

**Some moral motivation basics, as background to Kant**

**Act/motive**

An **act** can be morally required, or the right thing to do (Kant: “duty”) [I will call such acts “dutiful”]

Kant’s idea of duty involves the idea that human beings can perform duties simply because they are duties. The idea of duty can motivate. So “duty” can name either an act (“dutiful”) or a motive (sometimes referred to as the “sense of duty”).

**Motive:** However, a dutiful act can be performed out of a motive that is not duty. (Kant gives the example {p. 59} of a tradesman/merchant who adopts a policy of dealing fairly with his customers and not overcharging them; but he adopts this policy so not because it is the right thing to do but because he calculates that this policy will benefit his business in the long run. That is, his motive is self-interest.) So a person can perform a moral act (in the sense of an act that is morally required) from a non-moral motive.

[We are assuming that the act is **intentional**. For example, suppose a different merchant decides he wants to cheat a particular customer and he cites what he takes to be a higher price for a piece of goods. However, he miscalculates, so that the price he tells the customer is actually the correct price. In one sense he is “doing the right thing,” or performing a moral act, since the price is correct. But since he did not *intend* to charge the correct price, this is really a different case from the merchant intending to charge the right price, but from a self-interested motive, even though both involve a non-moral motive. And it is misleading to say he “did the right thing.”]

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**Moral worth in actions: Some competing possibilities in interpreting Kant’s view**

*Background:* Kant calls non-moral motives “inclinations”, although he also sometimes distinguishes an inclination—a direct desire to perform a particular act—from happiness or self-interest, a more complex idea that involves satisfying a lot of inclinations but in an ordered way so that they do not conflict.

*3 relations between an inclination and an act:*

- a. having an inclination to do the act.
- b. neutral: not having an inclination either for or against the act
- c. having an inclination against doing the act.

*The models* [to simplify the case, let us assume that there are 2 motives, one of duty, the other inclinational]

- 1. The “battle-citation” view (Henson): An act has moral worth when it is done out of duty, and against an inclination contrary to the dutiful act.
- 2. cooperation: neither motive by itself would be sufficient to motivate the agent to perform the act; but together they are sufficient, and each one is singly necessary.
- 3. “act on one” (Herman): both motives are alone sufficient to motivate the agent to perform the act, but the agent acts from only one, not the other. If she acts from the motive of duty, then the act has moral worth. [is this really possible? Herman argues yes.]
- 4. overdetermination: each motive is by itself sufficient, but the agent acts on both of them. [is this really possible?]