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KANT'S CONCEPTION OF MERITⁱ

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ABSTRACT: It is standard to attribute to Kant the view that actions from motives other than duty deserve no positive moral evaluation. I argue that the standard view is mistaken. Kant's account of merit in the *Metaphysics of Morals* shows that he believes actions not performed from duty can be meritorious. Moreover, the grounds for attributing merit to an action are different from those for attributing moral worth to it. This is significant because it shows both that his views are reasonably consistent with our ordinary views, and that he recognized a variety of purposes in evaluating actions, many of which are not furthered by determining whether they were motivated by duty.

A few pages into the *Groundwork* Kant claims that only actions from duty have moral worth.ⁱⁱ Even though as an aside he also says that a dutiful action from sympathy or honor, though lacking in moral worth, "deserves praise and encouragement", it is tempting not to take him very seriously. One suspects that he regards this praise as only a poor and morally insignificant cousin of the esteem reserved for actions from duty. In the end, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that, for him, only dutiful actions from duty deserve any morally significant positive evaluation.ⁱⁱⁱ This conclusion in turn raises a standard objection:^{iv} How can this be squared with the fact that we think highly of actions motivated, not by duty, but by desires to help those we love or those for whom we feel compassion? Of course, if we could ignore our suspicions and take Kant's aside seriously, the conflict would lessen. Contrary to the standard objection, Kant does indeed think that actions motivated by such desires are worthy of praise and encouragement. But the difficulties would not, for then we would then have to answer serious questions about the nature of the "praise" deserved by a dutiful action not

performed from duty, what moral significance (if any) a Kantian view can attribute to it, and the relationship it has to moral worth.

The aim of my paper is to work toward an answer to these questions. I believe that there is room within a Kantian account of moral evaluation to take seriously Kant's aside about actions from motives other than duty. The focus of my discussion, however, will not be on the account of moral worth in the *Groundwork* that has attracted much recent attention. Rather, it will be on Kant's discussion of "merit" [*Verdienst*] in the later *Metaphysics of Morals*. I think that there are deep enough differences between his account of moral merit and his account of moral worth to show that he takes these to be different kinds of moral evaluation. And his account of meritorious action shows that actions not performed from duty can be nonetheless deserving of a morally significant positive evaluation. Moreover, I think that this distinction between merit and moral worth in turn reflects an important difference in purposes we have in moral evaluation. Sometimes we want to evaluate how morally good we really are, and for this, evaluations of moral worth, but not moral merit, are appropriate. Other times we are concerned with what and how much to hold, not only ourselves, but also others, responsible for, what and how much desert and praise or blame are appropriate, or with whether an act has incurred a debt or an obligation to make amends. Evaluations of merit, but not moral worth, are appropriate here. These are two different sorts of purposes for moral evaluation, requiring different sorts of evaluative categories, and Kant's views respect this difference. Or so I will argue.

My strategy will be to articulate the main features of Kant's conception of merit, and then to contrast this with his more well-known (though still controversial) views on moral worth. More specifically, I will argue that on Kant's view the grounds for attributing merit to an action are different from those for attributing moral worth. Moreover, although all actions

performed from duty are meritorious, not all meritorious actions must be performed from duty. Kant's account in fact allows a surprising amount of room to regard actions not motivated by duty as meritorious. I will also argue that even if acting from duty is always meritorious, his account does not imply that it always is meritorious in a great degree. Indeed, his conception of merit does not imply that there must be more merit in acting from duty than from other motives.

For simplicity's sake, my account will focus on actions, rather than on other objects of evaluation, such as persons, which Kant does not discuss in relation to merit. It may be possible to extend a Kantian view in these directions, but I will not be concerned with this. However, by focussing on actions, I am not assuming that the concepts of "moral worth" or "moral merit" must apply only or even primarily to actions, rather than persons. The issue of whether moral evaluation mainly focusses on persons or on actions is not crucial to the account that follows.

Kant ties responsibility for consequences to judgments of merit, and although I will not focus on this, I will have something to say about how this relates to the different purposes we may have in moral evaluation in general. I do, however, suppose that his account of merit concerns at least in part the grounds of *moral praiseworthiness*. Kant never explicitly equates merit with praiseworthiness, nor does he say anything that indicates he thinks that they are different. His account of merit, I think, is most naturally taken to concern praiseworthiness, even if some non-meritorious actions might be praiseworthy as well. And if all meritorious actions are praiseworthy, but not all meritorious actions are performed from duty, then what I say here will be sufficient to imply that some morally praiseworthy actions need not be performed from duty.

One final preliminary note. I wish to emphasize at the outset that the issue here is over the grounds for judging an action to be *morally* meritorious (as opposed to, say, prudentially

meritorious). I say this mainly in order to allow space for the argument that follows. For many will resist a discussion of Kantian merit which separates it from moral worth simply because they hold the position which I wish to argue against, namely, that the *moral* dimension of merit for a Kantian must come from the motive of duty. By taking my topic to be *moral* merit, I am therefore not surreptitiously begging any questions, but simply putting the issue on the table for discussion.

My discussion is divided as follows: In sections one and two I discuss the first part of Kant's conception of merit, that meritorious actions are those in which the agent does more in the way of duty than can be rightfully coerced. Here, I will argue, Kant is referring mainly to the moral limits of coercion, and that this show that his view allows certain kinds of actions, even if not motivated by duty, to be morally meritorious. In the third section, I discuss the second element of Kant's conception, that merit varies with the degree of natural and moral obstacles to performing actions. This, together with the results from the first two sections, leads to my argument in the fourth section, that Kant's account not only does not restrict moral merit to actions from duty, but it does not even implies that acting from duty necessarily deserves more merit than other meritorious actions. Finally, I will end by briefly explaining the difference between these two kinds of moral evaluation.

I

In the *Groundwork*, Kant refers to "wide" duties as "meritorious" [*verdienstlichen*], in contrast to "narrow" or "rigorous" [*unnachlässlichen*] duties.^v This reference to merit itself might be taken as evidence that he thinks of an action's merit as distinct from its moral worth [*moralischen Wert*]. We can perform narrow duties, such as keeping a promise, from duty, and so the performance of narrow duties can be of moral worth. On the other hand, we can perform

wide duties, such as promoting the ends of others, without doing so from duty, and so the performance of wide duties can lack moral worth. Yet here he refers only to wide duties as meritorious. This does not imply that performing narrow duties *cannot* be meritorious; as we shall see, they can. Nevertheless, a wide duty is meritorious in some sense in which a narrow duty is not. So our first question is, How is the wideness in a duty related to its meritoriousness?

Unfortunately, there is nothing more said of merit or of the wide/narrow distinction in duties in the *Groundwork*, so we must turn to the *Metaphysics of Morals* for an answer.^{vi} In the introduction to this work, Kant defines some concepts that are preliminary and common to both of its parts, the doctrines of right and virtue.^{vii} One of these concepts is that of merit, which he takes up while discussing the imputation of actions and desert. The first part of his definition of merit is this: “If someone does *more* in the way of duty than he can be coerced by law to do, what he does is *meritorious* [*verdienstlich*] (*meritum*)”.^{viii} If someone simply does what can be coerced, on the other hand, he does what is *owed* [*Schuldigkeit*] (*debitum*), while doing less is *culpable* [*moralische Verschuldung*] (*demeritum*). From the first part of his definition, together with the fact that Kant refers to wide duties as meritorious, we can infer that a wide duty is meritorious because it involves doing more in the way of duty than can be coerced by law.

The idea that some duties can and others cannot be coerced is central to the *Metaphysics*. Its most basic division is between *juridical* and *ethical* legislation, or the legal and ethical aspects of morals. Kant makes this division on the basis of the fact that ethical legislation does not, and cannot, derive its authority from coercion, while juridical legislation must.^{ix} Given this, we can infer that the laws which can coerce only less than meritorious action are juridical, rather than ethical, for only compliance with juridical laws can be coerced. There can thus be no merit in merely conforming to juridical law. Consequently, by “meritorious” Kant

does not mean “ethically supererogatory”, or above and beyond the call of *ethical* duty, but, more minimally, beyond the reach of *juridical* duty, or the legally coercible. And since all ethical duties are uncoercible, simply performing them will always be meritorious.^x By “what can be coerced” here, Kant means both what is conceptually and morally possible to coerce. I will discuss the latter in the next section. Let us first consider the idea of what it is conceptually possible to coerce.

The reason that ethical duties cannot be coerced is that they are duties to adopt ends (most generally, the happiness of others and our own perfection).^{xi} They are therefore of (more or less) wide obligation and so, Kant claims, they leave

a latitude (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law, that is ... 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.^{xii}

We cannot specify what or how much should be done in order to fulfill a duty to adopt an end. For instance, adopting the happiness of others as our end requires no particular helping actions in any particular degrees of frequency. Others’ happiness simply must carry some weight in our deliberations, such that we are committed to sometimes and some extent performing actions which promote the happiness of others.^{xiii} Juridical duties, on the other hand, are of narrow obligation because they do specify what and how much the agent is to do. They demand the performance of particular external actions (such as fulfilling one’s contracts).^{xiv} So while ethical legislation characteristically does not concern specifiable external action, juridical legislation does.^{xv}

Since Kant conceives of an end as “an *object* of free choice, the representation of which determines it to an action”,^{xvi} adopting an end “excludes the possibility of constraint *through*

natural means by the choice of another.”^{xvii} From Kant’s definition of an “end”, then, the very idea of it excludes coercion, and so the very idea of coercing someone to adopt an end is self-contradictory.^{xviii} Kant’s idea here is plausible enough: While one person can coerce another to perform particular external actions, such as to pay for services rendered, to execute the terms of a contract, or to stay off someone’s property, no one can coerce another to do these things in pursuit of money, honor or whatever.^{xix} Given that ethics legislates the adoption of ends, and that the adoption of ends cannot be coerced, the performance of any ethical duty will therefore go beyond the legally coercible.^{xx}

Kant claims that all juridical duties are narrow (in specifying particular external actions), and all ethical duties are wide (in leaving some latitude for choice in what, how much and when to perform actions). However, it is apparent that he regards the categories of narrow and wide as resting on a continuum. (As we shall see, this continuum is important for assessing degrees of merit.) For instance, he claims that duties of respect, being duties of omission, are narrower than duties of love.^{xxi} Moreover, we can and should “bring closer to narrow duty (duties of Right) the maxim of complying with wide duty.”^{xxii} The implication here is clear: Duties can be more or less wide, and the more that a duty specifies in what way one is to act and how much one is to do, the narrower it is. Thus, even if the proscription of suicide is a duty to adopt an obligatory end (or at least to refrain from adopting of various ends which would require self-annihilation as a means to them), and so is included among ethical duties, it is comparatively narrow. For pursuing the ends which require self-annihilation will issue in one kind of act, and so refraining from such ends requires that one refrain from a specific kind of act. In contrast to this, adopting the happiness of others as one’s end, though also an ethical duty, leaves a more

latitude in what and how much to do. This makes it all the more clear why all juridical duties are narrow in this sense, for laws coerce specific actions in specific degrees.

II

So far, we have seen that, because the idea of coercing an end is self-contradictory, and because in adopting an end we are merely adopting a policy of action which (more or less) resists specification as to what and how much is required to be done, Kant holds that the performance of ethical duties is meritorious. However, he also thinks that many actions which could conceivably be coerced are also meritorious. Thus, the conceptual impossibility of coercion is not a necessary condition of merit. Indeed, there is nothing unintelligible about coercing someone to perform those external actions which someone with such ends characteristically, or in the case of narrower ethical duties, always, performs or omits. Aside from the shackling of self-mutilators or confinement of those who are suicidal, we could conceive of “good Samaritan” laws, for instance, coercing people to help others in need.^{xxiii}

Yet helping actions, for instance, seem meritorious quite apart from the inconceivability of coercing ends. When a person does something good for which there was no *moral* space for coercion, we think that this can make her action meritorious (i.e., we think “she did not *have* to do it”). Consider someone who helps out at a local soup kitchen. We can well imagine a law which coerces this. But under normal circumstances we would not think this justifiable. For the failure to perform good deeds of this kind does not (normally) interfere with anyone else’s rights or free choices. Indeed, such a person would be helping on her own initiative, and that is why we think it meritorious. The fact that she does something which no one has a *moral right* to coerce, even if it is conceivable that it be coerced, makes her action meritorious.

This idea of *moral* uncoercibility is central to Kant's conception of meritorious duties: For instance, he says that "what essentially distinguishes a duty of virtue from a duty of Right is that external constraint to the latter kind of duty is morally possible, whereas the former is based on only free self-constraint."^{xxiv} There is thus a sense in which the agent who performs a meritorious action does more than can be coerced in a moral sense. Helping strangers in need and taking care of one's health are instances of doing more than it is morally possible to coerce. Naturally, a law requiring people to moderate their smoking or to help at a soup kitchen is conceivable. Nonetheless, in Kant's view it is not *morally* possible.

The moral limits of coercion are defined by Kant's "Universal Principle of Right". An action is right (legal) "if on its maxim the freedom of choice of each can coexist with everyone's freedom"^{xxv} A law which forbade an action on whose maxim the freedom of choice of each could coexist with everyone's freedom would not be justifiable. Since the indulgence of immoderate personal habits or the failure to be a good Samaritan does not (normally) impinge on the freedom of choice of others, each would not be, as Kant sees it, a morally fit subject of coercion. Consequently, both moderate and beneficent acts are meritorious when they reflect the pursuit of the obligatory ends of our own perfection and the happiness of others.

Moreover, they may do so even if those ends are not adopted from duty. For, setting aside the interests a person might have in adopting these ends, both go beyond what can be rightfully coerced. Indeed, they do so "in the way of duty", for the ends the person adopts are the outcome of ethical legislation, even if it is not their being so legislated that is the motive for adopting them. Consider, for instance, a person who pursues her own perfection and the happiness of others, but not motivated by duty. Suppose she pursues them motivated by,

respectively, an interest in her reputation as a health-nut and sympathetic person. Even though she has not adopted obligatory ends from the motive of duty, she nonetheless acts *according to* her ethical duties in adopting them. She simply fails to adopt them from an interest in the dutifulness of adopting them.

It is common, however, to take Kant as saying something much stronger than this, that a person cannot really adopt a morally obligatory end or policy, unless she does so from the motive of duty.^{xxvi} Thus, on this interpretation, one simply fails to perform an ethical duty unless one acts from duty. Although there is some textual support for this interpretation,^{xxvii} I believe it depends on a dubious way of resolving the problem of determining relevant act descriptions. A lot turns, morally speaking, on whether a helping action should be described as “maintaining my reputation as a sympathetic guy” or “promoting the well-being of others” or, for that matter, “doing my duty”, and, on the Kantian view, this is the job of maxims. Our maxim is supposed to determine the description of an action that is relevant for moral purposes. And our interests, at least in some measure, should be counted as a part of maxims. This surely makes sense, given that we ordinarily tend to change our descriptions in light of intentions and motives. Thus, the description of what I am doing, for moral purposes, may depend in part on whether I am acting from duty or not. Some hold that this fact about maxims and act descriptions implies that one cannot perform any ethical duties at all unless one acts from the motive of duty.

But there is good reason to resist the implication. First, it is simply too austere a view. One cannot, on the austere reading, act in accordance with ethical duties and yet still be doing one’s duty. For to act merely in accordance with a duty is to act from some other motive than duty. But if performing ethical duties requires acting from duty, then in acting merely according

to one's ethical duties, one will not be performing any ethical duties at all. But surely there is *some* sense in which a person who helps others and looks after her health does her ethical duty, even if we may doubt that she does these things simply from the motive of duty.

Second, there is textual evidence in the *Metaphysics* that Kant did not hold the austere reading. He defines right and wrong action in terms of acting merely according or contrary to duty [*pflichtmässig oder pflichtwidrig*], even though “the duty itself, in terms of its content or origin, may be of any kind”.^{xxviii} If its content or origin may be of any kind, it can be an ethical duty, or a duty whose origin is the inner legislation of ends. If we can act merely according to our ethical duties, and this in turn is ethically right action, yet our ethical duties are duties to adopt obligatory ends, then we must be able to adopt such obligatory ends without doing so motivated by a view to their obligatoriness. The performance of, for instance, a helping action, may therefore reflect the fact that we have adopted the obligatory end of promoting the happiness of others, even if an interest in duty alone is not what leads us to adopt it.

Third, given that the “ultimate subjective ground” of our choices remains obscure even in light of the most studious self-examination, determining “what someone did” in a given case would be left equally obscure. I may be interested in helping others because I have a further interest, namely, doing whatever I believe is my duty. But I may also, in turn, have *that* interest, not simply because I have taken an interest in duty, but because I wish to maintain a good reputation and believe that doing what I believe is my duty no matter what will further that. The depth and complexity in the web of interests that motivate us makes it important to find some level of description that is not held completely hostage to them. And, I think, since the deepest part of this web determines whether or not we have really “acted from duty”, that level of

interest should not be taken as determining act descriptions in the sense relevant to whether we have or have not performed a given ethical duty.

Finally, although for moral purposes an act description should be determined by the maxim on which the agent acted, not all moral purposes are the same. What may be an appropriate level of description for determining, for instance, the moral value of an action may not be appropriate for determining desert, responsibility, praise- or blameworthiness. Hence, we should not assume that for every moral purpose we have in describing, and so evaluating, an action, we must determine as well what the ultimate interest was that motivated it. What I am supposing here is that for some moral purposes (and I will discuss one below), determining whether someone acted meritoriously need not hang on determining whether she was motivated by duty. For all of these reasons, then, I think there are good grounds for not attributing the austere view to Kant, that performing an ethical duty requires acting *from* duty.

Applying the more detailed discussion of duties in the *Metaphysics* back to the remark in the *Groundwork*, it is clear that Kant thought the performance of wide duties was “meritorious” because (a) they are moral requirements to adopt ends, which cannot be coerced, and (b) the actions which the adoption of such ends requires are not *morally* fit for coercion. By contrast (c) all juridical duties can be coerced (since they require only external actions), (d) are morally fit for coercion (according to the Universal Principle of Right), and so can typically be performed without doing more than can be coerced. Although the two kinds of limits on coercion are distinct, they are related in the sense that both single out actions that are a product of “free self-constraint”. In so doing, they focus on actions reflecting the agent’s own initiative. Thus, the rationale for judgments of merit is grounded in the reasonable idea that the merit of

such actions should be attributed to the agent's own initiative (rather than, say, the prospect of punishment).

III

This first part of Kant's account of merit, however, seems to have problematic results: First, we must count even narrow, perfect ethical duties, such as refraining from suicide and various over-indulgences or contemptuous attitudes, as meritorious, for these cannot rightfully (in one or the other sense) be coerced. But why, one might ask, should refraining from such base behavior be meritorious? Second, Kant contrasts what is meritorious with what is owed--either to others or even oneself. But in performing perfect ethical duties, one is only doing what is owed. So even if ethical duties go beyond what is legally coercible, many are nonetheless owed to others or ourselves, and so should not be counted as meritorious.^{xxix} Yet my account so far does just this.

Regarding the second problem, notice that the actions of refraining from suicide, overindulgence, contempt and the like *may or may not* reflect the adoption of an obligatory end. Yet surely it is only the external action that can be "owed", not the adoption of an end. What I owe another is not the adoption of any end in my actions, but simply certain actions. I must refrain from ridiculing others, for instance, because I owe them this in virtue of their humanity. But it is in the adoption of the end of respecting them that my refraint from ridicule becomes meritorious. So when an action is merely considered as what can be owed to ourselves or another, then it is not meritorious. But when that same action is considered as reflecting the adoption of an obligatory end, then it is (minimally, perhaps) meritorious. In other words, perfect ethical duties, in their guise as *ethical* duties, are meritorious, but in their guise as simple *what is owed*, whether morally or conceptually coercible, they are not meritorious.

Regarding the first problem, although it is quite clear that refraining from such behavior is not *equal* in merit to, say, helping others at a substantial personal cost to oneself, there is nothing counter-intuitive about its being meritorious, so long as it is only counted as *minimally* meritorious. And the second part of Kant's account allows for just this difference in the relative merit of various kinds of actions, for it provides for gradations in merit:

The greater the natural obstacles (of sensibility) and the less the moral obstacle (of duty), so much the more merit is to be accounted for a good deed.^{xxx}

The common-sense idea here is just that the harder it is to do a good deed, and the less expected it is that one do it, the more meritorious it is that one did it. On the other hand, the easier or more expected it is that one perform a good deed, the less meritorious. Thus, refraining from base behavior such as gluttony, since it is expected of everyone, is of little, but still some, merit. Pursuing the happiness of others, especially when one must make sacrifices to do so, however, is of greater merit.

More precisely, "the greater the natural obstacles (of sensibility)" refers to our often wayward inclinations. They may incline us against duty, either a little bit or a lot (or perhaps not at all). We may really lust after, or, alternatively, just prefer, to do something other than what we ought. And the more inclined we are against doing "more in the way of duty", the more meritorious it is that we do it. Hence, the rich person who gives a certain amount to charity is *prima facie* doing something of less merit than the person of more moderate means who gives the same amount, simply because it affects the material well-being of the latter person more than the former, and so there was a greater obstacle present.^{xxxi}

"The less the moral obstacle (of duty)", on the other hand, refers to the breadth of the duty. There is more of a "moral obstacle" to failing to perform a narrower duty than a wider one.

There is a great moral obstacle to breaking a contract, but a small one to failing to help out at the soup kitchen on a particular day at a particular time. The former is not meritorious, since the moral obstacle to breaking a contract is large (i.e., we must keep *every* contract). The latter, however, presents a relatively small moral obstacle (i.e., we must only adopt a general policy of helping others). Hence, only the latter is meritorious.

Moreover, as we have seen, wide duties can be “more or less” wide, not only in the sense that they can leave more or less room for judgment in deciding when and what to do in order to fulfill them, but also in the sense that we may be more or less free to pursue our own interests rather than perform an action that would carry out a wide duty (depending on what the duty is, and only if in doing so we are not thereby rejecting a morally required policy).^{xxxii} Thus duties of respect, for instance, may be wide in the sense that they require adopting an end and so do not specify in any particular degree or extent particular actions. Yet they do not allow the sort of latitude in performing actions that duties of self-development and of promoting the happiness of others allow--for instance, the freedom to allow exceptions in the interest of inclination.^{xxxiii} Thus, while it is left to judgment both when to, and what will and will not, fulfill a duty of respect, we cannot forgo acting on a policy of respecting others in a particular case because we happen to have a strong inclination to, say, ridicule someone. Therefore, although they are both “wide duties”, duties of respect are narrower than duties of self-development and promoting the happiness of others, and so the latter are, to that degree, more meritorious.

In sum, then, the wider the duty, the less moral obstacle there is to forgoing a particular action in accordance with it, and so the more meritorious it is that one performs it. Combining this with the “natural obstacle” variable, we get the conclusion that the most meritorious actions

are those one is least inclined to do or even inclined against doing, and would make the least moral difference if one did not do them in particular.^{xxxiv}

The Kantian conception of meritorious action, then, concerns whether an agent has done more in the way of duty than can be rightfully coerced, the degree of wideness of the duty and the difficulty or ease in its performance. But it still might be objected that many actions which quite obviously are not meritorious will fulfill these conditions. For instance, suppose someone performs an act of charity to a stranger (a wide ethical duty) against powerful contrary inclinations (she is a misanthrope, perhaps), but does so out of principled spite (say, her principle is to do whatever it takes to make a rival in charity feel like a failure).^{xxxv} Surely no one would count this as a meritorious action. But that is what the account so far requires that we do.

This objection can be met to a great extent by the condition that an action that goes beyond what can be coerced must do so “in the way of duty”. So one can perform a wide duty and struggle against contrary inclinations to do so, and so do more than can be coerced, without doing so “in the way of duty”. And acting according to ethical duties from spite, malice, vanity or other undesirable interests would surely seem to be a failure to do so “in the way of duty”, and so a failure to act meritoriously. The problem is how to show that this is a failure to act in the way of duty, yet at the same time allow that acting from other more desirable interests, such as compassion or love, is not a failure to act in the way of duty.

But Kant makes just such a distinction in speaking of the difference between acting from sympathy or honor and acting from duty in the *Groundwork*. A charitable act by a sympathetic person “without any further motive of vanity or self-interest...stands on the same footing as other inclinations---for example, the inclination for honor, which if fortunate enough to hit on

something beneficial and right and consequently honourable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem”.^{xxxvi} This implicitly contrasts acting from “vanity or self-interest” and acting from honor or sympathy. Right actions from vanity and self-interest do not deserve “praise and encouragement”, but right actions from sympathy or honor do. If Kant’s account of meritorious actions is an account praiseworthy actions, as I think is it most natural to suppose, then whatever underlies the distinction between right actions from vanity and those from sympathy will explain why the charitable act from spite is not meritorious, while the same act from love or honor is.

What underlies the distinction, I think, is this: Actions from spiteful or vane interests embody attitudes that are morally forbidden, while actions from sympathy, honor or love do not. Kant holds that attitudes such as envy, ingratitude, malice, contempt, arrogance (which he specifically contrasts with the desire for “honor”) are morally forbidden.^{xxxvii} Hence doing more than be coerced, even wide duties one has to struggle to perform, from spiteful or vane interests, is not doing so “in the way of duty”. For in doing so, one is being malicious, contemptuous or arrogant of another person. On the other hand, such actions from love, sympathy or honor are not actions from forbidden attitudes, even if they are not performed from duty. Thus, while meritorious actions are those that go beyond what can be rightfully coerced, they are only meritorious on the condition that they are not performed from morally forbidden attitudes.

Of course, this only shows that acting from love, sympathy or honor is not forbidden and that such actions can be morally meritorious. It does not show that it is meritorious to act from such motives over and above having simply performed a wide ethical duty. Yet many who object to the Kantian view do so not simply because they believe it is wrong to think that actions from duty are alone worthy of any positive evaluation, but because they believe that it is *because*

helping and other actions are *not* performed from duty, but from sympathy or love, that they deserve positive evaluations.^{xxxviii} However, at least this much can be said in defense of the Kantian view: Those who champion sympathy and love, for instance, often do so *because* these sentiments reflect a concern for the good of another.^{xxxix} It is thus this concern that is the source of their merit. But ethical duties require that we adopt obligatory ends, most generally, our own perfection and the good of others. So in doing more in the way of duty than can be rightfully coerced, as Kant conceives this, we are also concerned with the good of others. And this is so, as I have already emphasized, regardless of the source of this concern--whether it is an emotional or purely rational concern (and, as we have just seen, as long as it is not a morally forbidden attitude).^{xl} It is true that a Kantian may well not regard the fact that the source of this concern is *emotional* as of additional moral significance. But it is at least not obvious that this is wildly counter-intuitive.

IV

Consider now the merit in acting from duty. Acting from duty is adopting the “maxim of obeying the [moral] law even to the detriment of all my inclinations”.^{xli} Since no one can be coerced to adopt a particular maxim, no one can be coerced to act from duty, and consequently all actions from duty are meritorious. Indeed, Kant holds that it would not be permissible for any law to require that we follow it for the sake of duty. For “when one’s aim is not to teach virtue but only to set forth what is *right*,” Kant states, “one may not and should not represent that law of Right as itself the incentive to action”.^{xlii}

Since juridical duties do not require the adoption of ends, but only specifiable external actions consistent with the Universal Principle of Right, they all can be rightfully be coerced and so merely conforming to juridical duties is not meritorious. But although “there is nothing

meritorious in the conformity of one's actions with right" Kant says, "the conformity with Right of one's maxims of such actions, as duties, that is, **respect** for Right, is *meritorious*."^{xliii} Thus, when our performance of narrow, and so normally non-meritorious, juridical duties reflects our adoption of the maxim of acting from respect for juridical legislation, it goes beyond what can be coerced, and so is, by way of that, meritorious.^{xliv} Indeed, all juridical duties are also "indirectly" ethical,^{xlv} or are products of inner as well as outer legislation, and so when performances of them are the products of the former, they are meritorious.

Since we may do more in the way of duty than can be coerced without acting from duty, however, not all meritorious actions must be performed from duty. A benevolent action does more than can (within moral bounds) be coerced. Yet one can perform such an action without acting from duty. Consequently, and perhaps surprisingly, actions not performed from duty may be meritorious (again, as long as they do not reflect morally forbidden attitudes). Or, to put the point more provocatively, while only actions from duty are of moral worth, the fact that an action was performed from duty is only one among a number of grounds on which we may regard actions as being meritorious. For it is only one among a number of ways of doing more in the way of duty than can rightfully be coerced.

But even if actions not performed from duty can be regarded as meritorious, one might think that they will be of very little merit on Kant's view. Yet even were this so, the very fact that they can be meritorious at all shows that moral worth is a special notion for Kant, distinguishable from and narrower than the idea of merit. This is significant in itself, since it upends the standard view of Kantian accounts of moral evaluation, that they cannot attribute any positive moral evaluation to an action unless it was performed from duty.

Notwithstanding Kant's high regard for acting from duty, his account does not in fact imply that acting from duty is necessarily more meritorious than any other kind of meritorious action. For the dimensions according to which merit varies are simply the wider the duty and the less the countervailing inclinations, the more meritorious the action. Compare, for instance, keeping a contract from duty with adopting as one's end the promotion of the ends of others from kindhearted sentiment. Keeping a contract is a narrow duty, while adopting the end is wide. Hence, only the latter is meritorious in the sense that it is not a fit subject of coercion. So, setting aside motivations, adopting the obligatory end is actually more meritorious than keeping a contract. Our evaluations, of course, will not end here. For the narrow duty, while itself a fit object of coercion, went beyond the legally coercible by being performed from duty. However, as we noted above, acting from a kindhearted sentiment, while going beyond the legally coercible, does not make adopting others' ends any more meritorious than doing so from any other permissible attitude or sentiment.

Indeed, to perform one's duties from duty is, itself, a duty.^{xlvi} Kant claims that conforming to this duty represents the very essence of the ethical life--the cultivation of morality within us--and so, he remarks, it seems to be a duty of narrow obligation. But since we cannot be certain whether we have ever succeeded in acting from duty, our duty is not actually to act from duty, but only *to adopt the maxim of acting from duty*.^{xlvii} It is, in other words, only a duty of wide obligation. So the moral obstacle would be less to failing to act from duty than to failing to perform duties, such as keeping a contract, which are narrower. And, as a consequence, acting from duty, or performing a morally worthy action, is, to the degree that it is itself the performance a wide duty, relatively meritorious.

We still have the final variable left, however--the natural obstacles that have been overcome. But that may vary as widely for keeping one's contracts as it does for adopting an obligatory end, so the merit of each will vary widely as well. Because of this, no conclusion independent of knowing the facts of each case can be forthcoming as to the relative moral merit of either action. Since there is a great range of difficulties possible, there is a great range of merit possible for acting from duty along this dimension. At one end of the spectrum is the victor in a battle against seething, wicked impulses; they gnaw and tug against the strivings of the person who is motivated only to do her duty.^{xlviii} Success would guarantee great merit. On the other end stands the person who has few impulses that sway against duty. No great merit (considering just that dimension) is deserved by her action, even if it was performed from duty. The natural obstacle to doing so was small, even if the moral obstacle was also.

Now since there are only two dimensions along which to determine the degree of an action's merit, acting from duty is on all fours with any other actions in which one does more than can be coerced. Room for privilege could come only from two directions: Either, holding wideness of obligation constant, there is some especially daunting natural obstacles to acting from duty, or, holding the degree of agitation of the inclinations constant, acting from duty is an especially wide duty.

We can dismiss the latter, since the wideness of obligation depends on the latitude for choice in determining not only when and how often to perform particular actions, but in what manner to perform them. Since there is only one way to "act from duty", and our duty is to adopt a maxim of striving to make the thought of duty alone the sole incentive of every dutiful action, there is not as much latitude in choice as there is in other duties of wide obligation--for instance,

in the duty to promote the permissible ends of others. So there is, relative to other duties of wide obligation, a larger moral obstacle to failing to strive to act from duty.

Did Kant hold, then, that our inclinations were, for some reason, especially hostile to acting from duty? Clearly, his words at times indicate that he believed this. However, there are several reasons why we should regard his dim picture of human nature as inessential to his views. First, he never claims that inclinations are *necessarily* set against the motive of duty. Indeed, even though the moral law engenders the motive of respect by thwarting the claims of self-love, there is no necessary tendency of inclinations against the motive of duty as such.^{xlix} There is a tendency for them to operate *in ignorance* of its claims, for we have no inclination to do our duty inasmuch as it is our duty. But were morality to coincide happily with inclination, there would be no left-over enmity between them. Even if, as we are, we tend to prefer inclination to duty when they conflict, it is no necessary truth about us that this is so, because that would require that it be a necessary truth that they conflict. But it is surely possible, and at times actual, for inclinations to be completely in line with duty. So the obstacles presented by inclination are produced by contingent conflicts with morality. Since the obstacles are contingent, there is no necessity that actions from duty have a great deal of merit.

Some might be tempted to infer that acting from duty assumes a struggle between inclination and moral law, simply because they assume that the very notion of duty contains that idea. Thus, there has to be great, or at least more than a minimum of, merit, in acting from duty.¹ But, and this is my second point here, this is not what Kant's views imply. He does hold that we conceive of actions required by moral law as "duties" only because we have wills that are exposed or subjected to "subjective conditions (certain impulses) which do not always harmonize" with reason. That is why the moral law is for us an "*I ought*", or *duty*, rather than

merely an “I will” (as it would be for a perfectly rational will).^{li} But consciousness of the moral law as “duty” means only that we recognize that, because we are imperfectly rational, we are *capable* of being inclined against something which reason demands, not that we are *actually at that moment* inclined against it. Indeed, if Kant had thought that regarding something as a duty required actually being inclined against doing it, then no sense could be made of his claim that *when* we are inclined toward acting as the moral law dictates, we must still look on this as “duty and obligation” in order not to “deny, from self-conceit, respect to the holy law”.^{lii} No sense could be made of it because if we *could* only be disinclined toward what duty demands in the first place, then we *could not* in this way deny respect to the moral law. Nor could we make sense of his claim that “a heart which is happy in the *performance* of its duty ... is a mark of genuineness in the virtuous disposition”, since no such human heart would be conceivable.^{liii} Clearly, the implication is that we *can* look on something as a duty and at the same time as something we are at the moment inclined toward doing, or at least not inclined against doing. Therefore, there is no necessary enmity between the motive of duty and inclination.

Third, although Kant did not claim that there was any necessary enmity, one might think that this is how human psychology actually is. But even if Kant thought this, it would be an empirical claim, a part of moral anthropology, and so not, as he saw things, a part of moral philosophy proper.^{liv} His official view is perhaps not as innocent of empirical assumptions as he often represents it--nor perhaps should it be. Nonetheless, drawing conclusions from the empirical fact (if it is one) that human psychology is naturally set against moral interest is not in the spirit of his method of moral theorizing, and there is nothing in his account of acting from duty that requires drawing any conclusions from it.

Finally, while Kant thought that the motive of duty was unique in being *capable* of overcoming all contrary inclinations, it does not follow, of course, that acting from duty deserves a great deal of merit.^{lv} What follows is, at best, only that actions from duty are *capable* of having more merit than any other action, not that any action from duty actually has more merit, and certainly not that every action from duty does.^{lvi} Only in the event that someone actually does face such obstacles in acting from duty could we infer that her action was more meritorious than other meritorious actions.

Acting from duty, then, is always meritorious to some degree, simply because (a) it is not coercible, and (b) it is a wide, ethical duty, making the moral obstacle to failing to act from duty less than it is in narrow duties. However, someone who does not act from duty might do something more meritorious than someone who does because (i) she has more natural obstacles to overcome, and (ii) may be performing a duty of wider obligation than the comparatively narrow duty to act from duty. And we should keep in mind the limiting case, the case in which it is easy for someone to act from duty, and so to perform an action which has moral worth. In such an action, we should say, there is merit, but not a great deal.

V

Given my account so far, it might seem that if acting from duty can have less merit than other dutiful actions, then merit must be of little importance for Kant. After all, acting from duty expresses a good will, the only unqualified good. So if expressing a good will is not always of great merit, and acting from motives other than duty may be more meritorious, why should we care? What more, morally, can or even should we ask for than the expression of this unqualified goodness in our actions?

Whether and to what extent we should care depends, of course, who the “we” are, and what the purpose of making judgments of merit is. If there is a distinction between our judgments of the merit and of the moral worth of actions, as I have argued, then we should expect that it will reflect different purposes we have in making them. Regarding the deliberative task of agents, of assessing which actions to perform or what kind of person to become, there is little need for judgments of merit. Once I have decided that I ought to do *x*, there is no reason for me also to consider whether to do *x* *meritoriously*. Yet some who have found Kant’s account of moral worth problematic have assumed that it implies that our dutiful actions must be morally better if they are difficult.^{lvii} It would follow then that we ought to make our dutiful actions as difficult as possible. For instance, rather than simply helping friends when they need it, we should first try to dislike them so that we can overcome temptations not to help.^{lviii}

But only by assuming what I have argued against here, that merit is equivalent to moral worth, can one draw the conclusion that one action performed from duty can have more or less moral value than any other action performed from duty. Without this assumption, Kant’s view is simply that actions either are or are not of moral worth, without gradation. Suppose, then, that we do indeed have a duty to act in a morally worthy way. It would not follow that we have a duty to make acting dutifully difficult, since that would not show that our action would thereby be of more (or of any) moral worth. It would, on the other hand, show that our action would be more meritorious. But Kant does not claim that we have a duty to act in a *meritorious* way (over and above that which comes with acting from duty).

This suggests a significant difference in the purposes of evaluations of merit and of moral worth: The reason we should evaluate the moral worth of any actions at all is that we should care about the moral worth of *our own* actions, and we should care about this because we

should have as our ethical end our own moral perfection.^{lix} This is why Kant insists that we have a “duty of assessing the worth of [our] actions not by their legality alone but also by their morality” and so to strive to make “the thought of duty for its own sake...the sufficient incentive of every action conforming to duty”.^{lx} The purpose of evaluations of the moral worth is thus in relation to our own actions--to judge our own moral perfection. Judgments of merit do not have any role to play in this regard.

Presumably, the purpose of evaluating merit will have to do with other people's actions as much as our own. And there are, as I see it, important reasons why determining whether a given action was performed solely from duty will not be suited to all the purposes we might have in morally evaluating actions. Determining responsibility for our actions and their consequences, desert of rewards or punishments, praise or blame, whether a good act has incurred a debt on another, or whether a bad act has incurred an obligation to make amends--all are purposes we have in evaluating actions, and in all we need to think in terms of degrees. Yet if moral worth simply denotes whether an action was performed from duty, then, as I mentioned above, it will not come in degrees, and so degrees of responsibility and the like cannot be tagged to it. And, again, it is impossible to establish that anyone has actually succeeded in acting from duty, and so to establish anyone has done something having genuine moral worth. Now in our own case, the fact that the ultimate springs of our actions remain uncertain does not undermine the purpose of judgments of moral worth. For, as we noted above, the duty to act from duty demands not “this inner action in the human mind but only the maxim of the action”.^{lxi} Thus, nothing of practical importance relative to promoting our own perfection hangs on whether we can determine with certainty whether we have actually acted from duty, even if this is the standard we should hold ourselves to. However, issues of responsibility and desert, for instance,

turn on our evaluations of our own and other's actions. So if moral evaluations consisted simply of determining whether an action was right and whether it was performed from duty, then our confidence in having made appropriate judgments on these issues would be seriously compromised. Finally, Kant thought that we cannot have as our end another's moral perfection.^{lxii} So judging the moral worth of another's action not only is ill-suited to the other purposes we might have in evaluating actions, but also cannot be of use in the primary purpose it has for our own.

Judgments of merit, on the other hand, concern only whether and to what degree an agent has done more than could have rightfully been coerced and had to overcome obstacles to do so. This not only comes in degrees, but also does not require so subtle insight into the springs of human action, either our own or others'. So judgments of merit are in this regard more appropriate to serve the purpose of many kinds of moral evaluations than are judgments of their true moral worth.

Consider, as an example, a common purpose of moral evaluation, determining deserts, and how Kant's account of merit deals with it. The more merit (or demerit) an action deserves, in Kant's view, the more its "rightful effects" should accrue. Now by the "rightful effects" Kant means a "*reward (praemium)* (assuming that the reward, promised in the law, was the inducement to it)".^{lxiii} Since merit comes in degrees, then, it would follow that the greater the merit, the greater the reward deserved (and the more the demerit, the more punishment). Since merit varies with wideness of the duty and the subjective difficulty of performing it, rewards and punishments will vary along these lines as well.^{lxiv}

Now connecting merit with desert may seem to raise difficulties. First, how could there be merit in the juridical sphere, given that everything that legally ought to be done may

rightfully be coerced? But if there is juridical merit, there would then also have to be some sort of reward promised in the law. And only if that reward was the person's inducement for acting would she deserve it. Now Kant does hold that juridical laws do promise certain "rightful effects". However, they do so in the form of *aversions* or punishments, "for [juridical legislation] is a lawgiving which constrains, not an allurements, which invites".^{lxv} Thus, no reward, and so no merit, seems possible in the juridical sphere, since it is only aversions (and so *punishments*), not allurements (and so *rewards*) that are contained in the law as inducements.

This difficulty is only apparent, however. That the inducement for compliance must be an aversion does not imply that the law might also contain a promise of a reward for going *beyond* mere compliance. Hence it is not inconceivable that a juridical law could contain both aversions as incentives for compliance as well as allurements for doing more, and which does not serve as an incentive for compliance, but for exceeding compliance. There is no reward for abiding by the law, for instance, only punishment for breaking it. But one can expect to get honors (say, a key to the city) for, say, contributing greatly to its well-being. And this does indeed motivate many to do more than can be coerced, though it may fall short of ethically meritorious action. So judgments of merit do find a useful place here, as necessary to determine the "rightful effects" coming to a person's actions.

The more crucial problem, however, is with the idea of an ethical reward being attached to ethically meritorious action. The condition under which Kant claims that a reward is the rightful effect of meritorious action (that it is contained in the law as an inducement to performing the action) is the very condition under which the law ceases to be ethical at all.^{lxvi} Just as what makes a law *juridical* is the source of the inducement to comply with it, what makes a law *ethical* is the source of the inducement to comply with it. In this case, "that lawgiving

which makes an action a duty and also makes this duty the incentive is *ethical*'.^{lxvii} If no reward can be promised in ethical laws, no such reward can be the inducement for following them.

How, then, can a reward be the rightful effect of ethical merit?

Here again, however, there is a particular use for rewards that goes beyond an incentive for compliance. Kant claims that there must be an incentive, not only to comply with our duties of wide obligation, but also “to bring wide obligation as close as possible to the concept of narrow obligation”.^{lxviii} For even though ethical, unlike juridical, duties are of wide obligation, Kant thinks that the “closer to narrow duty ... the maxim of complying with wide duty (in his disposition), so much the more perfect is his virtuous action.”^{lxix} Hence, it is not incompatible with a law’s being ethical that it contains only itself as an inducement for *compliance* with duties of wide obligation, yet at the same time contains a reward for bringing one’s maxim of complying with wide obligations closer to that of a *narrow* duty.^{lxx} So, for instance, although the only incentive to carry out the duty to help others is the law itself, it also holds out a reward for narrowing one’s maxim of complying with this duty, and so for helping others more often.

Kant’s view is, of course, that virtue is its own reward. But he takes this, not in the negative sense that there is no reward at all for virtue, but in a positive sense, that virtue contains, indeed, a reward. That reward is the “moral pleasure” that is taken in the recognition of having adopted ethical ends. Kant says that this pleasure, which “goes beyond mere contentment with oneself”, arises when others recognize the fact that we have made another’s happiness our own. “Consciousness of [promoting a person’s natural end] produces a moral enjoyment in which men are inclined by sympathy *to revel*”, which he calls “*sweet merit*”. When people “fail to recognize” that we have promoted a person’s natural end (especially when the person herself

fails to recognize this), he regards this as “*bitter merit*”, since the moral enjoyment or pleasure is lacking, and so we cannot sympathize with it.^{lxxi}

Suppose, for instance, I adopt other people’s happiness as my end. If I then promote someone’s happiness, she will naturally become happier. But it is not my sympathizing with this increase in happiness that constitutes my reward. Rather, it is her *recognition* that I have adopted her happiness and the pleasure she takes in this which I then sympathize or “revel” in. Indeed, it is not only the person whose ends are being furthered that may take pleasure in our having adopted her ends as our own, but others as well. That also may be regarded as our reward for narrowing our maxim. Of course, this does not always happen. Sometimes our benevolence goes unrecognized--or is even resented. This may be especially the case when we promote the long-term interests of a person who only cares about short-term pleasure. In such a case, we get no reward.^{lxxii}

Thus, the rightful effects or reward of ethically meritorious action is the moral enjoyment in which we revel. This conclusion is significant, for it shows how judgments of ethical merit can have their own important purpose: to recognize and acknowledge that a person has done more than can rightfully be coerced, so that she may revel in any moral pleasure we take in it, a reward included in the ethical law as an inducement to bringing our maxims of wide obligation close to narrow duties.

VI

Since not all and only dutiful actions performed from duty are meritorious, Kant should not be regarded as holding that all and only actions from duty are worthy of any positive moral evaluation. This, I believe, shows that Kant’s fuller views on moral evaluations are not in as much conflict with our ordinary moral views as many have supposed. Performances of ethical

duties, such as duties of beneficence, may be judged morally meritorious even if they are done from, say, compassion, and are more so when the agent has had to overcome obstacles such as self-interested desires.

Clearly, what makes it so tempting to think that actions from duty alone are meritorious, or at least much more meritorious than other actions, is that Kant uses examples of meritorious actions when discussing moral worth. This, however, does not imply that he thought that acting from duty had more merit than acting from other motives. The point has often been made that these examples simply make it *clear* that it is the motive of duty that is the source of an action's moral worth.^{lxxiii} Indeed, what will make acting from duty more meritorious is not, as we have seen, the wideness of the duty to act from duty, for it is fairly narrow in comparison to other wide duties. Rather, it will be that it is performed by overcoming wayward inclinations. So the cases in which it will have the most merit will be precisely the same cases in which it will be clearest that it is only an interest in duty itself that leads the agent to act. For in that case *everything* will count against performing the action *except* the mere fact that it is a duty. So only an interest in duty itself can be the source of the value of the dutiful action, even if the psychological heroics are the source of its merit.

Indeed, rather than being at odds with ordinary moral views, Kant's fuller account of moral evaluation actually reflects a common sense difference between judging that an action is morally good, and judging that it is morally meritorious.^{lxxiv} When we are concerned to evaluate the moral value of an action, we evaluate whether it is simply an interest in its dutifulness that motivates us. The context for such concern is the evaluation of *our own* characters--in carrying out the duty we have of our own moral perfection. Our concern here is with whether our interest is indeed purely moral, that is, whether it is really the fact that it is

morally required that we are interested in, say, helping others, rather than garnering honors or praise from others or enhancing our image. However, when we are judging moral merit, we are concerned not so much with whether an action has been performed from duty, but with whether and to what degree a person has gone beyond what can rightfully be required of her, whether and to what extent in doing so she had to struggle against wayward inclinations, and what implications this has for responsibility, desert, credit and the like. In *Groundwork I*, Kant is concerned with the former, rather than latter, sort of judgment. The examples on which he focusses are of meritorious actions only because of the nature of his project. It is only in the context of providing an account of moral categories for human beings (in the *Metaphysics*) that we need to consider when and for what reasons actions are meritorious.

An interesting result of this look at Kant's views on merit is that what we are inclined to think of as the most "morally important" duties in Kant's ethical system--such as perfect ethical duties or duties of respect--are, at least with regard to one of his variables, the least meritorious. This might seem paradoxical at first, but there is reason in this: Perfect ethical duties represent a moral minimum or "baseline". A conscious failure to perform them marks one off as not merely lacking the *best* humanity has to offer, but lacking what is merely to be expected of every rational human being. There should be no great accolades coming to a person simply because she does not stoop below such a minimum, even if she refrains from stooping out of respect for duty alone.

NOTES

i. An ancestor of this paper was improved with the help of those who attended its presentation at a session of the American Philosophical Association 1994 Central Division Meeting. I am especially grateful for the helpful comments of Mark Timmons. Others whose comments and suggestions have improved this paper include Richard G. Henson, Thomas E. Hill, Jr., Alexander von Schönborn, and Arnulf Zweig. Work on this paper was supported by a 1994 Research Council Summer Research Fellowship from the University of Missouri.

ii. G 4:398. I use H.J. Paton's translation of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (G), New York: Harper & Row, 1964; L.W. Beck's translation of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (CPrR), Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956; M. Gregor's translation of the *Metaphysics of Morals* (MM), New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991; T.H. Green and H. H. Hudson's translation of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (R). NY: Harper & Row, 1960; and L. Infield's translation of notes transcribed by Kant's students collected together as *Lectures on Ethics* (L). (NY: Harper & Row, 1963). All page numbers refer to the volume and page numbers from the Prussian Academy edition, except the *Religion* and *Lectures*, which refer to the translator's page numberings.

iii. See, for instance, R. B. Brandt: "Kant thought that if we want to know whether a particular action was fine or praiseworthy, there is exactly one thing we have to know: Whether the person performed the deed because he saw that it was required by duty." (*Ethical Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959, p. 28; also p. 470). Also, see P. H. Nowell-Smith's discussion of "conscientiousness" in *Ethics* (NY: Philosophical Library, 1957); pp. 214-226, esp. pp. 214-16), Lawrence Blum, *Friendship, Altruism and Morality*. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980)

e.g., pp. 7-9. Erstwhile defenders of Kant also accept this conclusion, e.g., Richard G. Henson (in “What Kant Might Have Said: Moral Worth and the Overdetermination of Dutiful Action”, *Philosophical Review* LXXXVIII (1979); pp. 39-54); Onora O’Neill (in *Acting on Principle: An Essay on Kantian Ethics*. NY: Columbia University Press, 1975, p 50n.23) and Thomas E. Hill, Jr. (“Kant on Imperfect Duty and Supererogation” in his *Dignity and Practical Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992: 147-75, esp. pp. 163-8).

iv. See, for example, Blum, *ibid.*, Henson, *ibid.*, and Barbara Herman’s response in “On the Value of Acting from a Motive of Duty”, *The Philosophical Review* XC, No. 3 July 1981; pp. 359-382.

v.G 4:424.

vi. Kant’s moral categories have been discussed in detail elsewhere, e.g., by Paul Eisenberg, “Basic Ethical Categories in Kant’s Tugendlehre,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1966), 255-69; and Mary Gregor, *The Laws of Freedom: A Study of Kant’s Method of Applying the Categorical Imperative in the Metaphysik der Sitten*. (NY: Barnes and Noble, 1963); also, *op. cit.* Hill; *op. cit.* O’Neill (Nel), pp. 43-58.

vii.MM 6:222.

viii.MM 6:227.

ix.MM 6:218-220.

x. See also L 60-1.

xi.MM 6:380-8.

xii.MM 6:390.

xiii.MM 6:389-90.

xiv. MM 6:411.

xv. Still, some ethical duties are narrower than others, and result in duties to refrain from certain actions (e.g., refraining from self-mutilation). Even so, they require such actions only through the inner legislation of an end (e.g., our own perfection).

xvi.MM 6:384, 381.

xvii.MM 6:381. I take it that “natural means” refers to the fact that while ethical legislation makes the “Idea of duty” the incentive, the incentive for juridical legislation “must be drawn from the *sensibly dependent* determining grounds of choice” (MM 6:219)--namely, inclinations and aversions. I agree with Gregor’s reading of this (op. cit. Gregor, pp. 65-6), namely, that “external coercion” does not refer to physical force (as when one is put in jail or shackled). That would not be consistent with freedom, since it would not be a case of an imputable action. Moreover, it would be to make mere physical movements, rather than actions, the object of law. However, cf. Ludwig, Bernd. *Kants Rechtslehre*. (F. Meiner: Hamburg, 1988).

xviii.MM 6:231-3.

xix.MM 6:381

xx. See, also, L 61: “To comply with an ethical law is at all times meritorious”.

xxi.MM 6:449-50.

xxii.MM 6:390.

xxiii.MM 6:239.

xxiv. MM 6 : 383 .

XXV.MM 6:230.

XXvi. Henson and Herman both appear to hold this view. See op. cit. Henson, p. 41, op. cit. Herman, p. 374. Also, see Roger J. Sullivan. *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*. (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989); p. 30.

XXvii. MM 6:218; 391. Thanks to an anonymous referee for these citations.

XXviii.MM 6:224.

XXix. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this objection to me.

XXX.MM 6:228.

XXXi. Obviously, the poor person could be more inclined than the rich person to give the amount, which might (oddly, I think) reverse Kant's judgments of relative merit. Still, given human nature as it is, for the most part we do not expect this. For simplicity's sake, I will set these complications aside.

XXXii. See e.g., G 4:421n, MM 6:390, 393, 446.

XXXiii. See G 4:421n; MM 6:449-50; 462.

XXXiv. It is important to remember here that, as I am construing "merit" for Kant, it is an evaluative category with a rather narrower application than many have supposed in the past. So even if promoting the ends of others against inclination is more

meritorious than telling the truth or keeping contracts, this does not imply that there is *less moral value* in the latter than in the former. Moreover, as I will argue in a moment, the achievement of greater merit is *not* much of a practical aim for Kant.

xxxv. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this case to me.

xxxvi.G 4:398

xxxvii.MM: 6:458-66

xxxviii. E.g., op. cit. Blum.

xxxix. See e.g., Blum, p. 84.

xl. Indeed, it can be a *direct* and *particular* concern. See Barbara Herman's defense of this in "Rules, Motives and Helping Actions", *Philosophical Studies* 45 (1984), pp. 369-377.

xli.G 4:400.

xlii.MM 6:231.

xliii.MM 6:390-1.

xliv. Cf. Christine Korsgaard. "Kant's Formula of Humanity", *Kant-Studien* 77 (1986): 183-202; p. 185.

xlv.MM 6: 220-1.

xlvi.MM 6:392-3.

xlvi. Cf. Dietrichson, Paul, "What does Kant Mean by 'Acting from Duty'?" in *Kant: A Collection of Critical Essays*, R.P. Wolff, ed. NY: Doubleday, 1967; pp. 314-336.

xlvi. On this end of the spectrum are Henson's "battle-citations" (see op. cit. Henson, p. 42).

xlix. See, e.g., G 4:401n2 and CPrR 5:72-89.

l. Cf. L.W. Beck. "Sir David Ross on Duty and Purpose in Kant" in his *Studies in the philosophy of Kant*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965); p. 172.

li. G 4:412-14.

lii. CPrR 5:83.

liii. R 19n.

liv. 4:389, 412

lv. See G 4:410-11

lvi. Even if we assume that an action is "from duty alone" *only* when it is performed against *all* inclination, there is no guarantee of great merit, since at any given time, an agent may only have one weak inclination, which, as it happens, is inclined against duty.

lvii. Cf. Henson, op. cit.

lviii. See Schiller's famous poem, in *Über die Grundlage der Moral*, §6, quoted in op. cit. Paton, p. 48.

lix. MM 6:386-7.

lx.MM 6:393

lxi.MM 6:393

lxii.MM 6:386.

lxiii.MM 6:227. See also L 61: Any merit or demerit, "invariably involves positive consequences--reward or punishment".

lxiv. Hence, "the state of mind of the subject, whether he committed the deed in a state of agitation or with cool deliberation, makes a difference in imputation, which has results". (MM 6:228)

lxv.MM 6:219

lxvi. MM 218-19

lxvii.MM 6:219

lxviii.MM 6:391

lxix.MM 6:390

lxx. Though remember that even compliance here goes beyond what can be coerced and so is meritorious.

lxxi.MM 6:391

lxxii.MM 6:392

lxxiii. See op. cit. Paton, pp. 48ff; L. W. Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 228; and op. cit. Herman, p. 362.

lxxiv. A similar (though distinct) account of such a difference is explored by Elizabeth Beardsley's "Moral Worth and Moral Credit", (*Philosophical Review* LXVI, 1957, pp. 304-28) and I think that Kant's views fit nicely with her account. See also L 63: "The degree of morality of an action ought not to be confused with the degree of responsibility [and so merit] for the *factum*".