

*The Motive of Duty and the Nature of Emotions: Kantian Reflections on Moral Worth*¹

MICHAEL WEBER
Yale University
New Haven, CT 06520
USA

Introduction

It is unclear in the *Groundwork* exactly what Kant takes to be necessary for an act to be morally good or worthy.² Traditionally it has been thought that for Kant there are two conditions: it is 1) done in accord with duty, or the moral law, and 2) done for the sake of duty alone.³ The second condition is commonly thought to entail that an act is not morally good if the agent has a 'supporting inclination' or desire to do what is right — be it an inclination of self-interest, or one stemming from some emotion of 'fellow feeling,' such as sympathy, compassion, or love.⁴ Recent interpreters, however, claim that Kant is not so strict,

1 For valuable comments on early drafts of this paper I would like to thank Allen Wood, David Sobel, Elizabeth Anderson, and Lori Gruen. I would also like to thank participants in the Yale Philosophy Department Faculty Colloquium.

2 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, H.J. Paton, trans. (New York: Harper and Row 1964)

3 The relevant text here is the famous — some would say infamous — section of the *Groundwork* which the translator Paton titles 'The motive of duty' (65-7). It is regarded by some as infamous because they read it as saying what is embarrassing to Kant and Kantians that follow him, namely that grudgingly obeying one's duty is morally preferable to doing one's duty with pleasure.

4 'Sympathy' is frequently used as an umbrella term to cover these and other emotions of fellow-feeling. For the sake of brevity, I will sometimes follow this practice.

because for him the mere presence of a supporting inclination does not necessarily impugn the moral goodness of a dutiful act. The moral goodness of an act in accord with duty is compromised, it is claimed, only if some such supporting inclination is the *actual motive* for the dutiful act. Moral worth, on this view, requires that *duty* is the actual motive, and, so long as it is, it doesn't matter whether there is a supporting inclination or not.⁵ Be that as it may, it is clear in the *Groundwork* that for Kant there is something special about the motive of duty.⁶ A common suggestion for what makes it special is that it is more reliable than other motives in producing right action. Although it is debatable whether such reliability is the most important consideration for Kant and contemporary Kantians, there are clear indications that it is for them a matter of concern — perhaps a necessary but not sufficient

5 Barbara Herman, 'On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty,' in her *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1993), 1-22. Herman's view requires a Kantian view of action, according to which inclinations or desires are not necessarily motivating. They are motivating if and only if the agent regards them as reasons for action. This opposes the empiricist, or Humean view of action, according to which inclinations and desires are necessarily motivating. See Noa Latham, 'Causally Irrelevant Reasons and Actions Solely from the Motive of Duty,' *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994) 599-618, for a critique of Herman and the Kantian view of action. For other challenges to the traditional interpretation of Kant according to which the ideal moral agent is moved only by a dour sense of duty, see Nancy Sherman, 'The Place of Emotions in Kantian Morality,' in O. Flanagan and A. Rorty, eds., *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1993) 149-70; Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1995); and Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999). Wood's view is widely shared. He notes that there are distinctive pleasurable emotions, associated with recognizing and performing one's duty, such that even when motivated by duty alone one does so with pleasure, such that it is not the case, even when acting on duty alone, that the performance of one's duty is dour.

6 Herman and others who challenge the traditional interpretation of Kant's claims about moral worth do not challenge the claim that there is something special about the motive of duty. For Herman, as noted, the motive of duty is special and must be the actual motive for a dutiful action to have moral worth. What she challenges in the traditional view is that the mere presence of another motive compromises the worth of a dutiful act. Wood takes a different approach, but still regards the motive of duty as special. He argues that for Kant dutiful actions done for the sake of duty and dutiful actions done from other motives (as long as the other motives are not themselves discreditable, or involve ends or maxims contrary to duty) are both of moral value. The former are simply more valuable, deserving of special esteem, where the latter are less so, deserving merely of approval.

condition for moral worth.⁷ As a result there is a considerable literature on the topic. I think, however, that the treatment in the literature is incomplete because there is a failure to examine the relevant emotions in significant detail, and in particular to consider their complexity and the conditions of their warrant. As a result, both defenses and critiques of the motive of duty in terms of reliability are inadequate as they stand.

I

It is important before beginning to distinguish two questions. The first is an interpretive question: is it Kant's view that what makes the motive of duty superior is that it is more reliable? The second is a substantive question: is the motive of duty more reliable than other motives, and superior for that reason? Some will think that the answer to the first question is clearly 'no,' because Kant is emphatic that a good will is good 'in itself,' and not in virtue of what it effects or accomplishes.⁸ I think, however, that the answer is not so clear. The most obvious reason for that lack of clarity is that, as noted above, for Kant an action is morally worthy only if it is in fact in accord with duty. There is perhaps a way to accommodate both facts, which is to hold that in evaluating a person, what is accomplished — whether the action in question is in fact in accord with duty — does not matter; however, in evaluating an act it matters: the act must be in accord with duty. While there is surely more to say here, my main concern in this paper is with the substantive

7 There are several places in the *Groundwork* where Kant seems concerned about reliability in producing right action. For instance, he says that a morally worthy action 'must also be done from duty; where this is not so, the conformity is only too contingent and precarious, since the non-moral ground at work will now and then produce actions which accord with the law, but very often actions which transgress it' (58, my emphasis). Later, he complains that 'Innocence is a splendid thing, only it has the misfortune not to keep very well and to be easily misled' (72). Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), 337-44, shows that in other texts, especially the *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant is concerned with the reliability of the motive of duty as compared to other motives. Herman, 'On the Value' (3-4), indicates that reliability in producing right action is an important issue for her when she complains that 'the moral fault with the profit motive is that it is unreliable' and there is a 'need for a motive that will guarantee that the right action will be done.' Critics of the motive of duty, e.g. Justin Oakley, 'A Critique of Kantian Arguments Against Emotions as Moral Motives,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (1990) 441-59, also take reliability in producing right action to be an important consideration in judging the moral worth of actions.

8 Kant, *Groundwork*, 62

question above, and not with the interpretive question, though I will briefly address the interpretive question along the way and at the end.

II

It is crucial to be clear that the claim in question is that the motive of duty is more reliable in the sense that it is *more reliable in producing right action*.⁹ The motive of self-interest may well be the most reliable in a different sense: we can best count on it to be present and strong. Self-interest, however, is reasonably thought to be less reliable *in producing right action* because self-interest and morality can, and with some frequency do, conflict. Of course some will deny this, and argue that while perhaps what people *believe* or *take to be* in their self-interest may conflict with morality, *enlightened* self-interest and morality always, or nearly always, coincide. The debate over whether and to what extent self-interest and morality conflict is an ancient one that I don't care to enter here.¹⁰ Instead, I will simply assume what seems more plausible, that self-interest and morality can and with some frequency do part company. Nonetheless, there is something that we can take away from defenders of the coincidence of self-interest and morality. What we can take away is that we can distinguish between perceived or subjective self-interest, and enlightened or objective self-interest, which allows us speak of self-interest correctly or incorrectly identifying its object. Self-interest correctly identifies its object only when it hits upon what is truly in the agent's self-interest — when subjective and objective self-interest coincide. This talk, of course, is not limited to self-interest: we can more generally speak of any motive, or motivational system, correctly or incorrectly identifying its object. This will prove crucial in what follows.

Self-interest doesn't reliably lead to right action, then, because what is best for oneself is not always compatible with one's duty or moral obligation to others — because morality demands that in some way we take others into account. Sympathy and other emotions of fellow-feeling

9 Oakley, in 'A Critique of Kantian Arguments,' calls reliability in producing right action 'accuracy.' He considers also two other senses of reliability: 1) reliability as 'summonability' and 2) reliability as 'efficaciousness.'

10 Plato's *Republic* famously addresses this debate. For contemporary discussion, see, e.g., Samuel Scheffler, *Human Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press 1992) and the extensive Neo-Hobbesian literature, in particular David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987) and Gregory Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1986).

do just this. Why think, then, that the motive of duty is more reliable than such emotions in producing right action? It might be claimed that these emotions are overly self-denying — they fail to take into account one's own legitimate interests.¹¹ But more typically it is argued that the problem with the emotions of fellow-feeling is that though they take the interests of others into account they nonetheless can lead to immoral action, or less than morally ideal action, because they might lead us to help or otherwise attend to someone we should not. Barbara Herman, e.g., complains that sympathy or compassion might lead one to assist someone 'struggling, late at night, with a heavy burden at the backdoor of the Museum of Fine Arts,' thus assisting in the theft of treasured masterpieces.¹² The problem, she says, is that 'the class of actions that follows from the inclination to help is not a subset of the class of right or dutiful actions.'¹³ Though I will focus on Herman's example, there are less dramatic examples that raise the same issues. Love and compassion, for example, might lead a parent to always assist his struggling child, such that the child never learns to fend for herself.¹⁴

The natural reply to Herman's example is to claim that if a passer-by knew that the person struggling with the heavy burden was stealing from the museum, he likely wouldn't feel sympathy or compassion, and certainly wouldn't offer help. Instead of assisting the thief, one would call the police — as I will assume duty requires. It is only when one does not know that the person is stealing from the museum that one's sympathy or compassion would lead to immoral, or less than ideally moral action. Further, in this regard the motive of duty is no better. If the person motivated by duty knew that the person struggling

11 Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press 1992), suggests this line of argument.

12 Herman, 'On the Value,' 4-5. Although Herman stresses reliability here, she later suggests that dutiful actions performed out of a reliable motive is not sufficient for moral worth. This will be further addressed in a later section of this paper.

13 Herman, 'On the Value,' 5

14 Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology*, 126, has also used this example. 'True' or 'informed' or 'proper' love, it might be claimed, would concern itself with the child's ultimate interest, which is learning to fend for herself. In the same way, it might be argued that 'true' or 'informed' or 'proper' sympathy would not be felt for Herman's imagined thief. I take up exactly this issue in what follows. Although we might reach different conclusions about whether 'proper' sympathy and 'proper' (parental) love can lead us astray, I think many of the same issues arise in both cases. To this extent, much of what I say about sympathy can be applied to the case of (parental) love.

with the heavy burden were engaged in theft, he would rightly conclude that his duty is to call the police, and not to help the person struggling.¹⁵ But just like the sympathetic person, the person motivated by duty who does not know that the struggling person is a criminal might reasonably conclude that he ought to help, or that it would be best to help. The motive of duty, then, is no more reliable in producing right action than inclinations stemming from the emotions of fellow-feeling. Neither is foolproof.¹⁶

What drives the natural reply is the simple thought that the motive of duty, just as much as motives stemming from emotions such as sympathy, compassion, and love, can lead to immoral, or less than morally ideal, action. For both, a simple lack of full information — not knowing basic, relevant facts, in this case that the man struggling with the heavy load is stealing treasured masterpieces — can lead one astray. A lack of full information, however, does not seem to be the only way the motive of duty might lead one morally astray. There are at least two other ways. First, a person's moral sense could be corrupted in some way, such that he thinks abominations are his duty because they indeed follow from the corrupt moral test that he applies. Second, being led astray could result instead from employing the correct moral test but flubbing it, e.g., flubbing the test of universalizability — a test notoriously difficult to apply. Perhaps this is just a different case of a lack of full information, because what the agent lacks when he flubs the test of universalizability (or some other test) is full information about what is and what is not a universalizable maxim (or what follows from some other test). Be that as it may, the point is just that the motive of duty and inclinations stemming from other-regarding emotions such as sympathy, compas-

15 There are of course cases in which the right thing to do is to assist the thief, e.g., if his life or limb is at risk. In such cases, we should of course not help him to carry out his nefarious activity, but simply do what is necessary to save life and limb. Then, presumably, we should call the police. For the remainder of the discussion of this example, I will assume that the thief is not at risk of life and limb, and therefore that our duty is to call the police.

16 Of course it is not enough to establish that the motive of duty too is not foolproof, since it could be more reliable than other motives even if it is not foolproof. Both Herman and her critics, however, seem to focus on whether or not the motive of duty is foolproof. Herman, 'On the Value,' is probably to blame here, as she clearly states, having noted the fallibility of sympathetic emotions, that there is a 'need for a motive that will guarantee that the right actions will be done' (4). I don't think, however, that this exclusive focus on infallibility results in any important problems or confusions.

sion and love are in the same boat: both can lead to immoral action, or at least less than morally ideal action.¹⁷

III

That they are in the same boat, however, would seem to require more than just that they can both go wrong and lead to immoral or less than ideally moral action: it requires, further, that they go wrong, when they go wrong, in the same way. But it is not obvious that they do.¹⁸ Consider a witness to the heist of treasured masterpieces motivated *only* by duty. Were he to determine (correctly) that he is witness to a robbery, he would most likely conclude (correctly) that he ought not assist because, using the idiom introduced in my discussion of self-interest, the thief is not the proper object of a duty (to assist). The witness motivated only by duty could nonetheless go wrong, as I've indicated, were he to lack essential information, have a corrupt moral sense, or flub the test of universalizability or some other appropriate moral test. The motive of duty, then, leads us morally astray only when for some such reason duty fails to identify its proper object. It seems different, it is plausibly argued, with motives stemming from other-regarding emotions such as sympathy. Imagine a witness motivated *only* by sympathy. Seemingly he would be drawn to help the thief because insofar as he is suffering with his heavy load the thief is a sympathetic character. Sympathy is essentially responsive to suffering. The thief, therefore, is the proper object of sympathy and similar emotions, and a person motivated by sympathy alone would come to his aid. Unlike the motive of duty, then, motives stemming from other-regarding emotions such as sympathy can lead us astray even when they correctly identify their proper object. The point can be put this way: the motive of duty leads us morally astray only when it is not functioning properly (with full information, and without corruption and the flubbing of moral tests), while sympathy and similar emotions can lead us astray even when they are functioning properly.¹⁹ And this seems

17 This is the thrust of Oakley's critique of Herman and the suggestion that the motive of duty is superior to motives stemming from emotions because it is more reliable in producing right action.

18 It is the failure to see this that renders Oakley's critique of the motive of duty inadequate as it stands.

19 Michael Stocker, *Valuing Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), considers a similar claim, that 'cool belief and cool rationality are not dangerous when ... the facts and procedures they involve are correct, but ... emotions are always likely to be dangerous' (93).

sufficient ground for claiming that there is something special about the motive of duty.

Most people, of course, are motivated both by duty and by emotions like sympathy. This can confuse matters, because when we imagine a sympathetic witness determining that the person struggling with a heavy load is stealing treasured masterpieces we imagine that the witness would not offer help. But this masks what is most important, it could be argued: most people, motivated by both duty and emotions such as sympathy, might well conclude that they should not assist the person they know is stealing, but *not* because the thief is not the proper object of sympathy, but rather because whatever sympathies one has for a thief struggling with a heavy load, it is wrong to help a thief in his thievery. In other words, we are imagining a case in which sympathy is over-ruled by duty. Sympathy, on its own, drives us to help the thief. It is only in virtue of a stronger motive of duty that a sympathetic person would call the police rather than help the thief in carting off the treasured masterpieces.

IV

The case may at this point seem won: the motive of duty is superior because it fails to produce the right action only when it is not functioning properly — when it fails to identify its proper object — whereas other motives such as sympathy and compassion can fail to produce right action even when functioning properly — even when they correctly identify their proper object. In this sense, the motive of duty is more reliable.²⁰ But I think the case is not so easily won, for two reasons. First, it might be argued that the fact that the motive of duty fails only when functioning properly is not enough to make it a morally preferable motive. The thought here is that we don't always know if we lack crucial information, or if our moral sense is corrupted, or if we've flubbed some moral test. The possibility of corruption is perhaps the most troubling here, it seems to me, because the corrupt frequently have the most fervent attachment to their (corrupt) convictions, and the corruption goes 'all the way down,' such that even critical self-evaluation will not reveal the corruption. These features seem to be part of the disease. Thus *in the real world* there is no reason to think that the motive of duty will be

20 This could still allow the emotions a significant role, because it may be that the motive of duty, in some cases, needs emotions such as sympathy to find its proper object.

more reliable than other motives in producing right actions. As Jonathan Bennett has famously noted, sometimes in the real world it is better if people ignore their moral sense and instead act on their emotions. Huck Finn, who thought it right to turn in the runaway slave Jim, would do better to act on his love for Jim. And the Nazis who felt pity for the Jews slaughtered in the death camps would do better to act on this pity instead of their (corrupt) moral conviction that the genocide was morally sanctioned.²¹

It is hard to know what there is to say in response to this, other than that it seems to make a difference that were the motive of duty functioning properly it would not lead us morally astray, where sympathy, even functioning properly, would. The fact that the motive of duty in 'the real world' where it does not always function properly can lead us astray does not clearly undermine the claim to the superiority of the motive of duty. Perhaps it could be added that it makes a difference in this way: insofar as we are interested in people reliably doing the right thing, we would do best to focus on developing and perfecting our moral sense, rather than developing and perfecting our sympathetic emotional capacities.²²

The second and I think more important reply to the claim that the motive of duty is superior because it leads us astray only when it fails to identify its proper object (where sympathy can lead us astray even when it correctly identifies its proper object) is to insist that it is simply wrong that sympathy can lead us astray even when it is functioning properly and identifies its proper object. The thought here is just that the thief is not the proper object of sympathy because we simply shouldn't feel sympathy or any related emotion for malfesarsers. Their malfesarsance disqualifies them from a sympathetic response.²³ If we feel sympathy for

21 Jonathan Bennett, 'The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn,' *Philosophy* 49 (1974) 123-43

22 This does not preclude that encouraging a development of sympathetic motives is also advised. Kant seems to hold this view, even to go farther in claiming that developing sympathetic motives is an indirect duty: 'But while it is not itself a duty to share the suffering ... of others, it is a duty to sympathize actively in their fate; and to this end it is therefore an indirect duty to cultivate the compassionate natural feelings in us, and to make use of them as so many means to sympathy based on moral principles and the feeling appropriate to them' (*Doctrine of Virtue*, 6:4570). For a thorough treatment of Kant's reasons for cultivating sympathy and similar emotions, see Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 368-93.

23 It is a controversial matter whether it is true that we ought not feel any sympathy for malfesarsers. It might be thought simply too cruel, and that a weaker claim is more plausible: while it is acceptable to feel sympathy for malfesarsers, it is wrong to act on such sympathy when it involves complicity in malfesarsance. I am inclined to agree

the thief with his struggles, then, sympathy has not correctly identified its object. The argument here is really quite simple: since he is a thief, one should not feel sympathy for him; therefore, he is not the proper object of sympathy. Some defenders of the death penalty argue in this manner, chastising those who feel sympathy or compassion for the condemned. They imagine that some of the opposition to the death penalty gets its start in such emotions, and insist that it is improper to feel sympathy or compassion for the condemned because of the heinous crimes they have (presumably) committed.

I am not sure myself that I accept the claim that one should not feel sympathy or compassion for a person facing the death penalty, or that we should not feel sympathy for thieves. But even if it is accepted that we should not feel sympathy for the condemned, it does not follow that the condemned is not the proper object of sympathy and compassion. Similarly, even if it is right that one should not feel sympathy or compassion for the thief at the Museum of Fine Arts, it does not follow that the thief is not the proper object of sympathy and similar emotions. That it doesn't follow requires careful examination of the relevant emotions and our talk of when such emotions should or should not be felt, that is our talk of when such emotions are appropriate, justified, or warranted.

It might seem obvious — even analytic — that if we should not feel sympathy or some such emotion E for some person A in circumstances C, then A in circumstances C is not a proper object of E. But this can be disputed. The key is to appreciate that there are distinct reasons for thinking that an emotion ought or ought not be felt — is justified or unjustified, warranted or unwarranted — in a given context. One can, for instance, have an instrumental reason or warrant: a cancer patient is instrumentally justified in feeling hopeful and optimistic, because there is evidence that hopeful and optimistic patients do better than pessimistic ones.²⁴ The justification or warrant can be moral rather than instru-

that it is too harsh. However, it is a position that some are drawn to, including both the 'man on the street' and philosophers, even if less frequently. Further, as I hope will be clear by the end, consideration of the view that it is wrong to feel sympathy for malfeasors, even if it is false, is philosophically rewarding, because it brings to light important considerations that bear on the larger topic of the reliability and the superior status of the motive of duty.

24 The cancer patient I know best tells me that this is true, not so much because the treatments work better when taken by an optimistic patient, but because an optimistic patient is more likely to try a treatment and to stick to whatever regimen it requires. This suggests that it is not the case that hopeful and optimistic patients fare better *holding all other variables constant*. I do not know whether there are studies that have sufficiently isolated the emotional variable.

mental: it might be, as some claim, immoral to be amused by offensive (racist, sexist, homophobic) jokes, or pleased by sacrilegious art. But, crucially, both of these seem distinguishable from the question of whether or not an emotion is or is not intrinsically justified, whether an emotional response is in itself appropriate, correct, or fitting. Consider the example of the cancer patient. Whatever we might say about the instrumental value of hope and optimism, there is an independent question of correctness or fittingness of optimism, which turns on the nature of the illness and the treatments available. Optimism is justified or fitting in this sense if and only if the patient's prospects are good. Next consider the case of offensive jokes: whatever we might say about the morality of finding such a joke amusing, there is a separate question of appropriateness, correctness, or fittingness, which turns on whether the joke is or is not funny.²⁵ There are, then, (at least) three different senses in which a given emotion is or is not warranted — should or should not be felt. And all three enter into the all-things-considered question of the right way to feel. For this reason, there are different senses in which we might say some person A is the proper object of some emotion E in circumstances C: A can be the proper object of E intrinsically, that is, independently of instrumental and moral considerations, as in the case of the cancer patient's optimism which depends only on the severity of his illness and the treatments available; A can be the proper object of E instrumentally, or morally; and, A can be the proper object of E 'all-things-considered,' that is, taking into account intrinsic, instrumental, and moral considerations.²⁶

It should now be clear how it can be claimed that the thief (or the person condemned to death) is the proper object of sympathy or some similar emotion, even if it is the case that one ought not feel sympathy or any related emotion for him because of his moral transgressions: while the thief (or the condemned) might not be the proper object of sympathy or some related emotion *morally*, or *all-things-considered*, he is nonetheless *intrinsically* the proper object of sympathy or some related emotion, in virtue of the simple fact that he is struggling and suffering. When we say (if we do) that one ought not to feel sympathy for thieves (or the

25 This is a controversial view, defended in Daniel Jacobson, 'In Praise of Immoral Art,' *Philosophical Topics* 25 (1997) 155-99. Since I am using the view merely for illustrative purposes, I do not need to enter into the controversy and defend the position here described.

26 My discussion here is heavily indebted to Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, 'The Moralistic Fallacy: On the "Appropriateness" of Emotions,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61 (2000) 65-90.

condemned), what we are saying is that it would be immoral to feel sympathy, because thieves (and the condemned) have violated moral (and legal) norms. But this doesn't entail that the thief (and the condemned) are not intrinsically sympathetic characters, in the same way that the fact that a joke is offensive doesn't entail that it isn't funny. There is here a genuine contrast with duty, as originally suggested: unlike duty, sympathy and similar emotions can lead us astray even when they correctly identify their intrinsic proper object — even when they are functioning ideally. Thus there is sufficient ground for claiming that there is something special about the motive of duty.

The point of the above is a simple one: that it would be immoral to feel a certain emotion E in circumstances C does not entail that the emotion E is not intrinsically warranted, correct, or fitting in C. Inferring that an emotion is not intrinsically correct or fitting in circumstances C from the (supposed) fact that it would be morally wrong to feel such an emotion in circumstances C has been dubbed 'the moralistic fallacy' by Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson.²⁷ And it is just this fallacy that seems to be at the heart of the claim that the thief (and the condemned) are no more the proper object of sympathy and similar emotions than they are the proper object of duty.

Perhaps this is too fast, because even if it is accepted that it is fallacious to infer that an emotion is not intrinsically correct or fitting from the supposed fact that feeling it is morally wrong, it has not been shown yet that the thief (and the condemned) are the intrinsically proper object of sympathy and related emotions. All that has been shown is that the (supposed) fact that it would be immoral to sympathize with them does not establish that they are *not*, intrinsically, the proper object of sympathy. As D'Arms and Jacobson point out, the fallacy is not simply to include moral considerations into the conditions of intrinsic fit or correctness for an emotion E in circumstances C; the fallacy is to include such considerations *on the grounds that it would be morally wrong to feel such an emotion* in circumstances C.²⁸ Some emotions have moral considerations as elements of their conditions of intrinsic fit. Such emotions are 'morally sensitive,' while those whose conditions of intrinsic fit or correctness do not include moral considerations are 'morally insensitive.'

27 There is, as D'Arms and Jacobson note, a parallel instrumentalist fallacy, which is to infer that an emotion is not intrinsically fitting or appropriate because it is contrary to one's interests. Rudiger Bittner, 'Is it Reasonable to Regret Things One Did?' *Journal of Philosophy* 89 (1992) 262-73, flirts with this fallacy.

28 D'Arms and Jacobson, 'The Moralistic Fallacy,' esp. 82 and 87

Outrage, for instance, seems morally sensitive: whether outrage is intrinsically fitting when, e.g., a friend and colleague is denied tenure, depends on whether or not the colleague was deserving of tenure. It is perhaps a cause for sadness if a friend is denied tenure whether he was deserving or not; but it is outrageous only if he was deserving.²⁹

What this clearly suggests is that whether or not the motive of duty is more reliable than sympathy in producing right action will depend on whether or not sympathy is morally sensitive. If on the one hand sympathy is not morally sensitive, then it is right to say that the motive of duty leads us astray only when not functioning properly while the same cannot be said for sympathy. If, on the other hand, sympathy is morally sensitive, then it will be true that the motives of both duty and sympathy will lead us astray only when they are not functioning properly. So the whole debate about the reliability of the motive of duty as compared to sympathy turns on the question of whether or not sympathy is morally sensitive. This question, however, has not even been raised in the context of this debate. To this extent, previous treatments of the motive of duty and its reliability are incomplete. Insofar as defenders of the motive of duty concerned with its reliability in comparison to other motives fail to make the case that sympathy and other emotions of fellow-feeling are morally insensitive — or even to engage in any substantive, detailed discussion of these emotions — they fail to establish the claim that the motive of duty is more reliable.³⁰

V

Initially, it seems to me, sympathy does not appear to be morally sensitive. Consider the phenomenology. Sympathy seems to kick in without pausing to determine whether the subject ultimately deserves sympathy; it is an automatic response to suffering. And when it kicks in in this way it feels right, as if it were functioning properly. The experience is different from the experience of a bout of anger towards the messenger of infuriating news — when we ‘blame the messenger.’ In this case too the response is automatic; but, in contrast, it feels wrong. Further, our

29 Some qualification is needed here, because it can be outrageous if a non-deserving person does not get tenure but for the wrong reason, e.g., because he is a racial minority, and outrageous if a deserving person gets tenure for the wrong reasons, e.g., because he or she is related to a major benefactor of the college or university.

30 It is the failure to address this matter that renders inadequate Herman’s defense of the motive of duty, insofar as reliability is an important matter on her view.

usual talk suggests that sympathy is not morally sensitive. People often say that while it is wrong to feel sympathy for certain malfeasers even if they are suffering, it is 'understandable' or 'makes sense' nonetheless to feel sympathy. A natural parsing of this talk is that while morally, or all things considered, sympathy is not appropriate, it is nonetheless intrinsically fitting.

However, neither of these points is definitive. The phenomenology certainly isn't, for at least two reasons. First, while it is the case *for me* that sympathy feels right when it kicks in automatically whenever there is suffering, I imagine for some people it doesn't feel right, just because the person suffering doesn't ultimately deserve sympathy. Moreover, those in the grip of anger might feel that their response is just right when they direct their anger towards the messenger. Second, just because sympathy latches on to an object without applying a moral compass, it doesn't follow that it is morally insensitive, because what a motivational system first 'grabs' is not necessarily its proper object, even if it feels right.³¹ This is clear if we recall the earlier discussion of self-interest: it may initially latch onto what is objectively not in the agent's interest, and feel entirely right. For example, when infatuated with a certain purchase, e.g., a house or a car, it can feel entirely right from the point of view of self-interest to make the purchase, even if it is not because it is out of one's price range, or because it is impractical (because, e.g., the house has too few bedrooms, or the car too few safety features).

There are other reasons to doubt the initial sense that sympathy and related emotions are always morally insensitive. People frequently talk of unconditional love, especially in the context of parents and children: parents claim that their love for their children does not depend on anything about the child's behavior or character, such that they would love them no matter what they do or become. Such unconditional love is morally insensitive.³² But we talk of it just to distinguish it from a love that is conditional, a morally sensitive love. So it seems that some of the emotions of fellow-feeling might well be morally sensitive. At a minimum, it seems clear that insofar as what matters is reliability in producing right action, there is no blanket rejection of emotions as moral motives.

31 We sometimes feel a wave of sympathy for inanimate objects such as cute and cuddly stuffed animals, and all the more so if they are advanced and move and vocalize.

32 I am not denying that parental love is morally admirable. Rather, I am claiming that such love is often not dependent on the moral admirability of the loved child.

To pursue this matter further would require answering some difficult, fundamental questions that have not been previously addressed: what is it that determines whether a given emotion is morally sensitive or not? Is it fixed, as D'Arms and Jacobson seem to think? Or is it to some extent up to us — can we 'shape' our emotions? If it is fixed, by whom? If it is up to us, what criteria might we use in shaping our emotions? It might seem obvious that if we can we should morally shape our emotions, just because of the great importance of morality. But there are a variety of reasons — how convincing they are I'm not sure — for thinking we should not moralize emotions like sympathy. First, such natural or 'untutored' emotions might serve as a kind of check on our moral convictions. For example, if we experience great sympathy for the suffering of persons we think morally deserving of their fate, for instance those sentenced to death, this might properly lead us to re-think and revise our moral views. Second, the complete moralization of our emotions might leave us with an impoverished emotional life, because there are important values other than moral values. A person whose personality is totally moralized might well be admirable from a moral point of view. However, such a person might well be a real dud.³³

There are further difficult issues. Philosophers, including both Aristotle and Kant himself, have emphasized that we can in some ways shape or cultivate our emotions.³⁴ For instance, we can extend our sympathy by exposing ourselves to the suffering of the poor that we might not see in our ordinary daily activities.³⁵ We can also limit our sympathy by exposing ourselves to the facts, e.g., limit our sympathy to criminals by exposing ourselves to the suffering of their victims. But what this shows is unclear. When we cultivate our emotions are we altering their range or changing their nature or content (so as to include moral considera-

33 Susan Wolf, 'Moral Saints,' *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982) 419-39, has famously made this point. I think it is also at least part of what motivates D'Arms and Jacobson.

34 Kant is often tagged with the view that emotions are entirely irrational 'eruptions,' insensitive to rational cultivation. Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, ch. 10, shows that while this might be Kant's (implicit) view in the *Groundwork*, in later works, especially the *Lectures on Ethics* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant is clear that our emotions can be cultivated.

35 Kant himself goes one step further, maintaining that doing so is a matter of duty: 'It is therefore 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 sick-rooms or debtor's prisons and so forth in order to avoid sharing painful feelings on may not be able to resist' (*Doctrine of Virtue*, 6:457). Of course it will not necessarily have the desired effect. Some people, unfortunately, seem to be simply disgusted by the miserable plight of some, such that they do not feel sympathy at all.

tions)? Let's say I cultivate my sympathy such that I feel it only for a certain group of people: I feel sympathy only for the suffering of the righteous. It seems to me plausible to say that in this case it is not so much that I have made my sympathy morally sensitive, because the sympathy itself is a response just to the suffering of these people. It is not a response to their suffering *and* their righteousness. To put it in gross mechanistic terms, the way I limit my sympathy is by installing a kind of filter, which blocks certain cases — certain people — from reaching the suffering detector that triggers sympathy. The point is that the detector, and as such sympathy, is sensitive only to suffering.

Further, even if it is granted that we can change the nature or content of emotions such as sympathy, that we can truly build into them moral considerations, it is not clear that the argument has been won, because it might now seem that there is no clear distinction between the motive of duty and sympathy. What would be shown, in other words, is not that sympathy can be as reliable in producing right action, but instead that the motive of duty can work by shaping and regulating our emotional responses.³⁶

I don't propose to answer here the question about sympathy, whether it is or should be morally sensitive or not. That would be another paper. Here my goal is simply to indicate that the question is difficult but must be addressed in any treatment of the reliability of the motive of duty as compared to emotions such as sympathy.

VI

I suggested much earlier that the natural reply to Herman's claim that unlike the motive of duty sympathy can lead one morally astray is to point out that the motive of duty can also lead us astray, if the person motivated by duty is morally corrupt, is ignorant of relevant facts, or flubs the test of universalizability or some other appropriate moral test. There is, however, another natural reply that must be at least briefly addressed. The reply, familiar from Hume, is to claim that though sympathy can lead us morally astray, a fully-informed, impartial sympathy would not. Sympathy leads us astray only when it is uninformed, or partial. In other words, a sympathy suitably cultivated could be as reliable in producing right action as the motive of duty. So, in Herman's

36 This is a version of a point Herman herself has emphasized, that the motive of duty serves not as a primary motive but as a 'limiting condition' on otherwise nonmoral motives.

example, a sympathy sensitive not just to the thief's suffering as he struggles with the heavy load but also sensitive to the plight of, e.g., the museum's curators and the museum's would-be-visitors, would not motivate one to help the thief.

There are I think two Kantian responses to this Humean suggestion. The first is to argue that sympathy cannot be cultivated in such a way that it would be reliable in producing right action, because sympathy seems sensitive primarily to levels of well-being, which might be enough for utilitarians but not for Kantians who think there are morally relevant factors other than well-being. Sympathy, as some put it, is insensitive to questions of (distributive) justice, and so also, consequently, is utilitarianism.³⁷ The second, and for this paper more interesting response, is to insist that reliability in producing right action, while important, is not sufficient. This is in fact Herman's favored response: 'Nonmoral motives,' she argues, 'may well lead to dutiful actions, and may do this *with any degree of regularity desired*. The problem is that ... [people] who act according to duty from such motives may nonetheless remain morally indifferent.'³⁸ Addressing the Humean directly, she complains that '[even] if ... sympathy could be ... trained (as Hume suggests) toward an impartial response, it would still generate morally correct actions *only by accident* ... while sympathy can give an interest in an action that is (as it happens) right, it cannot give an interest in its being right.'³⁹ She therefore adopts the 'no accident' test for moral worth: a dutiful action has moral worth if and only if its performance was no accident.

The Humean reply is important, then, not just because it suggests that perhaps emotions can be as reliable as the motive of duty in producing right action, but also because it pushes Kantians such as Herman to require more than just reliability in producing right action. It shows that perhaps reliability, as I indicated right at the beginning, can be, for a Kantian, only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for moral worth. That the dutiful action being performed was no accident is the further demand Herman favors. This may be just a move from the stove to a frying pan, as it has been argued that the no accident test is too harsh.⁴⁰ Evaluating this claim, however, must be left for another day, as this paper must be limited to a discussion of moral worth and reliability in

37 There are of course sophisticated versions of utilitarianism that try to capture within the utilitarian framework our intuitions about (distributive) justice.

38 Herman, 'On the Value,' 6

39 Herman, 'On the Value,' 5 (my emphasis)

40 Holly Smith, 'Varieties of Moral Worth and Moral Credit,' *Ethics* 101 (1991) 279-303

producing right action. For the purposes of this paper, it is enough to note that for Kantians such as Herman reliability in producing right action is not the whole story when it comes to moral worth.

VII

Reliability in producing right action is also not the whole story for Kant. He too seems to think that it is important that the performance of dutiful actions is no accident. He worries in the *Groundwork* that a morally worthy action 'must also be done from duty ... [because] where this is not so, the conformity is too contingent.'⁴¹ However, I think that for Kant, at least as he is commonly read, there are even more important reasons for favoring the motive of duty. On his view, at least as some read him, the capacity for reason is what distinguishes human beings, and is the ground of their special dignity. Reason is, in this sense, our higher function. In contrast, emotions such as sympathy, which we might well share with the animals, are lower.⁴² Further, for Kant, unlike, e.g., Hume, the directives of morality, including our duties, are the product of reason. It is thus only when we act on the motive of duty that our action is grounded in our higher function. For this reason, dutiful actions motivated by the motive of duty are superior to dutiful actions motivated by emotions and other things lower.

Further, Kant thinks that it is only when we act on our reason that we act freely, or autonomously. Therefore, Kant thinks that only dutiful actions done for the sake of duty are true expressions of our free will. When we act on the motive of duty, we ourselves bring about the action. When acting on the motive of duty, in other words, we are active. With respect to emotions such as sympathy, in contrast, we are passive.⁴³ Such

41 Kant, *Groundwork*, 58. Careful readers will note that I used this quotation earlier (n. 6) to show that Kant is concerned with reliability in producing right action. It seems to me that the quotation indicates both a concern with reliability in producing right action and a concern that right action be non-accidental: 'precarious' indicates concerns about reliability; 'contingent,' about right action being non-accidental.

42 There is some evidence that elephants experience sympathy. Be that as it may, the important point is to distinguish emotions such as sympathy from emotions such as respect for the moral law.

43 Some might think that appealing to autonomy here commits one to Kant's dubious metaphysics involving a 'noumenal' self, though I don't think this is necessarily so. Be that as it may, it is perhaps worries about invoking such dubious metaphysics that lead contemporary Kantians such as Herman to adopt something like the no

emotions, on Kant's view, simply arise and disappear largely on their own, as part of the causal nexus. They are simply 'set upon us.' Since it is only dutiful actions that are the product of free will that have moral worth and deserve esteem, it is only dutiful actions done for the sake of duty that deserve esteem.⁴⁴

Commentators on Kant think that there is relatively scant evidence that this is Kant's view in the *Groundwork*. The evidence, it is claimed, is to be found in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Critique of Judgment*, and the *Anthropology*.⁴⁵ Perhaps there is *better* evidence there. But it seems to me that there is clear evidence in the *Groundwork*. In the discussion there of sympathy and why it is a motive which does not deserve special status he emphasizes that emotions such as sympathy are merely gifts of nature, which are simply bestowed on some and not others. Sympathy, he says, either is or is not simply 'implanted' in us.⁴⁶ He also emphasizes that, e.g., love, can not be commanded because it is '*pathological*' — not something we can simply will. This contrasts with the motive of duty, which is '*practical*,' because 'residing in the will.' Kant makes this clear in a passage which ends his discussion in the *Groundwork* of the motive of duty:

It is doubtless in this sense that we should understand too the passages of Scriptures in which we are commanded to love our neighbor and even our enemy. For love out of inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done from duty ... is *practical*, and not *pathological*, residing in the will and not in the propensions of feelings, in principles of action and not of melting compassion; and it is this practical love alone which can be the object of command.⁴⁷

accident test, despite the fact that Kant himself puts more emphasis on autonomy. It should be noted, also, that this view of emotions as passive is not so much mine as it is Kant's, at least in the *Groundwork*.

44 Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 344-50, and Kelly Sorensen, 'Kant's Taxonomy of the Emotions,' forthcoming in *Kant Studies*, emphasize this point. If this is right, it will be hard to maintain Wood's view (see n. 6) that dutiful actions done for the sake of duty and dutiful actions done from other motives (as long as the other motives are not themselves discreditable, or involve ends or maxims contrary to duty) are both of moral value, the former simply having greater moral value, because dutiful actions motivated by sympathy are not the product of our will, and thus not of any moral value. The only way out I can see is to claim that in cases of dutiful action motivated by sympathy the act has moral value but the agent is not deserving of any moral credit for performing the morally good action.

45 See Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* and Sorensen, 'Kant's Taxonomy.'

46 Kant, *Groundwork*, 66

47 Kant, *Groundwork*, 67

As Kant ends here the relevant section, I will end here as well.

Received: July 2002

Revised: January 2003