'With this book virtue ethics finally comes of age. Hursthouse elegantly dispels the aura of unattractive high-mindedness that has clung to the approach. Firmly rebutting both psychological and moral criticisms, she shows how the life of the virtuous is both possible and even enjoyable. This volume will effortlessly take its place as the defining exposition of the view.'
Simon Blackburn, University of North Carolina

'Incisive, clear, historically sensitive while addressing contemporary concerns, this book is the comprehensive statement modern virtue ethics has been awaiting for forty years.' *Roger Crisp, St Anne's College, Oxford*

'Rosalind Hursthouse's study of virtue ethics is an exceptionally clear and refreshing treatment of the subject. Fully informed and engaged with the best of contemporary moral philosophy, it breathes philosophical life into the conversation between virtue ethics and Kantian or utilitarian inspired alternatives. Hursthouse's uncommon insight into the texture of ethical life connects the claims of virtue theory with the ways most of us do think about morality and, especially, with the moral tale we tell our children.'
Barbara Herman, University of California, Los Angeles

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.oup.com

ISBN 0-19-823818-5

HURSTHOUSE ON VIRTUE ETHICS

OXFORD

OXFORD

ON VIRTUE ETHICS

CAP. 4
"ARISTOTLE
AND KANT"

ROSALIND HURSTHOUSE

4

Aristotle and Kant

In the last chapter we referred to some of the emotions a virtuous agent would feel on certain occasions, in particular, regret and even extreme grief as reactions to what had to be done. Virtue ethics is often praised, especially at the expense of Kant's deontology, for giving a better account of the moral significance of the emotions than the other ethical approaches, and, in particular, for giving a more attractive account than Kant of 'moral motivation'. But just what this account is, and whether and if so how Kant in particular, and deontologists and utilitarians in general, are cut off from it, has not been made clear. As I said above (Chapter 2, p. 48), it does not seem to me that either approach is cut off from recognizing the significance of regret simply in virtue of being 'act-centred' rather than agent-centred and it may be that neither is intrinsically debarred from incorporating a quite general and plausible account of the moral significance of the emotions. I have always thought that virtue ethics does give a better account than the other two approaches—that was, indeed, one of the things that attracted me to it in the first place—but I am no longer sure, as I used to be, that this is much more than a historical accident

The central issue people seem to have in mind when they think of virtue ethics as giving the superior account of the moral significance of the emotions is, I think, the issue of the feelings of agents who act charitably. The debate concerns a famous passage in the first section of Kant's *Groundwork*, and an apparent conflict between what this passage says and a central thesis of Aristotelian ethics. If I am right in thinking that this is the central issue people have in mind, we should pause to note a few oddities about it. First, it can hardly aspire to showing that virtue ethics is superior to both deontology *and* utilitarianism on the emotions since the latter, in its simplest forms, is uncommitted on what agents should feel when

they act. Second, it fails to engage with non-Kantian deontology—and surely a deontologist might still be recognizably Kantian while still repudiating some of Kant. Third, it does not look as though it will suffice to ground a general claim about the moral significance of *the* emotions. Even if it shows that sympathy, compassion, and love are morally significant, what about fear, anger, joy, sorrow, hope, pride, shame, despair, admiration, gratitude, embarrassment, and so on? Nevertheless this issue is worth considering in some detail, to deepen the understanding of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and to explore the extent to which it is at loggerheads with Kant in the *Groundwork*.

At the end of Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces a distinction between the 'continent' or 'self-controlled' type of human being, (who has *enkrateia*) and the one who has full virtue (*arete*). Simply, the continent character is the one who, typically, knowing what she should do, does it, *contrary* to her desires,[1] and the fully virtuous character is the one who, typically, knowing what she should do, does it, desiring to do it. Her desires are in 'complete harmony' with her reason; hence, when she does what she should, she does what she desires to do, and reaps the reward of satisfied desire. Hence, 'virtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue' (1099a12); the fully virtuous do what they (characteristically) do, gladly.

[1] I follow modern convention in giving this general description of continence, despite the fact that, when Aristotle comes to discuss continence and 'incontinence' (akrasia, weakness of will) in Book 7, he says explicitly that 'we must regard as continence and incontinence only those states that are concerned with the same pleasures as temperance and licentiousness'. He does allow that the word 'incontinence' may, by analogy, be used in relation to states concerned with other things, such as temper, honour, gain, and one's family (interestingly, he does not include fear), but he is markedly less interested in these cases of 'incontinence only by analogy' than the others. It seems, oddly enough, that he has overlooked the possibility that those who 'care too much' for such things might *act* in a way they knew was wrong; the passage (1148a20–b15) suggests that they feel too much (and know it) but that this is not a thing that is condemned because 'there is no actual wickedness involved', unlike incontinence proper. But we have thought of hosts of examples in which agents do what is wicked because, contrary to reason, but driven by passion, they exact undeserved revenge or do what is unjust or dishonest for the sake of honour, gain, or their family. If he has, indeed, overlooked these possibilities and is thinking only of people who, feeling as they should not, nevertheless always manage to act as they should, then his 'incontinent by analogy' cases would be included under our modern conception of continence, to which we add further cases such as helping others without any delight in their well-being.

So Aristotle draws a distinction between two sorts of people—the continent or self-controlled, and the fully virtuous—and he weights that distinction, as the phrases show, a particular way; the fully virtuous agent is morally superior to the merely self-controlled one.

In the *Groundwork* passage, Kant says,

> To help others where one can is a duty, and besides this there are many spirits of so sympathetic a temper that, without any further motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work. Yet I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however right and however amiable it may be, has still no genuinely moral worth. It stands on the same footing as other inclinations—for example, the inclination for honour, which if fortunate enough to hit on something beneficial and right and consequently honourable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem; for its maxim lacks moral content, namely the performance of such actions, not from inclination, but *from duty*. Suppose then that the mind of this friend of man were overclouded by sorrows of his own which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of others, but that he still had power to help those in distress, though no longer stirred by the need of others because sufficiently occupied with his own; and suppose that, when no longer moved by any inclination, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination for the sake of duty alone; then for the first time his action has its genuine moral worth. Still further: if nature had implanted little sympathy in this or that man's heart; if (being in other respects an honest fellow) he were cold in temperament and indifferent to the sufferings of others—perhaps because, being endowed with the special gift of patience and robust endurance in his own sufferings, he assumed the like in others or even demanded it; if such a man (who would in truth not be the worst product of nature) were not exactly fashioned by her to be a philanthropist, would he not still find in himself a source from which he might draw a worth far higher than any that a good-natured temperament can have? Assuredly he would. It is precisely in this that the worth of character begins to show—a moral worth and beyond all comparison the highest—namely that he does good, not from inclination, but from duty.[2]

On the standard reading of this passage, Kant draws the same distinction as Aristotle, but weights it the contrary way—the self-controlled agent is claimed to be morally superior to the agent who

[2] I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans H. J. Paton (1964), 66.

would, in Aristotle's terms, have full virtue, because she desires to do what she does. He describes the benevolent actions of people 'of so sympathetic a temper that . . . they find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work' as having 'no genuinely moral worth', and contrasts them unfavourably with the benevolent actions of two other people, who, unmoved by any feelings of sympathy, act 'without any inclination for the sake of duty alone'; their actions have 'genuine moral worth'. And this looks like bad news for Kant, for it seems to be (and has been claimed to be) tantamount to the wildly implausible claim that the person who visits her friend in hospital 'because she *is* her friend' is morally inferior to the one who visits her 'out of a sense of duty'.[3] I used to read the *Groundwork* passage in this way, but have now come to believe that Aristotle and Kant are much closer than is usually supposed.[4]

PHILIPPA FOOT IN 'VIRTUES AND VICES'

I was initially led to change my mind by Foot's penetrating discussion of Kant's passage in 'Virtues and Vices'.[5] Foot introduces her discussion by pointing to an apparent contradiction in our everyday thoughts about morality.

> [W]e both are and are not inclined to think that the harder a man finds it to act virtuously the more virtue he shows if he does act well. For on the one hand great virtue is needed where it is particularly hard to act virtuously; yet on the other it could be argued that difficulty in acting virtuously shows that the agent is imperfect in virtue: according to Aristotle, to take pleasure in virtuous action is the mark of true virtue, with the self-mastery of the one who finds virtue difficult only a second best. How then is this conflict to be decided?

[3] The example is now standardly used in this abbreviated form. In its original form, it was much richer in details which, importantly, made the characters of the agents clear. See Michael Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories' (1976).

[4] Robert Louden in 'Kant's Virtue Ethics' and Christine Korsgaard in 'From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble' also find more agreement between them than is allowed on the standard reading.

[5] 'Virtues and Vices' (1978), 10.

One rather weak response to the difficulty, which she does not consider, might be to say that common-sense morality just *does* contain contradictions, that different approaches (Kantian, Aristotelian) pick up on different sides, and that the only thing for moral philosophers to do is go for one approach rather than the other and give up, or remake, common-sense morality. So, one might say, it is just a brute fact that the Kantian approach captures the common-sense view on courageous actions, whereby the one who shows most courage is 'the one who wants to run away but does not', and the Aristotelian one captures the common-sense view on benevolent or charitable actions, whereby the one who shows most benevolence or charity is the one 'who finds it easy to make the good of others his object'.[6] Enlightened by the correct moral theory, we must revise our pre-theoretic ideas about courage or charity, comforting ourselves with the thought that we have, at least, managed to remove contradiction.

But Foot finds a better response; she finds some points in Kant with which Aristotelians may, and indeed should, agree. Her discussion forces us to note that the continent/fully virtuous distinction needs to be applied with some discretion and that the claim 'virtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue' needs careful qualification. Moreover, as I shall go on to argue, there are points of agreement beyond those that she mentions.

So, how are we to resolve the conflict between the thoughts 'the harder it is for a man to act virtuously, the more virtue he shows if he acts well' and 'the harder it is, the less virtue he shows'? Foot's answer is that each may be true with respect to different cases, depending on what it is that 'makes it hard' to act well. Some things that 'make it hard' for someone to act well 'show that virtue (in him) is incomplete',[7] less than full virtue, for what 'makes it hard' pertains to his character. These are the cases of which it is true that 'the harder it is for him, the less virtue he shows', and the ones that the continent/fully virtuous distinction—which is a distinction between different *characters*—applies to. But other things that 'make it hard' for someone to act well do not pertain to their character; rather, they are circumstances in which the virtuous character is 'severely tested' and comes through. These are the cases of which it is true that 'the harder it is for him, the more virtue he

[6] Ibid. [7] Ibid. 11.

shows', and here the continent/fully virtuous distinction does not apply.

Consider courage. This has always looked like a somewhat awkward virtue for the continent/fully virtuous distinction, and it is significant that Aristotle himself regards it as necessary to qualify his claim that the exercise of every virtue is pleasurable with respect to it (1117b10). Although his remarks in this passage are open to different interpretations,[8] what seems beyond dispute is that someone who wants to risk and endure frightful pain or death, and enjoys doing so, is not thereby courageous but a masochist, or a daredevil maniac. Even when the courageous are not acting contrary to an inclination to run away or preserve themselves, they are not, in any ordinary sense, 'doing what they want to do' and thereby reaping the pleasure of satisfied desire.

Nevertheless, there still seem to be neo-Aristotelian cases (off the battlefield) where the distinction applies. Parents who find it hard to go to the rescue of their children because they have to conquer their fear of danger to themselves do not compare favourably with those parents who fly to the rescue with no thought of their own safety; Hume's friends marvelled at the way in which he conducted himself towards the end of his life, in such a way that 'Death for the time did not seem dismal', as Boswell reported, let alone fearful. Those who find it harder to put their impending death out of their minds for the sake of their friends are less admirable. In such cases, fearlessness, rather than the conquering of fear, merits the highest esteem, since it reflects the agent's values and, thereby, character. But if the fear that has to be conquered does not connect with one's values, but is, as we say, pathological, the judgement goes the other way. As Foot points out, 'if someone suffers from claustrophobia or a dread of heights he may require courage to do that which would not be a courageous action in others'.[9] Being subject to some phobia is being in circumstances that *call* on one's courage; if one comes through, one merits esteem.[10]

[8] John McDowell, for example, maintains that the virtuous understand the notions of 'benefit, advantage, harm, loss and so forth' in such a way that no sacrifice necessitated by virtue counts as a loss: 'The Role of *Eudaimonia* in Aristotle's Ethics' (1980). I shall be discussing this view in Chap. 8.

[9] Foot, 'Virtues and Vices', 12. Louden, 'Kant's Virtue Ethics', fudges Foot's distinction, committing her to the blanket claim 'that the agent who does not even want to run away shows more courage than the one who wants to run away but does not'.

Consider honesty. If it is 'hard for me' to restore the full purse I saw someone drop because I am strongly tempted to keep it and have to conquer the temptation, I am less than thoroughly honest and morally inferior to the person who hastens to restore it with no thought of keeping what is not hers. But there are two different examples of the agent who thus hastens to restore the purse. There is the one who has a nicely full purse of her own, and the one who is poor. The former *may* be as thoroughly honest as the latter but, if she is, her honesty has not been, on this occasion, severely tested, because it is easy for her to restore it—what is a full purse to her? For the poor agent, 'it is hard' to restore it, hard in so far as she is hardily circumstanced, and the poorer she is—the harder it is for her to restore the purse—the more honesty she shows in unhesitatingly and readily restoring it. Here again, we should note qualifications that must be put on 'virtuous activity gives pleasure to the lover of virtue'. If the purse that the poor agent restores goes to someone who is manifestly a 'profligate debauchee', then Hume has a point when he says that there cannot be any 'natural motive' involved, only the motive of restoring to someone that which is theirs. As I shall stress later, no Aristotelian should take on Hume's vocabulary here, but I see no reason why we should deny to the fully honest the thought that it is a damned shame that this had to be done. The 'pleasure' the fully honest agent derives from this particular act is of an attenuated, not a characteristic, sort.

Consider now the (non-Aristotelian) virtue of charity or benevolence which Foot discusses. It might seem that the successful exercise of this could not fail to give straightforward pleasure to one who genuinely possesses the virtue, for should not a genuine attachment to the good of others guarantee joy in their joy, pleasure in their pleasure? Must it not quite generally be the case that anyone who 'finds it hard' to help another possesses only the inferior, 'continent' form of this virtue? No, for here we come to one of Kant's

[10] This is a 'neo-Aristotelian' point. Had Aristotle recognized claustrophobia, it seems likely that he would have regarded it as a defect that made the virtue of courage unobtainable, since the concept of pathological fears is a distinctly modern one. Nor does it seem likely that he would recognize, as we can, the admirable courage, fortitude, and hope of people who struggle with and triumph over addiction.

philanthropists, the one whose mind is 'overclouded by sorrows of his own'. To say of him, when he does what is charitable, with difficulty and without pleasure, that he thereby acts less well, or shows himself to be less perfect in the virtue of charity, than someone else who does the same gladly, would be a mistake, for what 'makes it hard' for him to act well here does not show that his virtue is incomplete.

There is no reason why an Aristotelian should not agree with Kant that there is something particularly estimable about the action of the sorrowing philanthropist. For here, the 'difficulty that stands in the way' of his virtuous action is of the sort that 'provides an occasion' for much virtue.[11] It is his sorrow which makes noticing and attending to the needs of others particularly difficult; and as Foot rightly remarks, if he still manages to act with charity this 'most shows virtue', because 'this is the kind of circumstance that increases the virtue that is needed if a man is to act well'.[12] The fact is that it is difficult to do anything much when one's mind is overclouded by sorrow, and impossible to take pleasure in anything; the difficulty and lack of pleasure in acting which this man finds, spring from the nature of sorrow, not from his character,[13] and it is only difficulties that spring from one's own character that show the virtue to be incomplete. So if the answer to 'Why does this person find it hard to make the good of others her object?' is 'Her mind is overclouded by sorrow', then the fact that she finds it hard may be no reflection on her virtue; she may still count as being fully virtuous rather than merely 'continent'.

So, following Foot, we may conclude that Kant's estimation of the sorrowing philanthropist should not be read as a straightforward denial of Aristotle's weighting of the continent/fully virtuous distinction. Instead, that distinction, and the concomitant Aristotelian claim that 'virtuous conduct gives pleasure to the lover of virtue', should be given qualified and particularized interpretations in a way that does justice to Kant's example.

[11] Foot, 'Virtues and Vices', 11. [12] Ibid. 14.

[13] Or so, at least, we charitably suppose when reading Kant's passage. It would have a very different ring if we imagined him 'no longer stirred by the need of others' because, appallingly conceited, he has been cast into despair by his failure to receive some trivial public recognition. Then the sorrow itself would manifest a defect in character, and the difficulty in attending to the needs of others would spring from it.

But what about his other examples? Surely we can discern the denial in what he says about the happy philanthropists who 'find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them', acting from inclination, not from duty? Foot does indeed imply that, in denying that their charitable actions have 'genuine moral worth', Kant has simply made a mistake about the virtue of charity. 'For charity is,' she says, 'a virtue of attachment as well as action, and the sympathy that makes it easier to act with charity is part of the virtue.'[14] She is right that he has made a mistake about the virtue of charity, but I suspect too that Kant may have a picture of the happy philanthropists in mind which would justify his dismissal of their actions as 'lacking moral worth'. This is the point at which I leave Foot's discussion and seek to show that there is even more agreement between Kant and the Aristotelian approach than she identifies.

ACTING 'FROM INCLINATION'

What does Kant take the happy philanthropists at the beginning of the passage to be like? What *is* it to be the sort of agent who acts 'from inclination not from duty'? Later, I shall suggest that the answer to the latter question is not the same as the answer to the first. But, for the moment, let us construct a picture as follows.

Suppose we began by thinking of certain emotions, say sympathy, compassion, and love, as good or nice ones. Without committing ourselves to tendentious details about what an emotion is, or what it is to feel one, we can say safely that each characteristically involves such desires as the desire to help others, to comfort them in their affliction, to give them what they want and need; in other words, that they motivate one to do such things, and also that they characteristically involve emotional *re*actions—felt pain or sorrow at another's pain or grief, felt pleasure or joy at another's pleasure or joy.

Now we note an important difference between people: some are very prone to feel these emotions, others very little or not at all. (Some are in between, but let us leave them out of it.) This seems to be a difference in their characters; the former are charitable (or, as

[14] Foot, 'Virtues and Vices', 14.

people tend to say nowadays, benevolent); the latter callous and selfish. So we might regard possessing the virtue of charity (or benevolence) as being very prone to feeling these emotions on suitable occasions. Can we note a further difference between people—that some are very prone to feeling these emotions without being prompted to many actions by them, whereas others are thus prompted? Given that we said that the emotions in question characteristically involve desires to act, this seems unlikely, but, just in case, we could make it explicit and say: possessing the virtue of charity is being very prone not only to feeling but to acting from the emotions of sympathy, compassion, and love, prompted by the desires associated with them.

Is this an adequate conception of the virtue of charity or benevolence? Well, it passes two tests. It certainly grounds the continent/fully virtuous distinction; someone who tends to help others and to spread happiness around, but feels no joy over their joy or sorrow when she cannot help, lacks the virtue in question, though clearly coming closer to it than someone who does not tend to do such things. It also makes the virtue of charity out to be, as Foot requires, 'a virtue of attachment' which corrects 'a deficiency of motivation' common to human nature. And it is not, I think, an uncommon conception.[15] If not Hume's [16] it is at least recognizably Humean, and it is plausible to suppose that Kant's target in this passage is Hume.

It is Hume who has said that 'If any man from a cold insensibility, or narrow selfishness of temper, is unaffected with the images of human happiness or misery, he must be equally indifferent to the images of vice and virtue'[17]—which is to say that he will never do

[15] It is, I think, Lawrence Blum's. Near the end of *Friendship, Altruism and Morality* (1980) he says: 'it is possible to cast much of the arguments of this book in the language of character and of virtues. For I have regarded compassion, sympathy and concern (or concernedness) as virtuous traits of character, associated with the emotions denoted by the same terms.' He assumes that I have the virtue of compassion if I have a compassionate character, and that I have a compassionate character if, simply, I am prone to feel and act out of the emotion of compassion on suitably moving occasions. It is also, I suspect, the conception that leads Frankena to coin the phrase 'principles without traits [virtues] are impotent and traits without principles are blind', *Ethics*, 65.

[16] I do not claim that it is Hume's. Oddly enough, Hume never says explicitly what he thinks possession of a virtue consists in, and how Humean passions might figure in a virtue when rendered suitably 'calm' is a large topic.

[17] D. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1902), § 183.

what is benevolent or refrain from doing what is callous or cruel, because inclination, or 'passion', will never move him to do so. To which Kant, we may suppose, replies, echoing his words, that suppose a man were 'cold in temperament and indifferent to the sufferings of others', assuredly he *would* still find in himself a source that would enable him to do what is benevolent; he will do it, not from inclination, but from duty. So perhaps Kant's happy philanthropists have this sort of Humean benevolence.

It will indeed be true of them that, as described, they are 'of so sympathetic a temper that, without any further motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work', in Kant's words. That is just what makes them, at first sight, so attractive—just the sort of character, one might think, that one wants to visit one in hospital. And when, in action, they hit on 'what is beneficial and right', their actions deserve praise and encouragement, as he says. But there is the rub, for, as described, they are liable to go wrong in a number of ways. How come?

In Kantian terms, they are liable to go wrong because the emotions are unreliable as sources of acting well. But this is not something with which any Aristotelian need disagree. In Aristotelian terms, we reach the same conclusion at greater length and on different grounds.

We may say that sympathy, compassion, and love attach one to 'the good' of others, involving desires to benefit and not harm them. But, more cautiously, we should say that they attach one to 'the apparent good' of others (and, correspondingly to 'apparent benefit' and 'apparent harm')—their 'good' as conceived by the one who feels the emotions. And a misconception of what is 'good' for others and of what benefits and harms them may result in someone's being prompted to act wrongly by the emotions in question. (For example, compassion misguided by a misconception of 'good' may prompt someone to lie rather than tell the hurtful truth that the other needs to know.) Moreover, even when guided by a correct conception, the emotions may prompt one to actions that other considerations should tell against; perhaps this person does not merit sympathy and charitable action but others, unnoticed, do; perhaps, not having paused to think, one will wind up doing more harm than good; perhaps others would make a much better job of it (there is sometimes a sort of greediness and vanity in wanting to

be the one who helps); perhaps one *can't* help, not because it is physically impossible, but because it is morally impossible in that it involves breaking a certain promise, or violating the other's, or another's, rights. And finally, one may fail to feel the emotions (and hence to be prompted to action by them) when other emotions get in the way—hatred or embarrassment or self-pity, or, indeed, personal sorrow—and thereby fail to act as one should.

In short, the emotions of sympathy, compassion, and love, viewed simply as psychological phenomena, are no guarantee of right action, or acting well. There is nothing about them, *qua* natural inclinations, which guarantees that they occur 'in complete harmony with reason', that is, that they occur when, and only when, they should, towards the people whose circumstances should occasion them, consistently, on reasonable grounds and to an appropriate degree, as Aristotelian virtue requires. Moreover, even when they are 'fortunate enough to hit on something [in some sense] beneficial and right', they still need to be regulated by *phronesis* or practical wisdom. They may prompt one to a good end, but the agent still has to be good at deliberation to be (reasonably) sure of attaining it, and the good of others, though a good end, is not the only good to be pursued in acting well.

So if Kant's happy philanthropists, who act from inclination, not from duty, are as described, they cannot be regarded as having an Aristotelian version of the non-Aristotelian virtue of charity or benevolence. Kantians and Aristotelians agree on the fact that this sort of agent cannot be relied upon to act well. And now for the further question: can Aristotelians agree with Kant that, when even their actions do hit on 'something beneficial and right', those actions lack genuine moral worth, *because* they are done from inclination not from duty? Well, not in those terms, of course, since 'duty' and 'moral worth' are terms of art in Kant, and nothing straightforwardly corresponding to them can be found in Aristotle nor even reconstructed in neo-Aristotelianism. But, in other terms, there is a significant measure of agreement to be found.

We should not forget that Kant and Aristotle significantly share a strongly anti-Humean premise about the principles or springs of movement (or 'action' in the broad sense of the term). According to Hume, there is only one principle of action, the one we share with animals, namely passion or desire; according to both Aristotle and Kant there are two, one which we share with the other animals, and

one which we have in virtue of being rational. Of course we all know that the ideal Kantian agent acts from a sense of duty, not from inclination, but if 'inclination' is that-principle-of-movement-we-share-with-the-other-animals, then the virtuous Aristotelian agent doesn't act from inclination either, but from reason (*logos*) in the form of 'choice' *(prohairesis)*.

In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle says, 'with the other animals the action on compulsion is simple (just as in the inanimate), for they have not inclination and reason (*logos*) opposing one another, but live by inclination; but man has both, that is at a certain age, to which we attribute also the power of action; for we do not say that a child acts, or a brute either, but only a man who does things from reasoning'.[18] So, in Aristotelian terms, we could say that the happy philanthropists, supposing them to have 'Humean' benevolence as described, do not *act* in the strict sense of the term at all. They live *kata pathos,* by inclination, like an animal or a child; their 'doings' issue from passion or emotion (*pathe*) not 'choice' (*prohairesis*). And here is the sense an Aristotelian may attach to the Kantian claim that their 'actions' (in the broad sense) lack genuine moral worth because they act from inclination not from duty. It is *actions* proper, which issue from reason, that are to be assessed as virtuous (or vicious), but their 'doings' are not actions, and thereby cannot be said to be, and to be esteemed as, virtuous ones.

So, in contrast to the standard reading of this passage, I maintain that neither the esteem Kant gives to the sorrowing philanthropist nor his (relative) denigration of the happy philanthropists should be regarded as drawing Aristotle's continent/fully virtuous distinction and, implausibly, reversing the weighting he gives to it. The esteemed sorrowing philanthropist need not be regarded as having mere continence (because of Foot's points), and the denigrated happy ones should not be regarded as having full virtue (because they do not act 'from reason').

However, those who have detected something deeply wrong about Kant in this passage, wanted to sum it up by saying 'Kant cannot give a proper account of the moral significance of the emotions', and thought that, somehow, virtue ethics gives a better account, have not been quite astray. The key example in this passage is the third philanthropist, the one who is 'cold in temperament and

[18] *Eudemian Ethics* 1224a25–30.

indifferent [!] to the sufferings of others' but who nevertheless manages to do good, whose character Kant describes as having 'a moral worth and *beyond all comparison the highest*' (my italics). But, in the terms of the Aristotelian distinction, the third philanthropist clearly has, at best, continence rather than full virtue, and in reserving for his character the highest moral worth, Kant displays in this passage, not a reversal of Aristotle's weighting of the continence/full virtue distinction but a total lack of recognition of its existence. Moreover, the explanation of this failure of recognition is Kant's picture of the emotions; he does not have the understanding of them that generates that distinction. The issue is not so much over 'moral motivation', nor Kantian problems with impartiality versus friendship or love, but over the nature of full virtue and the role emotion plays in it.

The fact is that the agent with, in neo-Aristotelian terms, the full virtue of charity, does not appear in this passage. I pretended he did when following Foot on the sorrowing philanthropist, in order to make clear that Aristotelians can accommodate the point that it is sometimes hard for the agent with full virtue to act well. But, sticking to the text, the sorrowing philanthropist is someone with Humean benevolence, liable to go wrong in a variety of ways, who hitherto has acted only from inclination and now 'for the first time' acts 'for the sake of duty alone'; not a new sort of philanthropist who has been introduced in contrast to the happy ones. And, in Aristotelian terms, this is hardly a coherent picture.

Let us ask again, what is it to be the *sort* of agent who acts 'only from inclination', not from 'a sense of duty', or reason, or whatever, that is, someone who acts 'only from inclination' not just on a particular occasion but as a way of going on? (I said above that this question did not have the same answer as the question 'What does Kant take his happy philanthropists to be like?') In Aristotelian terms, as we just said, it is to be the sort of agent who lives *kata pathos,* like an animal or child—that is the way children and animals go on. But what fairly ordinary adult lives like an animal or child?

It might be thought that, for Aristotelians, the answer to that question is 'the adult with natural virtue', but Aristotle's tantalizingly brief remarks on natural virtue near the end of Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* do not clearly bear this out. He says that the natural dispositions (towards, say, temperance or courage) are

found in (some) children and animals, notes that without 'intelligence' (*nous*)[19] they are apt to be harmful, and says that if the subject with the natural disposition(s) acquires 'intelligence', his disposition, while still resembling the natural one, will now *be* virtue in the full sense. But he does not say explicitly that natural virtue can be found in adults[20] and, when we look at what he says about prodigality in Book 4, we may see the omission as deliberate. The prodigal man is said to be open-handed and eager to give, much closer to having the virtue of liberality than the illiberal or mean one; if he could be trained or otherwise changed (to give and receive 'in the right degree or manner') he would have the virtue. But there is no suggestion that he has the natural virtue of liberality; on the contrary, prodigality is said to be a vice.

Now a child who was 'open-handed and eager to give' would surely have the natural virtue of liberality; since she has not yet reached 'the age of reason', her mistakes in giving and receiving do not manifest culpable ignorance. But once one is an adult, such mistakes *do* betray culpable ignorance and one is blameworthy. An adult can't just say to herself, 'I am preserving my childish innocence, acting only from inclination with no thought of whether I am thereby acting well', and make that true by saying it. On the contrary, this would count as, culpably, being inconsiderate, feckless, and self-indulgent, as acting that way *not* 'from inclination' but from choice (*prohairesis*), having decided (for some reason) that acting in accordance with one's inclinations *was*, in general, acting well.[21] Although those who have reached 'the age of reason' do,

[19] It is not clear whether Aristotle is using *nous* here in the casual popular sense—as we use it—or in the technical sense he has been discussing earlier. But either way, it is not something the children and animals have.

[20] I do not deny that one can interpret Aristotle here as implying that adults can have natural virtue. I do deny that this is the most plausible interpretation.

[21] Gary Pendlebury has pointed out to me that this is the point Hegel is making in his ringing phrase, 'When man wills the natural, it is no longer natural.' Christine Korsgaard, in 'From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble', recognizes the plausibility of the point in relation to Kant, but is so determined to identify the philanthropists who act 'from inclination' as, in Aristotelian terms, adults with natural virtue, that she does not allow Aristotle the same insight. According to Korsgaard, 'Kant's view seems to be that the capacity for reflective choice, whether exercised or not, makes a difference to every action: adult human actions take place in the light, so to speak, of reflective thought, and can no longer be exactly like the actions of children and animals' (234, n. 21). In contrast, 'Aristotle's view suggests that a merely voluntary [but not chosen] action performed "on the spur of the moment" is not a

occasionally, act 'from inclination', they do not then act from the same state as small children, for their state includes their knowledge that such action is up for assessment as innocent or deplorable, unjustifiable or justifiable in the circumstances. Once one has acquired reason, the only thing that would clearly count as being the *sort* of agent who acts 'only from inclination' and not from reason is being the sort of agent who is akratic or 'weak-willed' in character.

I take Marcia Baron's description of a certain sort of agent in her first (so-called) 'variety of ethics of virtue'[22] to be an instructive failure to attach sense to there being a sort of fairly ordinary agent who acts 'only from inclination'. This agent, she says, 'desires to help others' and so on, but has 'no moral concepts in the abstract: *no concept* of . . . goodness' (my italics.) But what sort of fairly ordinary adult, one who has learnt to use language and engages in the practice of explaining and justifying their actions in response to questions, could conceivably desire to help others but have 'no concept of goodness'? When small children act from their inclination or desire to help others, and get it wrong, saying, for example, 'She wanted the bandage taken off', we do not ascribe a mistaken conception of goodness to them. They are too young to have a concept of goodness, and we start teaching it to them when we say such things as, 'Yes, I know you wanted to do her good, but it's not good for babies to have their wounds unbandaged; she needs it to be left on.' But an adult who has acted similarly can't excuse themselves by saying, 'I was trying to help, but have no views about whether what I did benefited or harmed her, no concept of what is good or bad for human beings.'

So full virtue, which can be possessed only by adults, cannot be

proper subject of moral judgement, since the agent is just following nature, and it is choice, not the merely voluntary that reveals character' (ibid.). I would say that, on the contrary, there is nothing in Aristotle to suggest that actions of adults which are voluntary but not chosen are not proper subjects of moral judgement, and everything against it, for the primary examples of such actions are those of the akratic or weak-willed which he certainly takes to be blameworthy.

[22] 'Varieties of Ethics of Virtue' (1985). Baron thinks that Lawrence Blum would be drawn to this picture of the virtuous agent. I am not sure she is right to suppose that Blum's compassionate agents have *no* concept of goodness, but she is certainly right that he seems quite blind to the fact that there can be right or wrong conceptions, and thereby a difference between compassion as a virtue and compassion as a tendency to be moved to action by the emotion of compassion.

a child's natural virtue with reason, in the form of practical wisdom simply added on. It is only with respect to the doings of children, brutes, and the weak-willed (and perhaps occasional, uncharacteristic, impulsive doings of virtuous adults) that it makes sense to say that they act (in the broad sense) 'from inclination'.

What, now, is to be said about the simple contrast between the two agents who visit a friend, one 'because she *is* her friend', the other 'out of a sense of duty'? With hindsight, it is revealed to be far less simple as a criticism of Kant on 'moral motivation'. If we take it as the contrast between a child moved by inclination, by the emotion of love (or friendship or sympathy—it doesn't matter which) and an adult moved by reason (either with full virtue or continence), then it is far from implausible to say the first is morally inferior to the second. But if we try to take it as embodying the Aristotelian contrast between continence and full virtue, it has been set up in the wrong way. In so far as it makes sense to talk of Aristotle's view on 'motivation', the continent and the fully virtuous have the same 'motivation'—they each act from reason in the form of 'choice' (*prohairesis*). The difference between them lies not in their 'motivation' or reasons for action, but in their condition; the fully virtuous are better disposed in relation to their emotions than the self-controlled.

We shall be looking directly at the question of 'moral motivation' in Chapters 6 and 7. Before that, I want to describe the role emotions do play in full virtue, to make good the claim that virtue ethics gives an account of the moral significance of *the* emotions, not merely a few, such as, on the one hand, regret and grief, and on the other, compassion and love.