

# Duties of Virtue to Others

Kant BPhil Seminar, MT 2024: week 6

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## 1 The ends of virtue

Kant claims that there are only two ends that are also duties (i.e., ends of virtue): one's own perfection and the happiness of others. This raises the questions: why are one's own happiness and the perfection of others excluded here? What explains the asymmetry?

### 1.1 One's own happiness

We cannot have a duty to promote our own happiness because it is an end we have by virtue of our nature.

Recall that happiness is the sum total of our inclinations.

Kant seems to think that we cannot have a duty to adopt an end that we by our nature already have. If an obligation is a constraint, and we by our nature adopt the end of happiness, then a duty to adopt happiness as an end is a duty with no constraint, which is contradictory.

But happiness is *indirectly* a duty: "To assure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly); for want of satisfaction with one's condition, under pressure from many anxieties and amid unsatisfied needs, could easily become a great temptation to transgression of duty." (4:399; see also 6:388).

**Question:** What does it mean for something to be an indirect duty?

"What everyone already wants unavoidably, of his own accord, does not come under the concept of *duty*, which is *constraint* to an end adopted reluctantly. Hence it is self-contradictory to say that he is *under obligation* to promote his own happiness with all his powers." (6:386).

### 1.2 The perfection of others

We cannot have another's perfection as an end that is also a duty, because we cannot bring it about that another adopts the end of bettering themselves.

Is this true? Consider:

Imagine that I am starting graduate school in philosophy in a department without a language requirement. I want to do my dissertation on Rousseau. A philosophy professor acquaintance of mine thinks that I should begin learning French soon, and treats me in a way that encourages me to do so: she gives me French text books, informs me of various intensive introductory reading courses in French [etc., ...]. For all that she does, I will not learn French if I myself do not make learning French my own end. [...] Yet it does not seem perverse to say that my acquaintance has my learning French as an end. (Denis, 2001, 145-46)

"it is a contradiction for me to make another's *perfection* my end and consider myself under obligation to promote this. For the *perfection* of another human being, as a person, consists just in this: that he *himself* is able to set his end in accordance with his own concepts of duty; and it is self-contradictory to require that I do (make it my duty to do) something that only the other himself can do" (6:386).

Can we have another's perfection as an end in the way that it seems we can have another's learning French as an end?

**Suggestion:** For Kant, to promote something is to make a direct difference to it. We are able to promote the happiness of others because we can bring about the states of affairs specified by their relative ends. We cannot promote their perfection, because we cannot act in such a way that makes a direct difference to it.

The question for this suggestion is: why think that we need to restrict what it means to promote something in this way?

And what about moral education? Or moral praise that helps to motivate moral behaviour?

But we do have a duty not to perform action that will tempt others into wrongdoing.

**Question:** Why isn't this a duty concerning another's perfection? It seems to be a good candidate for such a duty.

## 2 Love & respect

Duties of virtue to others are divided into duties of love and duties of respect.

Kant distinguishes between these duties on the basis of whether they put others under obligation. While duties of love put others under obligation, duties of respect do not.

Duties of love are meritorious, duties of respect are owed.

Neither love nor respect are feelings. Love is "the maxim of *benevolence* (practical love), which results in beneficence" (6:449) and respect is the maxim "of limiting our self-esteem by the dignity of humanity in another person" (ibid.).

Kant claims that while the duties are separable in principle, they are "basically always united by the law into one duty" (6:448). For example, in helping those in need, we ought not exalt ourselves over them.

### 2.1 Duties of love

These are divided into duties of,

1. Beneficence: "promote according to one's means the happiness of other human beings in need, without hoping for something in return" (6:453).
2. Gratitude: "*honouring* a person because of a benefit he has rendered us" (6:454).
3. Sympathy: "the *capacity* and the *will to share in others' feelings*" (6:456).

Duties of love are meritorious with respect to others. This is not to be confused with the claim that the fulfilment of the duty is up to us.

Questions about duties of love:

- How demanding are they? What counts as satisfying the duty?
- Is it true that others cannot demand of us that we comply with these duties?
- In what sense are others obliged by one's performance of a duty of love?

### 2.2 Duties of respect

Darwall (2005) distinguishes between recognition and appraisal respect. The former is respect for one's moral status, the latter for one's achievements (or their merit). The Kantian duty of respect is a duty of recognition respect.

Duties of respect in the Doctrine of Virtue occupy a strange place. As duties of virtue, they are meant to be i. wide and ii. meritorious. However, Kant claims they are owed to others, which suggests they are neither i. nor ii.

"a duty of free respect towards others is, strictly speaking, only a negative one (of not exalting oneself above others) and is thus analogous to the duty of right not to encroach upon what belongs to anyone" (6:449).

"To see it that another does not deservedly suffer this inner reproach [of conscience] is not *my* duty but *his affair*, but it is my duty to refrain from doing anything that, considering the nature of a human being, could tempt him to do something for which his conscience could afterwards pain him, to refrain from what is called giving scandal" (6:394).

"The chief division can be that into duties to others by the performance of which you also put others under obligation and duties to others the observance of which does not result in obligation on the part of others" (6:448).

We cannot be under a duty to feel a certain way towards others, but we can be under a duty to adopt certain maxims regarding them.

"a wide duty is not to be taken as a permission to make exceptions to the maxim of actions but only as permission to limit one maxim of duty by another (e.g., love of one's neighbour in general by love of one's parents)" (6:390).

An analogy "surely does not signify, as the word is usually taken, an imperfect similarity between two things, but rather a perfect similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things" (4:357-58).

"no one is wronged if duties of love are neglected; but a failure in the duty of respect infringes upon one's lawful claim" (6:464).

Suggestion: duties of respect are wide (like all duties of virtue) because they require the setting of an end, and not the performance of certain actions.

“The different forms of respect to be shown to others in accordance with differences in their qualities or contingent relations — differences of age, sex, birth, strength, or weakness, or even rank and dignity, which depend in part on arbitrary arrangements — cannot be set forth precisely and classified in the *metaphysical* first principles of a doctrine of virtue, since this has to do only with its pure rational principles” (6:468).

**Question:** All duties of virtue are duties to adopt certain ends. So, what is the end corresponding to duties of respect?

Neither one’s own perfection nor others’ happiness seem to be a good candidate.

But, Kant says although respect is “a mere duty of virtue, it is regarded as *narrow* in comparison with a duty of love, and it is the latter that is considered a *wide* duty” (6:450).

“According to Kant, all human beings are entitled to respect from others as their due. [...] According to Kant, we deserve happiness only insofar as we are virtuous” (Fahmy, 2013, 726). So, it looks like the conditions for respecting another and the conditions for promoting another’s happiness differ.

### 3 References and suggestions for additional reading

- Darwall, S. 2005. Two Kinds of Respect. In *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect*, 181–197. Routledge.
- Denis, L. 1999. Kant on Perfecting Others. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 37(1): 21–41.
- Denis, L. 2001. *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to oneself in Kant’s moral theory*. Routledge.
- Fahmy, M. S. 2013. Understanding Kant’s Duty of Respect as a Duty of Virtue. *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 10(6): 723–740.
- Herman, B. 2021. *The Moral Habitat*. Oxford University Press.
- Moran, K. 2016. Much Obligated: Kantian Gratitude Reconsidered. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 98(3): 330–363.
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- Timmons, M. 2017. *Significance and System: Essays on Kant’s Ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Wood, A. 2009. Duties to Oneself, Duties of Respect to Others. In *The Blackwell Guide to Kant’s Ethics*, 229–251. Blackwell.

### 4 Readings for weeks 7 & 8

#### 4.1 Week 7: the state of nature

- Doctrine of Right: §§8, 9, 15, 41–44.
- Koltonski, “Kant and the Problem of Unequal Enforcement of Law” *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 2021.

#### 4.2 Week 8: cosmopolitan right

- Doctrine of Right: §§53–62, plus the Conclusion.
- Stiliz, “Provisional right and non-state peoples” in *Kant and Colonialism*, OUP 2014.