

## Duties to Others: Demands and Limits

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Reason prescribes, according to Kant, moral demands of different kinds. Taken together, these demands form a *system of duties* [MM 6: 242].<sup>1</sup> Duties to others need to be located within this system. As duties of virtue, or ethical duties, duties to others relate to duties of right, and within ethics, to duties to oneself.<sup>2</sup> Duties to others have, in the past decades, mostly been discussed with a view to Kant's conception of imperfect or wide duties, and their "latitude". If we want to understand the demandingness of duties to others, it seems we have to push for *precision* with respect to the notion of latitude. In this paper, I am suggesting an alternative approach, starting out from Kant's conception of a system of duties. Other duties, as it were, delineate the "space" of duties to others within a virtuous life. This suggestion may seem to imply that Kant's moral philosophy is highly demanding. If it is only duties – not ends – which limit other duties, life seems to be thoroughly structured by, and pervaded by duty. However, I will argue that for Kant, the duty to cultivate one's non-moral capacities significantly limits duties to others, and that his views on this duty capture a range of intuitions about how morality (understood as what we are to do *for others*) should leave room for our own lives. But still, according to Kant the agent's own concerns, her talents, and aspirations do not limit duties to others *as ends*, but *as duties*. Does Kant, at any point, allow the agent's ends to limit her duty? Kant is often quoted as referring to the agent's "true needs", and this is taken to indicate that he recognizes how the agent's *ends*, not her duties, delineate what we are to do for others. But as I will argue, Kant's remarks

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- 1 Bracketed numbers refer to the volume and pages in the Preussische Akademie edition.
  - 2 Throughout this paper, I am using "duties to oneself" and "duties to others" as referring to duties of *virtue* (in accordance with Kant in the *Doctrine of Virtue*), even though, in a sense, duties of right are also to oneself and to others (cf. [MM 6: 240 and 236]).

on true needs remain tentative, and are far less integrated into his ethics than one might wish.<sup>3</sup>

In contemporary moral philosophy, a wide range of views acknowledge some kind of limit to the demands of morality. This may be most obvious when the notion of supererogation is introduced.<sup>4</sup> Supererogationists, as we may call them, argue that there are actions that, while particularly laudable, are not required. But a theory need not focus on such a notion in order to acknowledge limits of moral demands. In the past decades, a number of ethicists have argued that agents have projects and close relationships which are so important to them, and indeed central to who they are, that morality should be understood in such a way as to leave room for them. Following Kagan<sup>5</sup> and Scheffler<sup>6</sup>, I will refer to those who endorse such claims as “moderates”.

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- 3 My discussion of duties to others does not extend to Kant's justification of these duties. The demandingness of Kantian duties to others has, in the past decades, received considerable debate, and it is impossible to do justice to the subtlety of the discussion in a brief paper. The following publications have been particularly influential: Thomas E. Hill, Jr., 1971, “Kant on Imperfect Duty and Supererogation”, in: *Kant-Studien* 62, pp. 55–76; Hill, 2002, *Human Welfare and Moral Worth. Kantian Perspectives*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Marcia Baron, 1995, *Kantian ethics almost without apology*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Nancy Sherman, 1997, *Making a necessity of virtue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - 4 Discussion of this category has been importantly shaped by: Paul Eisenberg, 1966, “From the Forbidden to the Supererogatory: The Basic Ethical Categories in Kant's *Tugendlehre*”, in: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3, pp. 255–69; J. O. Urmson, 1958, *Saints and Heros*, in: A.I. Melden (ed.) *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Seattle, pp. 198–216; Frances Myrna Kamm, 1991, “Supererogation and Obligation”, in: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28, pp. 273–285; David Heyd, 1982, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - 5 Shally Kagan, 1989, *The Limits of Morality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York: Oxford University Press. Kagan's discussion of moderate positions focuses on deontological restrictions as well as “options” (permission for the agent to take her own life and projects as particularly important).
  - 6 Samuel Scheffler, 1992, *Human Morality*, New York: Oxford University Press. In his earlier book, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), Scheffler introduces the notion of agent-centered prerogatives. As David O. Brink (1994, “A Reasonable Morality”, in: *Ethics*, vol. 104, pp. 593–619) points out in a review of Scheffler, the moderate theory that he discusses in *Human Morality* seems to have much in common with the argument in favor of agent-centered prerogatives that Scheffler presented earlier.

Supererogationists hold that (i) the demands of morality are limited, (ii) one can go beyond these limits, and (iii) it is especially admirable, praiseworthy or good to do so.<sup>7</sup> The fact that Kant distinguishes between what is meritorious and what is owed may seem to indicate that Kant accepts the idea that one can, in some sense, do more than is required. But Kant's theory of virtue does not allow for the specific mix of evaluation and deontological categorizing which marks the notion of the supererogatory, since, according to him, no action can be good without being done from duty, and thus every good action must be done as part of one's adherence to duty.<sup>8</sup>

But what about the intuitions of the moderate? While the moderate may share the first two assumptions of the supererogationist, she may be hesitant with respect to (iii). It is not clear whether going "beyond duty" impoverishes our lives in significant ways, and whether doing more than morality demands really is admirable. Thus, we might construe a position according to which (i) the demands of morality are limited, and (ii) it is possible to go beyond these limits, but not an ideal to do so. If we think of Kant's remarks about the phantastically virtuous person – the person who is so affected by doing good that she is in some kind of feverish state, afflicted with unhealthy enthusiasm [*MM* 6: 408–9]<sup>9</sup> – it would seem that Kant himself held such a view; one can, as it seems, do "too much". On closer inspection, however, this person is not really "too virtuous"; she is suffering from sympathy like from an affliction, and will be left exhausted. The truly virtuous agent has a tranquil mind [*MM* 6: 409]. Thus, the phantastically virtuous person merely appears to be too virtuous, and in fact lacks virtue in the best sense. Similarly, the person who doesn't treat anything as morally indifferent, not even whether she eats fish or meat, does not go beyond virtue; she is getting it wrong [*MM*

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7 Cf., e.g., Richard McCarty, 1989, "The Limits of Kantian Duty, and Beyond", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 26, pp. 43–52; Phillip Montague, 1989, "Acts, Agents und Supererogation", in: *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 26, pp. 101–111; James S. Fishkin, 1982, *The Limits of Obligation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 11.

8 Cf., e.g., Sherman, 1997, 332 f. For a detailed discussion of this point see Section 2.

9 Throughout this paper, I am quoting from Mary Gregor's translation of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, and, even where I do not quote the text directly, adopt much of her rendering of Kant's language. Immanuel Kant, 1996, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. by Mary Gregor, with an Introduction by Roger J. Sullivan, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

6: 409].<sup>10</sup> Kant cannot therefore accept (ii). However, he may still hold some version of (i). Kant does not accept the idea that one could be too virtuous; virtue is an ideal. But he may hold that the demands of the various kinds of duties are in some sense limited.

To discuss the demandingness of Kantian duties to others is as much an exercise in piecing together a variety of aspects of his theory, trying to see how he might answer the questions that interest us, as in trying to understand the questions that interest him. Kant does not seem to share the contemporary worry that morality might turn out to be too burdensome.<sup>11</sup> But he does discuss the demands of duties to others in various respects, qualifying the attitude in which we are to adhere to them, how far we are to go in complying with them, etc. According to the interpretation that I am suggesting, Kant's concern is how we can understand the place of specific duties within an overall virtuous life, and the different structures of duties of right on the one hand, and ethical duties on the other. Kant starts out from tables on how we are to distinguish between different kinds of duties, which he presents in the introduction to the *Doctrine of Right* [MM 6: 240–2]. His various remarks on duties to others seem to envisage them as part of a landscape in which we are to locate and understand them. In Kant's system of duties, duties limit each other, and understanding how Kant conceives of one duty involves importantly studying how the "space" of this duty is delineated by other duties.

After a brief general sketch of Kant's conception of duties to others (Section I), I will examine how different duties relate to duties to others, and more specifically, to duties of beneficence. I will argue that while the duty to morally perfect oneself (Section II), duties of respect (Section III), as well as duties of right (Section IV) shape and structure duties to others, they ultimately make them more, or at least not less demanding. Duties to develop one's own *non*-moral capacities, on the other hand, limit the demands of duties to others in significant ways. It is only in a few brief remarks that Kant suggests that something *other* than duty may limit duty. The agent is closest to herself, and she knows her "true needs" best

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10 Cf. Baron, 1995, p. 91.

11 The notion of the supererogatory may also seem to suggest something like a divide between ordinary agents and heroes or saints, and this kind of divide seems to be in conflict with core intuitions of an enlightened ethics. The idea that someone would see herself as an ordinary agent and, as it were, marvel at the sacrifices of some hero, seeing her own life on a wholly different plane, certainly does not fit into Kant's moral philosophy.

(Section 6). On the most straightforward interpretation of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, it is duties to cultivate one's abilities and talents which limit duties to others. However, the few comments which Kant makes on how the agent is closest to herself may seem, while – at least on my understanding – not fully integrated into Kant's argument, most directly related to contemporary concerns.

## I. Limits and Demands of Duties to Others in Kant's Ethics

Ethical duties are those which cannot be externally enforced; the necessitation of duty must come from self-constraint, not external constraint [MM 6: 219, 379 f.].<sup>12</sup> However, at some points Kant writes as if the basic difference between ethical duties and duties of right were that ethical duties are *wide*.<sup>13</sup> He further complicates matters by going back and forth between calling them wide and imperfect in a way which does not make it entirely clear how the distinctions between wide and narrow on the one hand, and perfect and imperfect on the other hand relate.<sup>14</sup> He then starts the main text of the *Doctrine of Virtue* with a discussion of *perfect* duties to oneself – a highly unexpected turn, since the introduction leads the reader to believe that all of ethics is about imperfect, or wide duties: the duty to cultivate one's non-moral faculties, the duty to cultivate one's will, as well as the duties of love and respect for others.

Thomas E. Hill's paper *Kant on Imperfect Duty and Supererogation* (1971) has in many ways set the stage for the discussion of Kantian duties

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12 When Kant sums up his discussion of ethical duties, he makes this his first point [MM 6: 410]. Cf. also [MM 6: 406–7], where Kant writes that the concept of freedom makes it necessary to divide duties into duties of outer freedom and inner freedom.

13 In Kant's summary account, this is the third point [MM 6: 410]. The second point is that ethical duties do not give laws for actions, but only for maxims of actions.

14 At [MM 6: 390] Kant states that the wider the duty is, the more imperfect is the agent's obligation to action; up to this point, Kant had talked of wide duties, but he now goes on to speak of imperfect duties. The most difficult point lies in a striking discrepancy between introduction and main text. In the introduction, it would seem that it is due to the imperfection (and/or *latitudo*) of ethical duties that they call for casuistical reflection; however, in the main text, perfect duties to oneself lead into such reflections. My brief sketch of the duties of virtue does not depend on a specific view on the difficult question of how we should think about differences between the introduction and the main text.

to others. Hill focuses on the latitude of imperfect and wide duties.<sup>15</sup> While he emphasizes that ethical duties prescribe maxims for action, not particular acts [MM 6: 388–9], he initiates debate on what “act principles” are implied by ethical duties. In his latest discussion of these matters, Hill argues that “noone disputes that imperfect duties imply act principles” of the form “Sometimes, to some extent, one ought...”; the dispute is, on his account, rather on what *more* they imply, i.e., how we are to spell out such act principles more precisely.<sup>16</sup> While I do not wish to be the only dissenter on what Hill describes as scholarly consent, I propose that there may be a fruitful alternative to trying to pin down the precise form that such act principles might take. I share the general sense that the notion of latitude is at the heart of Kant’s conception of duties to others, and that any discussion of their demands and limits must figure out how we are to understand this latitude. However, it seems to me that, instead of trying to make Kant’s discussion more precise by translating duties to others into act principles, we can study his emphasis on how wide duties relate to other duties.

When Kant introduces the notion of *latitudo*, he writes that wide duties allow for a range in how to comply with them [MM 6: 389–90]. He goes on to say that this play-room (*Spielraum*) is not to be confused with the permission to make exceptions. Rather, the agent is supposed to figure out ways of complying with *all* her wide duties. For example, love for one’s parents and love for one’s neighbor limit each other; the virtuous agent will choose ways of complying with one of these duties that will not preclude compliance with the other. While this passage is sometimes referred to as indicating that Kant’s ethics is highly demanding, I think that the most significant point about it is that, according to Kant, duties *limit each other*. The passage leaves it open whether our duties to parents and neighbors are more or less demanding; but it emphasizes that the virtuous agent will structure her life so as to be able to comply with both.

Further, Kant is concerned with explaining the peculiar structure of duties which cannot prescribe actions, but only maxims for action; or to put it slightly differently, with the question how there might be duties which do not make it clear what is to be done, but are nevertheless just as much duties as are duties of right. Ethical duties seem comparatively fuzziest, and it seems that one will often have to neglect some in order to

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15 *Latitudo* is the Latin term that Kant gives in parenthesis when he explains how ethical duties are wide [MM 6: 389–90].

16 Hill, 2002, 204.

comply with others, and perhaps even to go about one's daily life. But at the same time, they are still duties, and the fact that they cannot be brought under an external law doesn't taint the necessity of their requirements, or their normative force. The duties of virtue are duties in the full sense.

Questions about the demandingness of morality are, in contemporary ethics, quite generally conceived as dealing with duties *to others*, asking what or how much it is that we are required to do for others, alleviate their suffering, etc. But within the Kantian framework, the question how much morality demands arises just as much with respect to duties to oneself as with respect to duties to others. Ethical duties which are wide are duties of "commission". Ethics, other than the doctrine of rights, obliges us to adopt *objective ends* or *ends which are duties* [MM 6: 383]. One's own perfection, and the happiness of others [MM 6: 385–6] have to be adopted as objective ends and duties. One's own perfection is a twofold end: we are required to cultivate our faculties [MM 6: 387; 392], and to cultivate our will up to the purest virtuous disposition (*bis zur reinsten Tugendgesinnung*) [MM 6: 386–7]. To make the happiness of others one's end means making the *permitted* ends of others one's end. While it is up to the others to decide what to pursue as their ends, it is up to me to disregard those of their ends which I do not take to contribute to their happiness [MM 6: 388]. Thus, both one's own perfection and the happiness of others are duties which are ends, and one might wonder how far one is to go in one's efforts with respect to each of these duties. While it seems, from the point of view of recent debates, more worrisome to understand what the needs of others demand of the moral agent, within Kant's theory, it could seem equally difficult to see how much, and what, one is to do to better one's own adherence to duty, or to cultivate one's talents.

This difficulty leads, as Kant explains, into casuistry. According to the introduction, it is because ethical duties are wide or imperfect that we get into casuistry, i.e., the discussion of problematic cases, which "call upon judgment to decide how a maxim is to be applied" [MM 6: 411]. Kant offers "Casuistical Sections" which exemplify how we are to apply judgment if we want to comply with duties of virtue. These sections of text do not have the status of "science" or metaphysics. In Kant's terms, it would be "dogmatics" to present the kind of considerations which are to be discussed here as science. Further, such reflections must remain "fragmentary" [MM 6: 411]. The structure of the main part of the *Doctrine of Virtue* loosely corresponds to this claim: Kant goes back and

forth between the exposition of duties of virtue and sections on “Casuistical Questions”.<sup>17</sup> Some of the most interesting remarks on the limits and demands of duties to others have the status of casuistry, not of science. In assessing Kantian duties to others, we will have to accept, as I suggest, that some of the most substantial ideas which Kant discusses remain tentative.

## II. Virtue as Moral Perfection

Kant’s duties to others can be considered as more or less demanding in two ways – with respect to how one is to act *from* duty in adhering to them, and with respect to the maxims for action which are called for. I will begin with the first question.

In Kant’s terminology, ethics is defined as the study of the duties of virtue, or as the doctrine of virtue. When Kant offers the Latin version of the German term *Tugendlehre* – *doctrina officiorum virtutis*<sup>18</sup> [MM 6: 381] – it is made explicit that the doctrine of virtue is a doctrine of the *duties* of virtue. Insofar as what Kant discusses under the title of virtue really is a set of duties, his theory of virtue might appear quite fundamentally different from the idea of virtue as it is conceived within

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17 However, while it may seem in the Introduction that only imperfect duties invite casuistry, the text starts with a long section on perfect duties to oneself, each of them receiving a section with casuistical questions. Kant does not adhere to a regular pattern. Most surprisingly, imperfect duties to oneself do not receive any casuistical discussion.

18 It would be a large project in itself to study the notion of duty in Kant as relating to the term *officium*. In the *Doctrine of Rights*, Kant refers to Cicero when he explains why he calls his moral philosophy a doctrine of duties instead of a doctrine of rights [MM 6: 239]. As I hope to argue elsewhere, it is Cicero’s peculiar appropriation of the Stoic notion of *kathêkonta*, translated as *officia*, which allows him to speak of *officia* of virtue. Once we, like Kant, then proceed to translate *officium* as duty, we arrive at the idea of duties of virtue. On key passages in Cicero, and on the notion of *kathêkonta* as translated in Cicero, cf. John M. Cooper, 1999, “Eudaimonism, Nature, and ‘Moral Duty’ in Stoicism”, in: J. M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 427–448; also published in: *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics*, Engstrom/Whiting (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 261–284. Cf. also the first sentence of the *Doctrine of Virtue*: “In ancient times “ethics” signified the *doctrine of morals* (*doctrina moralis*) in general, which was also called the doctrine of duties.” Clearly, in classical antiquity, ethics was *not* referred to as a doctrine of *duties*. The transition only works if something like Cicero’s interpretative translation is adopted.



“virtue ethics”, both in the contemporary and the ancient senses. However, with respect to the demandingness of virtue, Kant shares, to some extent, ancient intuitions: virtue is an ideal, and in important respects an ideal with respect to what might be called the motivational disposition of the soul.

While Kant speaks about the soul, he does not use the term “motivation”. Kant’s discussion is about the agent’s heart as the source of her action [MM 6: 441]. He talks of her *Gesinnung*, which determines what she will allow to be incentives (*Triebfedern*) for her action – reverence for the law, or her inclinations.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the term “motivation” is foreign to Kant’s own vocabulary, and I intend to use it merely in a provisional way, that does not imply any claims about Kant’s moral psychology. I am using the term for the limited purpose of bringing out an important affinity between Kantian and ancient ethics. Virtue is, for Kant, and according to major positions of ancient ethics, an ideal with respect to the source of one’s action. Even though virtue must be practical, it is in this sense about motivation. Kant defines virtue as “*fortitude* with respect to what opposes the moral disposition *within us*” [MM 6: 380], i.e., strength in adhering to duty in the face of one’s inclinations, or as “the moral capacity to constrain oneself” [MM 6: 394]. Virtue must *result from* “considered, firm, and continually purified principles” [MM 6: 384–5]; but to be virtuous is, most centrally, to act *from duty*.<sup>20</sup>

Virtue is thus relevant to one’s adherence to all duties, including the duties of right. Kant calls “act in conformity with duty *from duty*” a universal ethical command [MM 6: 391; cf. 392, 387].<sup>21</sup> The external

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19 Kant often uses the phrase “to act *from*” (where “from” translates “*aus*” – *Handeln aus Neigung, aus Pflicht*).

20 This point is somewhat related to Christine Korsgaard (1996, “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble: Kant and Aristotle on Morally Good Action”, in: Engstrom/ Whiting (eds.): *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 203–236, at. pp. 204–5). However, my point is more preliminary than Korsgaard’s. Independently from the details of Kant’s claims about how one should be motivated, it is interesting that, while his doctrine of virtue may seem to be a doctrine of *duties* of virtue, and thus quite different from major ancient theories, it is on the most basic level about the ideal state of the soul or heart as the source of action – and thus closer related to ancient conceptions than it is often thought.

21 The interpretation that I am proposing is not committed to a view on the much debated question how acting from duty relates to other incentives. Cf., e.g.,

law can enforce the actions that duties of right call for, but it cannot enforce *reverence* for rights, or make reverence for the law the incentive for one's actions. If compliance with the duties of right springs from reverence for the law, it can be called virtuous or ethical [MM 6: 394].<sup>22</sup>

Virtue, understood as the ideal to act *from* duty, is limitlessly or maximally demanding. Doing one's duty *from* duty might, as Kant observes, look at first sight like a narrow obligation, but it isn't. A human being cannot "see into the depths of his own heart so as to be certain, even in a *single* action, of the purity of his moral intention and the sincerity of his disposition" [MM 6: 392]. To be motivated in a virtuous way is a matter of continuous striving, and one can never fully know whether one has achieved what one has strived for, even with respect to particular actions. The first command of all duties to oneself is to know oneself, in the sense of scrutinizing oneself [MM 6: 441]. Kant explains how one cannot adhere too much to duty: "For really to be *too virtuous* – that is, to be too attached to one's duty – would be almost equivalent to making a circle too round or a straight line too straight" [MM 6: 433].<sup>23</sup> Virtue is an ideal, and it is a duty to oneself to strive for this ideal – the duty to perfect one's virtuous disposition.

Once we fully appreciate this, we see why Kant cannot make sense of the key intuition of the supererogationist: that there are actions which are not required but are good or virtuous. No action can be called good if it is not done *from* duty, and one can only act from duty when one acts in compliance with a duty. With respect to the duties to others this means that whatever action of beneficence an agent will choose to perform, her action will be an act of duty. No matter how enormous her effort will be,

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Barbara Herman, 1983, "Integrity and Impartiality", in: *The Monist*, vol. 66, pp. 233–250.

- 22 In this sense, virtue is tied to freedom. In his notes to [MM 6: 382], Kant remarks that a human being is the more free, the more he can be constrained by the mere representation of duty.
- 23 In talking about the straight line, Kant may adopt a Stoic image. However, it may seem odd that Kant would appropriate this image – in Stoic philosophy, it mostly serves to show how one is either virtuous or not (a stick is either bent or straight, it is bent even if only slightly bent). Kant clearly does not agree that there are no degrees in virtue. As Schneewind points out with reference to a passage from Herder, Kant even calls the Stoic ideal of perfect goodness "nonsense". J. B. Schneewind, 1996, "Kant and Stoic Ethics", in: *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics*, Engstrom/Whiting (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 285–301, at p. 292. An even more direct reference to the Stoic notion of virtue is [MM 6: 405], but again Kant does not make it explicit that he is quoting Stoic ideas.

and no matter how purely she will be motivated, her action will not go beyond duty.<sup>24</sup>

However, with respect to duties of right, Kant acknowledges actions which go beyond what can be enforced by *external law*. In the general introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant makes the following remark: to do more in the way of duty than one can be constrained to do by the law is meritorious; to do exactly what the law requires is what is owed; and to do less than what the law requires is morally culpable [MM 6: 227].<sup>25</sup> It is also in this general introduction that Kant explains how ethics has duties in common with right [MM 6: 220]: duties of right and duties of virtue can interrelate so that, to do more than what the external law requires is to adopt the perspective of virtue.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the notion of what is meritorious as it is introduced here does not locate the agent's action outside of duty. What is meritorious will still be done from duty. With respect to the doctrine of right it might be tempting to think that Kant could accommodate a category of the supererogatory. But this would be a mistake. To do more than can be *externally* enforced is merely to move from the sphere of right to the sphere of virtue (and that is, the *duties* of virtue), not from duty to the supererogatory.

The duty to cultivate a virtuous disposition is maximally demanding: no matter which duty we are observing, we are called upon to be progressively more purely motivated in our adherence to it. And we can only comply with the duty to moral self-perfection insofar as we adhere to other duties. The duty to perfect one's virtuous disposition is in this sense dependent on our adherence to other duties, duties which are more directly about action. Duties to others are, as it were, one of the fields in which progressive moral perfection can take place. But does the duty of

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24 Of course, we might consider adopting a relaxed or revised notion of supererogation, and then work out a way in which Kant may allow for supererogatory acts. Hill argues that Kant could accommodate something like supererogation insofar as a *particular* act of beneficence may, while it is a duty to adopt the maxim to help others, not be required. He mentions the objection that there is a sense in which *no particular* act is required, since ethics gives, in Kant's terms, laws for maxims of action, not for action (2002, pp. 215–6). It seems to me that, for any particular act of beneficence, once the agent performs it, she performs it *as an act of adherence to her maxim, which it is a duty to adopt*. In this sense, her act seems to me to be performed as an act of duty.

25 On the notion of merit in Kant's ethics cf. Paul Guyer, 2000, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 323 f.

26 Reverence for right is already meritorious (as opposed to the conformity of one's actions with the duties of right) [MM 6: 390].

moral perfection delineate in any way *what* (or *how much*) we are required to do for others?

Baron argues that the duty to moral perfection “affects how we are to carry out the duty to promote others’ happiness”. The less sensitive agent may not choose actions of helping others that she might choose if she were more sensitive; “the full spirit of it [i.e. the duty to help others] is not brought out until that duty is shaped and ‘stiffened’ by the duty to improve oneself morally”.<sup>27</sup>

While I can see what Baron means by saying that the duty to moral perfection *stiffens* all of the agent’s adherence to duty, it is not clear to me how it would *shape* duties to others. If we distinguish Kant’s claims regarding how we should be motivated, and how we should act (cf. [MM 6: 218]), we can see why the duty to moral perfection runs through all of an agent’s adherence to duty, and is, as it were, its backbone. But how far one has succeeded in achieving one’s moral self-perfection is not about how often or to what extent one is able to do something for others, so that, if one were not far advanced, one would do (and would have to do) fewer things. Someone might adhere to the duty of beneficence quite consistently, without their motivations ever being particularly pure. Of course, the agent who is far advanced with respect to her moral perfection is going to adhere to the duties to others. But the fact that an agent has not made much progress with respect to her motivation by no means absolves her from adhering to the duties to others. The extent to which an agent has already perfected her motivational disposition does not translate into what the practical duties of beneficence require: which actions ethical duties call for is, in this sense, quite independent from the duty of moral self-perfection.<sup>28</sup>

Ethical duties, it seems, cannot be limited by anything that Kant would consider “empirical”; and whatever state of perfection one may

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27 Baron, 1995, p. 100.

28 A more detailed analysis of the duty to moral perfection would require engaging with Kant’s distinction between the command “be holy”, which refers to working on the purity of one’s disposition to duty, and the command “be perfect”, which refers to trying to fulfill all one’s duties (progressing from one perfection to another) [MM 6: 446–7]. While this would, on my interpretation, not lead to any further clarification of duties to others, it would be interesting with respect to Kant’s notion of virtue. As I hope to argue elsewhere, one of the aspects in which Kant engages more with ancient accounts of virtue than it is often supposed is that Kant seems to consider questions about the unity of virtue (i.e., about how a notion of virtue in the singular relates to the idea that there are several virtues).

have attained at a given point in one's life would count as an empirical fact. What we are required to do is determined by the law, and nothing else. Kant states that a human being must consider himself as capable of resisting and conquering the impulses of nature – “he must judge that he *can* do what the law tells him unconditionally that he *ought* to do” [MM 6: 380]. In this statement, and in more detail in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant makes the following claim about the relationship of “ought” and “can”: if we ought to do something, then we must be able to do it. Thus, “ought implies can” does not provide a limit to the demands of morality; rather, whatever morality demands, we must be able to do it and must see ourselves as being able to do it.<sup>29</sup> At the end of the introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant proposes three principles, the third of which emphasizes this very point:

Ethical duties must not be determined in accordance with the capacity to fulfill the law that is ascribed to human beings; on the contrary, their moral capacity must be estimated by the law, which commands categorically, and so in accordance with our rational knowledge of what they ought to be in keeping with the idea of humanity, not in accordance with the empirical knowledge we have of them as they are [MM 6: 404–5].

Whatever limits to the demands of duty to others there may be, they can only be ascertained in the moral law itself, not in such empirical facts as where a specific agent is at a given point on her path to virtue.

### III. What We Owe and What Is Meritorious: Duties of Respect

The distinction between what we owe and what is meritorious is introduced again at the beginning of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, this time specifically with respect to the duties of virtue. Again, this may suggest that, among the things that one can do in adhering to duties to others, some are immediately required while others are good to do, but not required. But once we see how Kant spells out the difference between what is owed and what is meritorious, it is clear that this distinction makes duties to others *more* rather than less demanding.

According to Kant, by doing what we owe to others we do not put them under any obligation, while by doing something meritorious, we do

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29 Cf. also *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (II.1.b (76)).

[*MM* 6: 448].<sup>30</sup> Both what we owe and what is meritorious, is to be done *as one's duty*. The distinction between what we owe and what is meritorious does not place any actions of help outside the realm of duty. For Kant, both the question of how much we owe to others and the question of how much we should meritoriously be doing for others, concern *duties* of virtue. Kant emphasizes the perspective of the addressee of the action: It emerges from Kant's discussion that ultimately, to do one's best with respect to duties to others involves *pretending* that what is meritorious is owed, so as to not put the addressee under the impression that she is under an obligation. Thus, Kant does *not* envisage an agent who would rather think of whatever could be done to help others as *not* owed, so as to be less burdened with strict requirements. Rather, he makes it part of duty to others to be prepared to see things as owed which are not in fact owed.

Kant ties the distinction between what is owed and what is meritorious to a discussion of love and respect for others. Love and respect are, in one sense, feelings which accompany the carrying out of duties to others. At the same time, however, Kant refers to them (as practical attitudes) as duties. The duty of respect seems only negative, insofar as it requires not exalting oneself above others [*MM* 6: 449]. But Kant's discussion makes it clear that this duty is actually quite complex. Not only are we to respect others; we are additionally to act so as to preserve their own respect for themselves. Kant arrives at the following picture: we are under the obligation to help someone poor, yet while this obligation may in fact be such that our action will be meritorious, we should endeavor to make the poor person feel as if our meritorious help is indeed owed or "but a slight service of love", so that we "spare him humiliation and maintain his respect for himself" [*MM* 6: 449; cf. 453, §31].

Mere benevolence, which is the practical side of love, doesn't "cost us anything". But benevolence *results* in beneficence [*MM* 6: 449]. Beneficence demands that we adopt the ends of others as our ends; beneficence is the duty which concerns alleviating deprivation or helping

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30 Guyer argues that the performance of any particular act of benevolence is always more than is strictly owed (2000, p. 327). While I cannot go into the details of this question, it seems to me that there might be acts of benevolence which do not put the addressee of the action under an obligation (we might think of relatively small acts of kindness – they might not put the addressee of the action under an obligation, and they might seem to be required by the duty of beneficence).

others in need [MM 6: 452, §29].<sup>31</sup> The distinction between what is owed and what is meritorious again comes in: Kant's precise formulation of the duty of beneficence calls for promoting the happiness of others in need, "without hoping for something in return" [MM 6: 453, §30]. Not hoping for anything in return involves – independently of whether the action may in fact be meritorious or not – to not make the addressees of one's actions perceive them as meritorious, so that they will not feel under an obligation "which always humbles the other in his own eyes"; it is even better to practice beneficence in secrecy [MM 6: 453; §31].

The fact that Kant begins his discussion of duties to others with these considerations indicates that for Kant, thinking about what and how much one is to do for others is placed within a theory that starts out, in an important way, from the dignity of persons. As Kant writes in the introduction, that human beings are ends is the "supreme principle of virtue" [MM 6: 395]. Respect for others and self-esteem delineate how we are to understand practical duties to others. Love admonishes human beings to come closer to another, and respect calls for *keeping a distance* [MM 6: 449]. This makes Kant's ethics, in some sense, even more demanding. While helping others, there is a sense in which it is important to "leave them alone", to not disrupt the way in which they are masters over their own lives.<sup>32</sup> We are to do what is meritorious *as if* it were owed, to spare others the humiliation of feeling that they will have to pay us back or are obliged to us in any other way, and as a result see themselves as somehow dependent on us. The importance of self-respect calls for reflection about what is to be done for others that is not primarily quantitative – asking how much time or resources we are to "sacrifice". We are not only to help others, but are also expected to think about our help from the "receiving end", trying to find ways of helping which don't

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31 Kant discusses three duties of love: beneficence, gratitude, and sympathy. The duty of gratitude captures, as it were, the flipside of Kant's thoughts about putting others under obligation; gratitude is a "sacred duty", reflecting that one appropriately appreciates any kindness one has received [MM 6: 454–5].

32 Marcia Baron (2002, "Love and Respect in the Doctrine of Virtue", in: Mark Timmons (ed.), *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals: Interpretative Essays*, pp. 391–407) suggests that duties of love and duties of respect are presented to an implausible extent as differing from each other, and opposed to each other. To her, the idea that respect "bids us to hold back from others" is "intuitively odd" (392). If we think about distance as leaving it up to others how they want to lead their lives, and what they consider as integral to their happiness, it would seem to me that there is no such oddness.

involve placing oneself above the addressee of one's action. Further, sympathy with others is, just as beneficence, a duty of love. We have a duty not to shield us from the sight of suffering, to actually go to the places where we can learn about it, and to cultivate a compassionate nature [MM 6: 457].

#### IV. Duties to Others and Perfect Duties

Duties of right are *perfect* duties, and – according to the main text of the *Doctrine of Virtue* – some duties to oneself are perfect, too. Duties of right delineate the space of compliance with ethical duties. When we choose between different ways of getting hold of money that we plan to give to charity, we are supposed to rule out robbery, but we may take money from our bank account. It is only the permitted ends of others which we are to make our own ends; if someone sees his happiness as depending on our assistance in a robbery, we are supposed to exclude this element of his perceived happiness from the happiness of others that is to be our end.<sup>33</sup> If it is due to the narrowness of duties of right that they take this kind of precedence, we should expect that perfect duties to oneself have a similar status. When deliberating about what one may do to help others, murdering oneself (i.e., suicide in the fullest sense of the term) is ruled out as a means of possible help, just as is robbery.<sup>34</sup>

But there is more to the relationship between duties of right and ethical duties to others than that certain types of acts are ruled out. Duties of right are, on the one hand, duties of individual persons; but the way in which duties of right are brought under external law shapes the political situation in which these persons live. It is this side of duties of right which contemporary ethical theorists have viewed as of enormous importance, and Kant seems to have expressed many of the ideas which have become central to the debate. While he ends with questions rather than any definitive conclusions, the link between political institutions and ethical duties which Kant points out in the casuistical section on beneficence seems worth quoting at length:

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33 It is this claim, i.e., the acceptance of “deontological restrictions”, which Kant may be said to share with the kind of position which I refer to as moderate.

34 However, even though they are not wide, perfect duties to oneself lead into casuistical reflections.



If someone who exercises over another (a serf of his estate) the greater power permitted by the law of the land *robs* the other of his freedom to make himself happy in accordance with his own choices, can he, I say, consider himself the other's benefactor because he looks after him paternalistically in accordance with *his own* concepts of happiness? Or is not the injustice of depriving someone of his freedom something so contrary to duty of right as such that one who willingly consents to submit to this condition, counting on his master's beneficence, commits the greatest rejection of his own humanity, and that the master's utmost concern for him would not really be beneficence at all? Or could the merit of such beneficence be so great as to outweigh the right of human beings? – I cannot do good to anyone in accordance with *my* concepts of happiness (except to young children and the insane), thinking to benefit him by forcing a gift upon him; rather, I can benefit him only in accordance with *his* concepts of happiness.

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

The considerations which Kant introduces here are of diverse theoretical status. (i) That one cannot do good to anyone in accordance with one's own concepts of happiness is part of Kant's metaphysics of morals; (ii) similarly, that human beings have a right not to be submitted to having a master has the status of metaphysics. (iii) But that much of the need which we see in others originates from the injustice of the government and the resulting distribution of wealth is an empirical claim, and since this consideration plays a major role in Kant's reflections, they must, as a whole, be situated outside of metaphysics. With a view to contemporary discussions, it seems relevant to note that Kant does not make the outcome of the dispute depend on who will get the empirical questions right. Rather, since empirical questions are involved, he locates the whole dispute outside of moral philosophy proper.

Further, while Kant introduces the very link between duties of beneficence and institutions which many contemporary theorists see as central to the debate about the demandingness of morality, he spells it out differently.<sup>35</sup> Kant's worry is not that duties to help those in need seem

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35 For those who might want to cite Kant as a predecessor of key arguments in the debate about justice (and, today, global justice), it may be slightly disappointing that in the very next casuistical section Kant raises a different kind of consideration: what if all morality were captured in duties of right, so that no

overwhelmingly demanding as long as we understand them as duties of individuals, and that we can as it were “cut down” what is called for in individual action when we see that it is institutional change which is in fact needed. Kant’s question is whether someone may see himself as someone else’s benefactor if he alleviates his suffering, but is at the same time part of the institution which causes the deprivation.<sup>36</sup> And his reasoning again extends to the perspective of the addressee of help. Since duty is not only about how one treats others, but also about one’s attitude toward oneself, we need to ask whether those who *accept* situations which are against their right violate a duty to themselves, thereby “rejecting their humanity”.

The link between virtue and the doctrine of right which Kant suggests does not limit the demands of beneficence. Rather, it is about how the helping agent is to see herself and the addressee of her action. In cases where both are part of an unjust institution, the agent is not only not acting in a meritorious way, but is, in fact, not even adhering to a duty *of virtue* by helping the other person. What she does is not really *helping* (or being beneficent) at all, but is rather more fundamentally determined by her role as “master” (or whatever her role within the unjust institution may be) than by the acts that she performs within this role. Questions about justice thus, like Kant’s discussion of the duties of respect, refer us back to the overall framework of Kant’s ethics, and his views regarding the dignity of persons. Neither the agent nor the addressee of the action should be in the situation in which they find themselves, since it conflicts with the dignity of persons. And whatever the agent may do, it is tainted by this fact; it cannot fully qualify as beneficence, which does not, of course, imply that she should not nevertheless do it.

## V. Duties to Others and Duties to Cultivate One’s Non-Moral Capacities

Duties to oneself limit and determine duties to others, and vice versa; in the agent’s life, there must be room for both. And much of what *we* would describe as the agent’s ends (her projects, plans, etc.) might be

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room were left for beneficence as a duty? In this case, “a great moral adornment, benevolence (*Menschenliebe*), would be missing from the world” [*MM* 6: 458].

36 Kant also suggests that a rich person should not, when helping others, make his efforts appear meritorious, or regard them as such [*MM* 6: 453].

captured in the Kantian realm of duty: all those pursuits that belong to developing one's talents, one's intellectual and physical capacities, etc. Thus, many activities which may seem to us like the agent's "projects" – studying, getting educated so as to be able to hold a profession, learning to play the piano, exercising, etc. [MM 6: 444–5] – may fall, for Kant, into the sphere of duty to oneself.<sup>37</sup>

More broadly, what we might refer to as (in some sense) *values* or part of the agent's good life, is in Kant discussed in terms of *duty*.<sup>38</sup> Developing one's talents, for example, is not something that we value so highly that morality should make room for it; rather, agents have a duty to develop their talents. But like duties to others, duties to oneself are wide – no one can explore all talents she might possibly have, or know for certain whether the particular talents she decides to develop are in fact her greatest talents. Thus, duties to oneself leave the same kind of leeway that characterizes duties to others, and ethics as a system of ends calls for finding a way of life in which there is room for complying with all of them.

The duty to cultivate one's capabilities significantly delineates duties to others. Duties to help others may, for example, conflict with the duty to push forward with a research project. Neither the agent who devotes all her energy and time to her research, nor the agent who devotes all her resources to helping others is, on Kant's view, doing her duty. Contemporary ethicists tend to think only of one, broad kind of moral duty – duty to others. Thus, if they claim that an agent does more than is required, they will most likely view this as laudable. The space into which the agent's actions extend is a non-moral space; what the agent may neglect by doing more in the way of duty are her own ends, which are

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37 While Susan Wolf's worry about the unattractiveness of leading the life of a moral saint does not disappear within such a framework, it would have to be rephrased. Contemporary concerns with a morality that "crowds out the non-moral virtues, as well as many of the interests and personal characteristics that we generally think contribute to a healthy, well-rounded, richly developed character" (Wolf, 1982, "Moral Saints", in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 79, no. 8, pp. 419–439, at p. 421) rest on a picture according to which morality is concerned fundamentally with what we are doing *for others*.

38 The question whether Kant can make room for what is important to the agent (issues which have been discussed largely by reference to the agent's identity and her integrity) has been raised to a great extent through engagement with Bernard Williams, and received much attention by Kant scholars and contemporary Kantians. I cannot here engage with this debate, which would – on my reading – call for discussion of the conception of duties to oneself.

considered as *morally* (though not otherwise) indifferent. But within Kant's framework, many of the things one would neglect have *moral* status. A life which does not make room for learning something, or for pursuing one's talents is not a life of praiseworthy sacrifice, but rather a life in which things of moral significance are being neglected.

What is more, duties to others and duties to oneself are connected. Each human being has the duty to be a useful member of the world, which one cannot be without developing one's talents. If one does not put effort into developing one's talents, one is, in the end, not really going to be able to act to the benefit of others. On the whole, an agent is more "useful", if she has developed her talents [MM 6: 445–6]. But this reference to one's "usefulness" does not lead Kant into moralizing one's choices with respect to education and career. Which talent one wants to develop is up to one's own reasonable reflection, in accordance "with his own rational reflection about what sort of life he would like to lead and whether he has the powers necessary for it (e.g., whether it should be trade, commerce, or a learned profession)" [MM 6: 445, §20]. A certain kind of pleasure in one's own life is part of duty to oneself: it is against duty to oneself to deny oneself the pleasure of some joys in life through exaggerated avarice or discipline [MM 6: 452].

Duties to oneself are, in Kant's ethics, the most straightforward limit to duties to others. As I have argued, the ways in which duties of respect and duties of right delineate duties to others make adherence to duty, in the end, more (or at least not less) demanding. Duties to others need to be complied with, as it were, under the premise of the duty of respect; concern for the self-esteem of those who are in need of help surely makes beneficence ultimately more demanding. Perfect duties delineate the range of choices that one has within the sphere of virtue. But more importantly, in situations where others are in need, we may have to consider whether we are part of the institutional framework which contributes to their deprivation, and may not be benefactors at all (I write "may" since this is, for Kant, an open, casuistical question). Thus, while the justice or injustice of political institutions shapes how we are to see our help for others, it does not make duties to others less demanding. But duties to oneself indeed make room for pursuing the life that one is interested in, the life in which one cultivates one's talents, has a fulfilling career, etc.

Recent scholarship often engages with Kant not in terms of interpretation or exegesis, but in terms of what *we*, were we to adopt a Kantian framework, could say about a certain question. From this point

of view, it would seem that Kant's most substantive limit of duties to others is closed off – hardly anyone today is convinced by Kant's arguments for duties to oneself. We might still find it plausible that one is to strive to become a better person. But the conception of a duty to cultivate one's non-moral capacities finds almost no adherents today. If we do not recognize such a duty, we are not rejecting a minor detail in Kant. Kant's moral philosophy is in a very fundamental way about a *system* of duties. Rejecting any of these duties will therefore be a substantial departure from this system. Thus, it seems that we can either, as interpreters, come to the view that duties to cultivate one's non-moral capacities are Kant's most significant limit to duties to others, or we can, as ethicists, recognize an important divide between a contemporary version of Kantian ethics that we might wish to hold on to, and Kant's ethics.

## VI. Duties to Others and One's Own Ends

But Kant may have further arguments regarding the limits of duties to others, arguments which do not concern duties to oneself, but rather one's own ends. Such aspects of Kant's thought would be much closer to the concerns of contemporary ethics. I will conclude by examining a few passages which are as interesting as they are frustrating – Kant seems to acknowledge some of the intuitions that are important to moderates, but he does not spell them out.

In the introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant points out how the duties to oneself relate to one's own ends: an agent who gives away so much of her own means that she falls into poverty might endanger her own morality (*Sittlichkeit*) [MM 6: 388]. Thus, one's own happiness, while not a duty, is tied to the duties to oneself. One's moral perfection is – as Kant supposes – easier to attain in some circumstances than in others; and these circumstances happen to be those in which the agent is taking care of her own needs. Kant repeats this point in the main text, this time as a casuistical reflection [MM 6: 454]. It is important to note that the introduction does not distinguish between “science” and “casuistry”, and we must therefore go to the main text to determine the theoretical status that Kant ascribes to particular considerations. That poverty makes human beings liable to vice is an empirical claim, with which one may or may not agree (we may for example think of an agent who is very certain that poverty will not mislead her into vice). It is

important to keep in mind what Kant himself thinks about the status of such empirical considerations. We cannot draw on the casuistical sections and claim that, in Kant's moral philosophy, we find such-and-such limits to the duties of others, or, as it is sometimes put, an indirect duty to promote our happiness. What we find is an empirical reflection on how our own virtue may relate to our happiness, and this reflection may play some role in how we are to adhere to the imperfect duties to others.

But what about the agent as "one of all"? Duties to others are universal duties. Strictly speaking, they are not duties to *others*, but to all human beings, of which the agent herself is one. Kant writes on the maxim of benevolence: "I want everyone else to be benevolent toward me (*benevolentiam*); hence I ought also to be benevolent toward everyone else. But since all *others* with the exception of myself would not be *all*, so that the maxim would not have within it the universality of law, which is still necessary for imposing obligation, the law making benevolence a duty will include myself, as an object of benevolence, in the command of practical reason". This doesn't make benevolence toward oneself a duty; but it does *permit* benevolence toward oneself "on the condition of your being benevolent to every other as well" [MM 6: 451]. Thus, a minimal criterion limiting benevolence toward others is benevolence toward oneself. However, as long as we think of this just insofar as the agent is one of all, this may mean very little. Any kind of significant permission to attend to one's own ends, it seems, would have to attribute some kind of special importance to them.

In the introduction, Kant mentions an additional aspect, a "maxim of promoting others' happiness at the sacrifice of one's own happiness, *one's true needs*, would conflict with itself if it were made a universal law" ([MM 6: 393]; emphasis K.V.).<sup>39</sup> How far we should go in the sacrifice of

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39 In her assessment of the duty to promote the happiness of others, Andrea Marlen Esser refers to Kant's remarks about poverty as a temptation to violate one's duty and to this passage. She seems to find Kant's empirical claims about how need may endanger virtue quite compelling and, within Kant, unproblematic. On her reading, these passages once and again show that the image of Kant as "verknöcherte[r], lustfeindliche[r] Philister" is but a bad caricature. Kant, on her interpretation, *understood* that the good deeds of someone who neglects her own happiness will, in the long run, make the benefactor resentful, and thus be counterproductive (2004, *Eine Ethik für Endliche. Kants Tugendlehre in der Gegenwart*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, pp. 341–342). Sherman thinks that this passage "reminds us that the Kantian agent's happiness and needs are not a matter of moral indifference" (1997, p. 339). However, as I will

our own welfare “depends, in large part, on what each person’s true needs are in view of his sensibilities, and it must be left to each to decide this for himself” [MM 6: 393]. One might wish that Kant had elaborated more on this point; one’s true needs, as understood by oneself, may indeed be a quite significant criterion for limiting what one is to do for others.<sup>40</sup> While Kant does not go on to explain the notion of one’s true needs, there is a second passage which is similar in spirit, though it may seem to be even more difficult to interpret.<sup>41</sup> Kant discusses how the duty of benevolence relates to what he calls the ethical law of perfection – “love your neighbor as yourself”:

Yet one human being is closer to me than another, and in benevolence I am closest to myself. How does this fit in with the precept “love your *neighbor* (your fellowman) as yourself”? If one is closer to me than another (in the duty of benevolence) and I am therefore under obligation to greater benevolence to one than to the other but am admittedly closer to myself (even in accordance with duty) than to any other, then it would seem that I cannot, without contradicting myself, say that I ought to love every human being as myself, since the measure of self-love would allow for no difference in degree [MM 6: 451, §28].<sup>42</sup>

Kant talks about benevolence, not beneficence. But *practical* benevolence *is* beneficence [MM 6: 452]. Does Kant ask us to envisage something like circles of closeness, and a duty to take care of someone’s needs in accordance with relative closeness, with the agent herself at the center of the circle? On this account, we are not only closest to ourselves by knowing our own needs best, but also *in duty*. This may seem to stand in stark contrast with Kant’s thesis that there can be no duty to promote one’s own happiness.

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go on to argue, it is quite unclear how Kant would spell out the notion of one’s true needs, properly understood only by oneself.

- 40 In his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (2003, ed. by Barbara Herman, Cambridge/Mass. and London/England: Harvard University Press, p. 172 f. and p. 221 f.) Rawls emphasizes – albeit in a different context – that Kant’s notion of human needs is not really spelled out, and that it is difficult to see how Kant would explain this passage.
- 41 Kant mentions one’s true needs also in the context of duty to oneself: avarice, understood as “restricting *one’s own* enjoyment of the means of good living so narrowly as to leave one’s own true needs unsatisfied”, is a vice which is contrary to one’s duty to oneself as a moral being, i.e., a perfect duty to oneself [MM 6: 432]. Again, he does not spell out the notion of one’s true needs.
- 42 In his earlier discussions of “Love your neighbor as yourself” in the *Groundwork* [MM 4: 399] and the *Doctrine of Virtue* [MM 6: 402], Kant had emphasized that the point of this command is to “do good”.

Kant doesn't offer further argument, and the passage remains puzzling. Like no other passage in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, it recalls both a Stoic idea, and what Cicero makes of it. The Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* presents the picture that Kant invokes – concentric circles of closeness with the agent at the center (however, not in Cicero's account of it).<sup>43</sup> But while the Stoic theory concerns the way in which one should try to develop the same disposition towards those from the outer circles as one has for those in the inner circles, Cicero himself does not adopt this idea.<sup>44</sup> According to Cicero, our *officia* are indeed more demanding with respect to those who are closer, and Kant may only spell out a further implication of this reasoning when he states that one is closest to oneself even in duty. A different (and extensive) study would be needed to find traces of Kant's engagement with Cicero (as a source and as a philosopher), and to assess it. However, at this point, one cannot help but feel that Kant presents a line of reasoning which is not fully integrated into his ethics. If it were, Kant would offer a very substantial criterion for limiting the demands of duties to others.

To conclude, let me briefly return to the notion of one's true needs. As Rawls emphasizes, we can only speculate about how Kant would explain this were we to push him for clarification.<sup>45</sup> Kant's claim that one is to judge one's true needs in view of one's own sensibilities seems to suggest something about how others are to keep a distance from the agent if they are to duly respect her. Kant writes that no one has the right to require of me that I sacrifice my ends if these are not immoral [MM 6:

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43 Cf. Cicero, *De finibus* III.16 f. For a range of passages on the Stoic theory, cf. A. A. Long/D. N. Sedley, 1992, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, ch. 57, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

44 Cf. Cicero's discussion in *De officiis* I, 15 (49) f. Cicero argues that there are several degrees of human *societas*, and the society of all human beings will, on his view, be best sustained if one dedicates more of one's well-doing (*benignitas*) to those with whom one is more closely connected. Cicero relates this idea to other considerations like need, or whether someone is dependent on the agent; however, for him it follows from the relative scarcity of resources that one should give priority to those who are close.

45 Rawls' engagement with this point is part of a different train of thought – Rawls is not pointing to its difficulty with a view to limits of the duties to others. He says: "I understand Kant to say that we have certain true human needs, certain requisite conditions, the fulfillment of which is necessary if human beings are to enjoy their lives." Rawls suggests that we may add to Kant (or amend his theory) by spelling out this notion in the sense of what humans *in fact* need. Ed. Herman (2003), p. 174.



388]. Along these lines, it might seem that, within Kant's moral philosophy, the distance that others are to keep from the agent reserves some kind of space for the agent to figure out what her most important ends are, what it is that she judges to be indispensable to her happiness, and to her enjoyment of life. If she errs, this is, as it were, the lesser of two evils. It might seem worse to interfere with the kind of space that respect calls for than to have someone go along with some misconception of her true needs.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> I am very grateful to Christian Barry for proofreading this paper, and for offering many helpful suggestions.

