and (c) to bear in mind (particularly if we are wealthy, and are giving to the needy) that what we think of as beneficence may really be a case of giving them something they are owed. After all, as the saying goes, “There, but for fortune, go you, or I” . . . or more aptly for our purposes, “There, but for injustice that happens to benefit me, go I.” The hint seems to be that much of what the affluent do for those who are not affluent should be viewed by the “benefactors” as a matter of justice, not as a matter of beneficence. (As we'll see later, Kant does not recommend that the *recipients* so view it.)

In addition, (d) thanks to the duty to perfect ourselves, it would not be permissible for us to judge that we cannot really do much to help others because we are impatient, insensitive, self-centered, arrogant, or lazy. It might be tempting to

think, “Well, beyond giving some money to charity, I can’t really be of any help”; but regarding one’s character as fixed, beyond our capacity to improve, would be at odds with the duty to perfect ourselves morally.⁷

Although this tells us something about the duty of beneficence, it leaves some questions unanswered, or only partially answered. We can see that (with some qualifications) we are to promote others’ happiness as they see it, rather than superimpose our conception of happiness – and what we think they should regard as their happiness – on theirs; but questions remain about just how Kant understands beneficence. Let’s return to a statement that we quoted earlier: “To be beneficent, that is, to promote according to one’s means the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return, is everyone’s duty” (MM 6:453). What is the import of “in need”? Is the idea that the duty of beneficence is simply a duty to meet fundamental needs? Or is the duty broader than that, namely, to help another even when help is desired but not desperately needed, and is desired for aims that are expendable?

It may be tempting to read “in need” as restricting the scope of the duty, as if Kant holds that our duty to promote the happiness of others entails helping only when they are very much “in need” of our help (and perhaps also when the need is for something vital, not something expendable). But that reading is not supported by the various passages that explain the duty. The following sentence could, if read in isolation from the context, be regarded as supporting the narrow reading, according to which the duty of beneficence is only a duty to help those in distress:

But beyond *benevolence* in our wishes for others (which costs us nothing) how can it be required as a duty that this should also be practical, that is, that everyone who has the means to do so should be *beneficent* to those in need? (MM 6:452; see also MM 6:453)⁸

The very next sentence discloses, however, that “in need” in the previous sentence should be understood more loosely, and the duty thus understood more broadly:

[B]eneficence is the maxim of making others’ happiness one’s end, and the duty to it consists in the subject’s being constrained by his reason to adopt this maxim as a universal law.

It is noteworthy that there is no qualification here, nothing to suggest that the duty of beneficence is a duty only to adopt the maxim of helping when the person is in distress (or in dire need). Equally important is the fact that Kant often speaks of the duty of beneficence as a duty to make others’ ends one’s own, a phrasing that strongly suggests that the duty of beneficence should be understood broadly. (See, e.g., MM 6:388 and MM 6:450, both quoted above.)

It is best, therefore, not to take “in need” as restricting the scope of the duty, and to understand “need” in the passages cited above as covering not only dire

need or basic aid, but also need of assistance with personal projects – assistance with pursuing ends one has set for oneself. That Kant is likely to have had in mind assistance with personal projects is also supported by the fact that happiness is, on his view, highly subjective (entirely different from the conception of *eudaimonia* in ancient ethics).

Exactly what Kant thinks happiness consists in is, admittedly, obscure. He sometimes defines happiness as the satisfaction of one's inclinations (G 4:405; CPrR 5:73) yet at other times speaks of it as "satisfaction with one's state, so long as it is assured of lasting" (MM 6:387). What is clear, however, is that he means by "happiness" the happiness of a particular individual, and that it reflects an agent's particular preferences and choices of ends, including professional aspirations, personal commitments, as well as recreational interests. These personal ends are expressions of the agent's capacity to freely set ends, though due to the limitation of human agency, achieving most of these ends will require some form of assistance from others. Kant's decision to frame the duty of beneficence in terms of the *happiness* of others is a clear indication that he intended the duty to extend to assistance in achieving these ends.

The Question of Latitude

An additional question that needs to be addressed is just how much latitude the duty of beneficence entails. As noted earlier, the duty of beneficence is "wide" or "broad," leaving agents more latitude than is afforded them by perfect or juridical duties. Just how much latitude the duty permits, however, is unclear. It is very common to look to the *Groundwork* for an answer to this question, given the close connection between a duty's breadth and its status as perfect or imperfect. In the *Groundwork* Kant distinguishes perfect from imperfect duties, classifying the duty of beneficence and the duty to develop one's talents as imperfect, and explaining the distinction as follows: "I understand here by a perfect duty one that admits no exception in favor of inclination" (G 4:422n). This suggests that imperfect duties *do* admit exceptions in favor of inclination, though Kant does not state this explicitly. What Kant does state explicitly is that his method for distinguishing types of duties in the *Groundwork* is merely provisional, and will be taken up with more care in a future *Metaphysics of Morals*. Although some scholars have read the *Metaphysics of Morals* with the expectation that the *Groundwork* statement of the distinction would be likely to carry over into the later work, we prefer not to do so, for two reasons. First, Kant says that he reserves the division of duties entirely for that future work, and draws the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties in the *Groundwork* only "for the sake of arranging my examples." Second, the natural way of reading G 4:422n is at odds with the example of beneficence as it is developed at G 4:430. There the duty is explained as requiring that everyone try, "as far as he can, to further the ends of others." Given the tension between saying that we are to try as far as we can to further the ends of others and implying that perfect duties differ from imperfect duties in that the former admit no

exceptions in favor of inclinations, it seems wise to take Kant at his word when he says that he is adopting the division only for the sake of arranging his examples and will work it out later. We opt therefore to ignore all remarks in the *Groundwork* regarding how to differentiate imperfect from perfect duties as we address the question of how much latitude the duty of beneficence allows.

Returning, then, to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, let us examine the following passage:

[I]f the law can prescribe only the maxim of actions themselves, this is a sign that it leaves a playroom (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law, that is, that the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty. (MM 6:390)

In this passage Kant identifies two kinds of latitude, the latter of which is unique to duties of virtue. First, because the law *cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act*, much is left to the discretion of the agent; she must decide *how* she will promote the obligatory end. Certain restrictions naturally apply; for instance, one cannot violate a perfect or narrow duty for the sake of a wide duty. I cannot treat others as mere means in order to perfect my talents, or even to promote their happiness. Maxims of actions, Kant tells us, must “qualify for giving universal law” (MM 6:389). They must be universalizable: I must be able to will, consistently with having and acting on my maxim, that others act on the same maxim. (See Korsgaard, 1996, ch. 3.) But even when we acknowledge these restrictions, we may still find that agents enjoy a significant degree of latitude with respect to *how* they go about promoting an end that is also a duty.

Kant also stipulates that the law cannot specify precisely *how much* one is to do for an end that is also a duty. This is a second kind of latitude, and on one natural reading, the presence of this kind of latitude rules out the possibility that we could be required to do *as much as possible* to promote obligatory ends. It should be noted that the passage can be read differently: if emphasis is placed on the word “precisely”, it is not clear that that possibility is ruled out. One might argue that Kant is saying that the law can indicate how much one is to do and how one is to act, but cannot specify this with precision. This reading would be consistent with an interpretation according to which the latitude is very restricted.

However, it does seem that the duty of beneficence allows considerable latitude – indeed, considerable latitude of both types just described, though we focus on the second type of latitude. The evidence for this comes from such passages as the following, together with what Kant does not say.

I ought to sacrifice a part of my welfare to others without hope of return, because this is a duty, and it is impossible to assign determinate limits to the extent of this sacrifice. How far it should extend depends, in large part, on what each person’s true needs are in view of his sensibilities, and it must be left to each to decide this for himself. For, a maxim of promoting others’ happiness at the sacrifice of one’s own happiness, one’s true needs, would conflict with itself if it were made a universal law. Hence this duty is only a *wide* one; the duty has in it a latitude for doing

more or doing less, and no specific limits can be assigned to what should be done.
(MM 6:393)

This passage does not decisively rule out the possibility that Kant thinks that we must do all we can to help others; after all, he could hold that we cannot assign determinate limits to the extent of this sacrifice because it depends on the agent's needs, but that everyone has a duty to do all that they can (constrained only by lack of resources or by their own true needs) to promote others' happiness. But this reading is implausible (though not as clearly ruled out as a reading that holds that we are to optimize – that we must always pursue the course of action that will maximize happiness). For one thing, Kant says (at the end of the passage quoted above) that the duty “has in it a latitude for doing more or doing less,” and this is hard to interpret as meaning only that how much the agent is morally required to do depends on his or her needs (and resources). The natural reading is surely that we do not have to do as much as we possibly can. Furthermore, if we thought Kant's view was that we have to do as much as we possibly can, we would expect him to say so, yet he does not.

By contrast, Kant does speak in these stronger terms of the duty to increase one's moral perfection. The law requires that one “*strive with all of one's might* that the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty” (MM 6: 393; emphasis ours). Kant's claim that we must strive *with all of our might* to bring it about that the thought of duty is always a sufficient incentive suggests that with respect to the duty of moral self-perfection we are required to do as much as we can to further this end. The fact that he does not speak similarly in the *Metaphysics of Morals* of the duty to promote others' happiness or the duty to develop our natural talents suggests that he considers these duties to allow more latitude than does the duty to perfect oneself morally. Moreover, he describes the duty to increase one's moral perfection as *narrow* with regard to its object (perfection), but *wide* with respect to its subject (MM 6:446); yet he makes no such distinction with respect to the duties of beneficence or developing one's talents.

It seems, then, that Kant is allowing for a fair amount of latitude in the duty of beneficence and the duty to develop one's talents. There are of course still constraints; I cannot really be said to have embraced the end of others' happiness if I only help when it is very easy, or when I feel confident that helping will ultimately promote my own interests. But it is reasonably clear that his position is not that we have to help others as much as possible, or develop our talents as much as possible.

The question remains, though, of what sorts of reasons for not helping are acceptable. A passage in the *Metaphysics of Morals* suggests that the acceptable reasons are quite limited. But the passage is obscure, and interpreters differ on just how it should be read. In the course of describing the latitude inherent in wide duties of virtue, Kant cautions (see page •• above):

But a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another (e.g., love

of one's neighbor in general by love of one's parents), by which in fact the field for the practice of virtue is widened. (MM 6:390)

This passage invites what is often called a "rigorist" or "rigoristic" interpretation of the latitude permitted by wide duties of virtue, such as beneficence. According to the rigorist interpretation, one may permissibly decline to perform an act that promotes an obligatory end only for the sake of performing another action that is also commended (or required) by a maxim of duty. For instance, as Kant's example suggests, one may decline to contribute to a particular charitable organization in order to be able to properly care for one's aging parents. In this sense, one limits the maxim of promoting the happiness of others in general by the maxim of caring for one's parents. Alternatively, one may decline an opportunity to promote the happiness of others for the sake of pursuing some activity that will allow her to further develop some talent. These alternative activities need not be comparable in any significant sense, and to legitimately forego doing an action commended by a (wide) duty of virtue, it is not necessary that one do at least as much as one would have done by that action to promote others' happiness or to develop one's talents.

It is important to be clear on what the rigorist interpretation does not entail. Like its non-rigorist counterpart, the rigorist interpretation does not entail a requirement to maximally promote either others' happiness or one's own perfection (nor does it entail a requirement that one maximally promote the two ends, taken together).⁹ Agents remain free to promote these ends as they see fit and as they prefer. Still, it is impermissible on the rigorist interpretation to decline to perform an action that promotes an obligatory end for any reason other than to perform another action that falls under a maxim of duty.

Many of Kant's commentators have found the rigorist interpretation excessively restrictive and moralistic, and, thinking it uncharitable to attribute it to Kant, some have proposed an alternative reading of Kant's statement that "a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another." It has been suggested, for instance, that "the 'exceptions' may mean a relinquishing of the maxims of promoting obligatory ends, rather than a mere refusal to act, here and now, in pursuit of such an end" (Gregor, 1963, p. 105; see also Hill, 1992, p. 152). Kant's admonition would then amount to saying that we may not give up the maxim to promote the happiness of other human beings generally, even when a special obligation to our parents overshadows the more general requirement.

This alternative reading is not very plausible. Kant's stipulation that "a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions" is given by way of explaining and qualifying what he means by saying that duties of virtue leave a "playroom (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law" (MM 6:390). Thus Kant has already indicated that the latitude permitted by wide duties applies to how one goes about applying the maxims of action prescribed by duty once these maxims have been adopted. Furthermore, it is more natural to read the term "exceptions" (*Ausnahme*) as indicating merely provisional

deviations from a rule that remains in existence rather than a wholesale abandonment of the maxim.

But perhaps there is a more plausible reading of Kant's warning that "a wide duty is not to be taken as permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions" that also resists the rigorist interpretation. Kant may be intending to caution his readers against thinking that latitude in adopting different instantiations of the maxim of beneficence goes further than it does. On this reading, Kant is saying that although we may limit somewhat our aid to strangers if we are taking care of our elderly parents (or tending to our chronically ill child), we are permitted only to limit it somewhat, not to confine our beneficence entirely to just a few people. Thus we may limit our maxim of beneficence towards people we do not know by our maxim of beneficence towards our parents, but we may not excuse ourselves altogether from aiding those not closely related to us. Permission to limit one maxim of duty by another ought not be confused with permission to limit ourselves entirely to one or two particular instantiations of the obligatory end (particularly when the end in question is others' happiness).

While this interpretation is certainly plausible,¹⁰ it depends on viewing "love of one's neighbor" and "love of one's parents" as different instantiations of the same duty of beneficence. However, if we consider the possibility that we may have special (narrow) obligations and responsibilities to particular persons (obligations which are owed) it may be more natural to read "love of one's neighbor" and "love of one's parents" as indicating two distinct duties. If this is the case, then it will be much more difficult to read "exception" as referring to a particular instantiation of the duty of beneficence.

It should also be noted that the rigorist interpretation can be understood in more than one way, and the motivation for avoiding it may rely on assumptions that it has to be more extreme than in fact is necessary. The rigorist interpretation claims that the only legitimate reason for declining to perform an action that promotes an obligatory end is to perform another action that falls under a maxim of duty. This is usually taken to mean perfect duties and wide duties, but another possibility is to include *indirect* duties as well, and in particular the duty to promote one's own happiness (G 4:399; MM 6:388). Exactly when indirect duties could weigh in would have to be worked out; the matter is complex, because if promoting one's happiness even in a minute way were allowed to be a reason for foregoing to help another, the rigorism of the rigorist interpretation would disappear altogether. We will not try to work out the details of such a revised rigorism here. But assuming that a rigorist interpretation that recognizes indirect duties is possible, it could allow that while we may not omit to perform an action that falls under a principle of wide duty just because we generally have been "doing our share" and simply do not feel like performing the action now, we may omit to do so for reasons having to do with our own happiness, if the effect on our happiness is weighty. A rigorist interpretation that includes indirect duties in the scope of acceptable reasons for declining to promote an obligatory end will thus limit an agent's freedom to pursue her own happiness less severely and better reflect Kant's views on the value of personal happiness. (See Seymour, *Kant's Duties of Love*, unpublished.)

Even if upon reflection we decide that such reasons in fact are not adequate, on the rigorist interpretation, for declining to perform an act that falls under a principle of wide duty, the rigorist interpretation may still be less restrictive than is often assumed. It needs to be borne in mind that there will likely be considerable overlap between activities that promote obligatory ends and activities that promote an agent's happiness. Clearly, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Organizing a group of friends to participate in a race that benefits cancer research will promote one's own perfection, the happiness of others, and most likely one's own happiness as well. Many other activities that we consider pleasurable will also promote obligatory ends, such as reading or (bearing in mind that "human beings have a duty of friendship" (MM 6:469)) engaging in conversation with friends. Acting on a maxim of duty need not entail foregoing one's own happiness. Consequently, while the rigorist interpretation may restrict an agent's freedom to pursue her own happiness, it may turn out that this restriction is only slightly greater than what we would find given a non-rigorist interpretation.

The rigorist interpretation may still strike some as undesirably moralistic insofar as it seems to moralize all of life, treating our happiness as valuable largely insofar as happy people are, *ceteris paribus*, more able to resist temptations to act immorally than are unhappy people, and asking us to justify our use of our time and energy entirely in moral terms. We do not have the space here to address that objection beyond pointing out that because "moral" is used quite broadly in Kantian ethics, the "moralization" is not as leaden as it might seem.

That said, we also want to acknowledge that the rigorist interpretation is by no means the only plausible reading. Those who find it unpalatable can take comfort in the fact that the passage at MM 6:390 from which the rigorist interpretation is derived is undeniably obscure, leaving room for challenging the rigorist account of wide duties. (See Hill, 2002, ch. 7.)

Latitude and (Im)partiality

A further question about latitude deserves mention. So far we have discussed latitude mainly in connection with how hard we should have to work, or how much personal sacrifice we should be willing to make, to promote others' happiness. We have seen that although it is clear that Kant does not hold that we have a duty to do as much as we can to promote others' happiness, it is less clear what sorts of reasons are permissible reasons for omitting, in a particular instance, to help another. Related to this is the question of what reasons are permissible for opting to help one person rather than another. It is occasionally just assumed (hopefully exclusively by those who know Kant's writings only slightly, or only secondhand) that Kant holds that we must choose impartially among the possible recipients of our beneficence. There is no evidence for this position. Indeed, Kant makes it plain that the idea is not to be equally beneficent to everyone. "I can, without violating the universality of the maxim, vary the degree greatly in accordance with the different objects of my love" (MM 6:452).

Those looking for explicit indications from Kant as to how much one must do for strangers compared to how much one should do for acquaintances, and how much for those one loves, will be disappointed. In general, Kant offers little by way of guidelines for deciding whom to help and how. We take it that this is not an oversight, but simply something on which he does not believe that people need him, or other ethicists, to provide advice or direction. It is clear from his discussion of beneficence, together with his more general discussion of obligatory ends, that we are to exercise good deliberative judgment in our promotion of the obligatory ends. Thus, rather than randomly selecting beneficiaries, we ought to consider thoughtfully the needs of others, our own capabilities, and the impact our beneficence will have on the recipient's well-being. Recall his attention to how beneficence can humiliate. No doubt the issues that we are to take into account in thinking about *how* to aid are among those that we should take into account in thinking about *whom* to aid.

Attention to such details may have the effect of encouraging somewhat more aid to those to whom we are close than to strangers, depending on the nature of the aid. It will not entail that aid should always be only to those near and dear to us. (Indeed, since it is much easier today than it was in Kant's time to render aid to people who live thousands of miles from us, there is less of a basis now for the view that beneficence should be exclusively or primarily to those close to us.) (See Herman, 2002.)

Beyond these points, we can summarize what Kant's ethics tells us regarding whom to aid – and more specifically, whether we may favor those close to us simply because of the personal tie (rather than because of the impact our beneficence will have, and similar considerations) – as follows. It is clear that the happiness of persons in general makes a claim on us, and so it would be wrong to neglect altogether to help everyone other than our close friends. At the same time, it is permissible, as he says in MM 6:452, to vary greatly the degree of our aid depending on the closeness of the tie we have to the person in question. In addition, as Allen Wood notes in his contribution to this collection, we do have special duties to others, including duties of friendship. Thus in addition to duties to aid people in general, we have (depending on their content) more stringent duties to help those who stand in particular relationships to us. (Of course the stringency may vary depending on the nature of the relationship and on the needs of each party. We have more stringent duties to care for our children than to promote the happiness of our adult – and able-bodied–siblings.) That Kant offers no further guidelines is not, in our view, a shortcoming; it is part of Kantian ethics that the moral agent is not following a set of rules that tell one precisely how to act, but rather, must think for herself, working out reflectively how to live.¹¹

Gratitude

As we noted above, the rich man is supposed, in aiding the poor, to avoid giving the recipient the feeling that he wants to put her under an obligation. Nonetheless,

recipients have a duty of gratitude to their benefactors. This duty is given some salience inasmuch as Kant differentiates duties of love from duties of respect as follows: duties of love put others under obligation (specifically, an obligation of gratitude), while duties of respect do not. Performing the first, Kant says, “is *meritorious* (in relation to others)”; while “performing the second is fulfilling a duty *that is owed*” (MM 6:448).

Gratitude is one of three duties into which Kant divides the duties of love, the others being beneficence and sympathy (MM 6:452).¹² It is a “sacred duty . . . the violation of which (as a scandalous example) can destroy the moral incentive to beneficence in its very principle” (MM 6:455). Its sacredness consists in this: “the obligation with regard to it cannot be discharged completely by any act in keeping with it (so that one who is under obligation always remains under obligation).” The idea is not to perform some action that will discharge one’s debt, or “even things out”; gratitude consists in “*honoring* a person because of a benefit he has rendered us.” It has both an attitudinal and an actional component: one is to be appreciative and to express that appreciativeness. (An additional actional component, implicit in the attitudinal component, is that one is to cultivate appreciativeness in oneself.) The appreciativeness extends not only to people we know, or other contemporaries who have benefited us, but also to our predecessors, “even to those one cannot identify with certainty.” Thus it is wrong to treat the ancients with disdain, though Kant adds that:

[I]t is a foolish mistake to attribute preeminence in talents and good will to the ancients in preference to the moderns just because of their antiquity, as if the world were steadily declining. (MM 6:455)

Gratitude involves

not regarding a kindness received as a burden one would gladly be rid of . . . but taking even the occasion for gratitude as a moral kindness, that is, as an opportunity given one to unite the virtue of gratitude with love of man, to combine the *cordiality* [*Innigkeit*] of a benevolent disposition with *sensitivity* [*Zärtlichkeit*]¹³ to benevolence . . . and so to cultivate one’s love of human beings. (MM 6:456)

Sympathy

One of the most intriguing discussions in the *Doctrine of Virtue* is the section entitled “Sympathetic feeling is generally a duty.”¹⁴ Kant already explained (MM 6:399) that there are certain moral endowments that are “natural predispositions of the mind” for being “affected by concepts of duty, antecedent predispositions on the side of *feeling*.” It is by virtue of these that we “can be put under obligation.” Among these moral endowments is “love of one’s neighbor” (*die Liebe des Nächsten*) (MM 6:399) or “love of human beings” (*Menschenliebe*) (MM 6:401). The idea that we are endowed with morally vital feelings, or recep-

tivity to feeling, comes up again in “Sympathetic Feeling is Generally a Duty,” where Kant says that nature “has implanted in human beings receptivity” to sympathetic joy and sadness, and that we have a duty to use this receptivity “as means to promoting active and rational benevolence” (MM 6:457). We have a duty to cultivate our compassionate feelings, and this involves putting ourselves in situations that will elicit them. It is “a duty not to avoid the places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out, and not to shun sickrooms or debtors’ prisons and so forth in order to avoid sharing painful feelings one may not be able to resist” (MM 6:457). But although we should not harden ourselves against such feelings or avoid situations that are likely to elicit them, the idea is not simply to let the feelings wash over us. We are to cultivate them, not just let them happen. We are to moderate them and utilize them properly, preventing them from overwhelming us without endeavoring to extinguish them. We need to keep them in check lest they become passions or, more likely, affects [emotions] so intense that they eclipse reason. (In *Anthropology* Kant explains the difference between the two: “In an affect we are taken unawares by feeling, so that the mind’s . . . self-control is suspended. So an affect is rash: . . . it rises swiftly to a degree of feeling that makes reflection impossible.” Passion works more slowly but roots itself more deeply and tenaciously. “We should think of an affect as a drunken fit that we sleep off: of a passion, as a madness that broods over an idea which settles in ever more deeply” (A 7:253).)

Exactly to what purpose, or how, we are to utilize these feelings is not clear. Kant says, just after the quote above from MM 6:457, “For this is still one of the impulses that nature has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish.”¹⁵ This is a little surprising, given his emphasis throughout his ethical writings on our ability to act from duty alone, and his claim that we should not look for other incentives to sweeten the task of doing our duty; we should rather “adopt the law *alone* as [our] *sufficient* incentive” (R 6:30). If duty alone is a sufficient incentive, and if it is “impure” to try to mix other incentives with duty, why is Kant encouraging us to utilize our sympathetic feelings “to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish”? It is beyond the scope of this essay to answer this question, a question that parallels the question of what motivational role a belief in God and an afterlife can legitimately play for the Kantian agent. One possible explanation, in each case, is this: even though duty should be a sufficient motive, the counterweights stemming from inclinations that are contrary to duty are such that many agents will find it hard to resist them unless they have cultivated their sympathetic feelings or believe that virtue is eventually rewarded (or better yet, both). (For doubts about this explanation, see Baron, 1995, ch. 7.) In addition (though Kant does not mention this), our sympathetic joy and sadness will attune us to what is going on with others, so that we will be engaged, noticing ways in which we can contribute positively to their lives. Relatedly, as our sympathetic impulses are cultivated, we become more sensitive to the needs of others and to ways in which we might help, and more broadly, we are better able to understand others, and, indeed, human nature (in particular, human joys and human pains, in their manifold diversity).

While it is not as clear as one would like exactly why Kant thinks that sympathetic feelings should be cultivated, it is clear that he thinks they should be. And it is clear that at the heart of what we are to do is to get them under our control so that they aid us morally rather than, say, paralyze us or disable us from helping others (as when someone is so upset about a friend's loss that she avoids her friend so as to lessen her own pain).

Nonetheless, one might wonder if Kant does justice to the value of sympathy, for while clearly it is important to keep it in check, there also seems to be value in the sympathetic feelings beyond their usefulness "as a means to promoting active and rational benevolence." There seems to be something missing in someone who lacks such feelings, or has them only slightly . . . and perhaps there is even something missing in someone who is as able to shut off such feelings as Kant seems to favor. On this there is certainly room for debate. (See Baron, 1995; for a defense of Kant, replying to Baron, see Denis, 2000. See also Sherman, 1997.)

Conclusion

In this essay we have examined the three duties of love that Kant enumerates in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. First and foremost is the duty of beneficence – our duty to make the happiness of others our end and to promote this end accordingly. We have emphasized the importance of Kant's stipulation that we must promote the happiness of others *as they understand it* (with some qualification) and have noted some other constraints on how we are to aid; in addition, we argued that the duty of beneficence is not reducible to a duty to aid only those in desperate need, but rather should be understood more broadly to include assisting others with personal projects and endeavors. We then turned our attention to a thorny interpretive issue: just how much latitude does the wide duty of beneficence permit, and how much are we expected to sacrifice for the happiness of others? Finally, we have explored the less prominent duties of love, gratitude, and sympathy, and the role they play in Kant's ethical theory. These duties reveal Kant's (often overlooked) interest in the cultivation of dispositions, attitudes, and even feelings, and show that it is a mistake to hold that Kant considered rationality to be the *only* morally important feature of persons. While duties of love may be less fundamental than duties of respect, it is clear that Kant considered duties of love to be a vital component of a moral life.¹⁶

Notes

- 1 Cf. Wood, 2002.
- 2 This bears emphasis, because in twentieth century ethics we often find it asserted that it is part of the concept of a duty that it entails a corresponding right to compel one to act accordingly. See, e.g., Urmson, 1969. That Kant denies this, holding that juridical duties entail such a right but ethical duties do not, underscores the difference

between his concept of duty and that of many contemporary or recent ethicists. For further discussion, see Baron, 1995, chs. 2–3.

- 3 Possible exceptions include killing oneself to prevent oneself from harming others after having been bitten by a rabid dog, knowing that there is no cure and that one is already beginning to go mad; and a leader's using a fast-acting poison to take his own life after being captured by the enemy, so that he cannot be forced to agree to "conditions of ransom harmful to his state" (MM 6:423–4).
- 4 Also of importance is something we note below: the duty to perfect oneself removes what might otherwise be acceptable excuses for not aiding others in various ways, e.g., "I'm not a good listener; I'm no good at comforting the bereaved; I don't have the patience for children/sick people/tedious tasks."
- 5 See also MM 6:454.
- 6 For discussion of paternalism and children in connection with Kantian ethics, see Shapiro, 1999.
- 7 It is true that in spelling out the content of the duty to perfect ourselves morally, Kant stresses the duty to "strive with all one's might that the thought of duty for its own sake is the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty" (MM 6:393), and one might for that reason think that self-perfection, on his view, has nothing to do with being patient, sensitive, and so on. Nonetheless, his detailed discussion of various virtues and vices makes it clear that we are to strive to be more virtuous and less vicious in these respects, as well. The duty to cultivate certain impulses likewise reflects a general duty to cultivate our characters, and in this way, too, to perfect ourselves morally.
- 8 It is worth noting that the term that Gregor translates here as "in need" is "*Bedürftigen*" ("*Bedürftige*" in the nominative), whereas the term in the passage from 454 that we cited earlier and that she also translates as "in need" is "*in Nöten*." We thank Dieter Schönecker for bringing this to our attention. The difference between the German terms is that "*Bedürftige*" refers to those in need in virtue of poverty, whereas "*in Nöten*" applies to a wider range of neediness. We do not think this is a serious translation flaw, however, because although the terms have different meanings, Kant appears, judging from his argument at 453, to regard the differences as insignificant for his purposes. He uses "*in Not*" in his premises and "*Bedürftige*" in his conclusion.
- 9 Some commentators understand the rigorist interpretation as entailing a requirement to do as much as possible toward an obligatory end. (See Gregor, 1963, p. 107.) We think it is important to distinguish these logically separable claims – that one may permissibly decline to perform an action that promotes an obligatory end only for the sake of performing another action that is also commended (or required) by a maxim of duty, and that one must do as much as possible towards an obligatory end (or to the two ends taken together). On our view, rigorism entails only the former claim.
- 10 And endorsed by one of us: Baron.
- 11 In "What is Enlightenment?" Kant emphasizes how tempting it is not to think for oneself: "If I have a book that understands for me, a spiritual advisor who has a conscience for me, a doctor who decides upon a regimen for me, and so forth, I need not trouble myself at all." Enlightenment, Kant says, is the emergence from a self-incurred inability to think for oneself (8:35).
- 12 The term that Gregor translates as "sympathy" is "*Teilnehmung*," perhaps better translated as "participation." See Seymour, "Active Sympathetic Participation: Reconsidering Kant's Duty of Sympathy."

- 13 “*Zärtlichkeit*” could also be translated as “tenderness” or “affection”; indeed, it is a stretch to translate it as “sensitivity.”
- 14 This is Gregor’s translation of “*Teilnehmende Empfindung ist überhaupt Pflicht*.” See note 12 above.
- 15 A note on translations is in order here. The previous editions of Gregor’s translation of the *Tugendlehre* translate “*würden*” as “would” rather than “might.” Native speakers of German whom we have consulted confirm our hunch that “might,” though not ruled out, is a bit of a stretch, though it does make the passage a little less puzzling than it is if “*würden*” is read as “would.”
- 16 We are grateful to Dieter Schönecker and Thomas E. Hill, Jr. for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of our paper, to Elizabeth Tropman for her editorial assistance, and to Georg Theiner for his help with some translation questions. In addition, Melissa wishes to thank the Dolores Zohrab Liebmann Foundation for fellowship support, and Marcia wishes to thank Dartmouth College for providing a supportive environment in which to work on this paper June–July, 2005.

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