INTEGRITY AND IMPARTIALITY

Most of us have been brought up on the idea that moral theories divide as they are, at the root, either deontological or consequentialist. A new point of division has been emerging that places deontological (mainly Kantian) and consequentialist (mainly utilitarian) theories together against theories of virtue,1 or a conception of morality constrained at the outset by the requirements of the "personal." In a series of important essays Bernard Williams has offered striking arguments for the significance of the personal in moral thought based on the role of integrity in human activity and character. His criticisms of both Kantian and utilitarian theories for their deep-seated tendencies to undermine the integrity of persons brings to a new level of seriousness and subtlety long-standing complaints against these theories—the invasive do-gooding of utilitarianism, the coldness and severity toward normal human concerns of Kantian theory. Although Williams is inclined to find the sources of the attack on integrity in these different features of the two traditional theories, in the end his complaint against both of them turns on their demand that the moral agent submit himself to the authority of impartial value.

For example, Williams argues that the basic utilitarian requirement—that the sum of utilities in a particular course of events (including other people's actual and proposed actions) should determine what the moral agent is to do—constitutes an attack on the agent's integrity "because it undermines the way his actions and his decisions have to be seen as flowing from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified." But if the requirement of integrity is that agents be able to treat their own projects and actions as (morally) special, the problem Williams finds with utilitarianism should occur within any moral theory that gives the central place in determining how the moral agent should act to the realizing of impartial value.5

In this essay I will be concerned not at all with Williams's criticism of utilitarianism, and very little with his positive account of integrity. I want instead to examine the use he makes of the connection between integrity and the personal to criticize Kantian moral theory. Williams sees Kantian theory as impinging on integrity in two main ways: (1) it leads to an estrangement from and devaluation of our emotions, especially in the rejection of emotions as morally valued motives; and (2) it insists on dominion over even our most basic projects and intimate commitments, demanding a degree of attachment to morality that alienates us from ourselves and what we value.
Williams's criticism of the Kantian view of the emotions begins with the idea that Kant excludes emotions from those motives which can give an action moral worth because he judges them "too capricious."6 Given this view of emotions one could not expect: (a) consistency of response in morally similar cases, (b) that the emotion as motive will always be available (given that emotions cannot be summoned when needed), and (c) that the emotions will be invariant in the right way (they can be affected by morally irrelevant factors). The Kantian then compares acting from emotion with acting according to moral principle from a sense of (respect for) duty. Because one is acting on principle, morally similar cases will be treated consistently; attachment to a principle is not emotional, and so stable; and, given the moral content of the principle, morally irrelevant elements are excluded from the start.

Williams has a strong, straightforward response: emotions are not capricious—at least, not necessarily. The Kantian objection posits a crude view of the emotions themselves; it suggests that there is no way of adjusting one's emotional response in the light of other considerations, of applying some sense of proportion without abandoning emotional motivation altogether.7

Moreover, we often take emotional capriciousness to be a moral fault. Someone whose feelings of sympathy were capricious—characteristically here today and gone tomorrow—would not only fail to possess the virtue of sympathy, but could be morally criticized for not having his emotions under control.

But the most serious Kantian objection to emotions as moral motives is not captured by the idea that they are capricious. Imagine a set of emotions cured of this fault: indeed, to take an extreme, we might suppose the relevant emotions inculcated as habits of response—thereby solving any unreliability problem—and broadened in scope (as Hume suggests they can be in the mature moral agent), so we do not respond only to those we already care for, etc. Would a judicious Kantian be satisfied? I think not; for even with an agent who habitually had reliable and available emotional responses, actions from such emotions would "hit on something right and beneficial"8 only accidentally. (What he does is done deliberately [not accidentally], but that what he does is morally right is accidental.)

In acting from a motive attached to a moral principle (acting from principle, we will say"), the moral rightness of the action is, as it were, guaranteed. In action from emotion (say, responding to someone's need for help from feelings of sympathy or compassion), this is not so. It is not that someone who acted from emotion would frequently fail to act rightly: he might
and he might not. The connection between sympathy and helping someone is not accidental; the connection between helping someone and doing what is right is. All helping actions are not also right actions: perhaps the person we are moved to help is doing something we should (morally) oppose and not promote; or, less starkly, someone may be better off, even morally better off, for not being helped.

So to the extent that acting from emotion is to respond affectively to someone (or to some circumstances), the claim that emotions cannot be moral motives follows from Kant's thesis that it should not be an open question (a matter of accident or chance) whether what one does from a moral motive is morally right. There needs to be some internal connection between a moral motive and the rightness of a proposed action. This is the sort of thing I understand Kant to have had in mind when he said that maxims of action based on the motive of sympathy had no "moral content."10

Williams might accept this account of why Kant held that emotions could not do the same job as the motive of duty.11 But I think he would then want to say that even if the motive of duty guarantees the performance of morally correct actions, the exclusion of the emotions as motives stands in the way of an agent's acting in a natural and humanly appropriate way. We imagine someone offering to help a friend out of the motive of duty, where failure to help would be a moral failure. What seems lacking in such an action is some kind of appropriate attitude. The help is offered out of a sense of duty and not from a feeling of care and concern about the friend.12 The concern with doing the right thing (acting from principle) seems to get in the way, preventing direct or personal response to another's need. "You don't care about me," we can imagine the friend complaining, "you are here only out of a sense of duty."

The idea here is that the motive of duty makes "doing what is right" the agent's object of concern in acting. By contrast, an emotion like sympathy leads him to take the welfare of the other as his object. If the object of an action is its intended effect (the state of affairs the agent is moved to bring about), when the agent's object is "doing what is right," we have someone whose interest in doing a helping action is to bring about a state of affairs in which a right action has been done. Simply, the goal of the action is not "to help my friend"; the helping act is in the service of doing what is right. No wonder the friend complains. The bearing on the question of integrity seems roughly to be this. If the Kantian moral agent is required to act in this way, then to an extent, his responses to others are less personal, less an expression of his feelings for them. So the motivational structure of Kantian morality might be thought to undermine an agent's integrity by requiring that he dissociate himself from natural and appropriate responses to others. This would
be especially grave in relations of love and friendship which call for such personal response.

This objection rests, however, on the view that the function of the motive of duty is to bring about states of affairs—moral ones. Some kinds of motives do lead us to try to realize states of affairs (hunger: eating); others direct us to act from one (kind of) motive rather than another (these are sometimes called higher order motives); still others may best be described as “limiting condition” motives. These last permit us to act as we will on the condition that our action satisfies some additional requirement (that we stay within our budget, not break some rule, etc.). This is not, of course, a systematic account of motives. But attending to complexity in these matters encourages a more supple construal of the Kantian motive of duty.

In the wide range of cases, the role of the Kantian motive of duty is as such a limiting condition: it expresses the agent’s commitment that he will not act (on whatever motive, to whatever end), unless his action is morally permitted. Thus, in the case of bringing aid to someone in need, it would be quite ordinary for the action of the normal moral agent to be overdetermined: he might act from the emotion-based desire to help (meeting the other’s need would thus be the direct object of his action), and he would act from the motive of duty (the permissibility of what he was doing would be a necessary condition of his acting to help). The helping action is not thereby made the means to some further object of the agent’s concern. Refusing in advance to act in ways that are morally impermissible is not the same as taking the object in acting to be the bringing about of morally permissible states of affairs.

The claim against the motive of duty was that whenever it is present and effective in controlling the way someone acts it excludes the influence of emotions as motives, or makes the agent unable to respond directly to the need of another. When the motive of duty functions as a limiting condition, neither of these claims against it are valid. As a limiting condition, the motive of duty in fact requires the effective presence of some other motive. Its role is to prevent the agent from embarking on impermissible acts the agent has an independent interest in pursuing. So one could well be prompted by feelings of sympathy to give help, while committed (in advance, by the motive of duty) not to do this if it turned out to be morally wrong (what the other needed aid in doing was impermissible; the agent himself had more serious obligations that would be neglected if he followed his feelings here, etc.). Likewise, since the motive of duty as a limiting condition does not direct the agent to act for any end, in so far as in acting from emotions as motives the agent is able to respond “directly” to the other, the regulative presence of the motive of duty cannot alter the direction of response.

But more serious problems emerge where the motive of duty functions as a primary motive, one sufficient by itself to bring the agent to do what is
morally required. It is, after all, possible to give help from the motive of duty alone. Now, while the Kantian is committed to the idea that it is better to act out of principle with no other motive present than it is to act out of feeling or emotion with no attention to principle, it does not follow that acting in the absence of emotions is desirable. There is reason to encourage the complementary influence of emotions even when the motive of duty is sufficient to bring about the required action. An agent whose emotions cooperate with the motive of duty has a desirable kind of internal unity; it is a good thing, from the agent's point of view, that internal struggle over doing what is right is diminished. Indeed, Kant thinks we are required to engage our natural sympathetic feelings, to place their special sensitivity to others at the service of beneficence, in order to increase the range of cases where we may be of help.

The Kantian claim is rather that the complementing of the motive of duty by nonmoral motives cannot be morally necessary. That is, the motive of duty must be by itself sufficient to bring about whatever is morally required. Non-moral motives may add to the action (sweeten it, as it were), but if they are not present, nothing that could be morally required is thereby out of reach for the agent acting from the motive of duty.

Williams's objection to this fundamental Kantian claim begins with the idea that a person may need the benefit of some "human gesture": a helping act that is of value to the recipient because it is "the product of an emotional response." The problem is not that without the presence of emotion no help will be offered, but that the kind of help that can come from the motive of duty is not the kind of help that is needed. If a person can need the support of the human gesture, then it seems we might need something that cannot be had through the motive of duty acting alone. This leads Williams to argue that since it may be rational to prefer an emotion-based to a morally motivated action done by someone with both moral and emotion-based motives. The necessary condition for a dutiful action having moral worth is that the action value of moral men becomes an open question.

Is this argument compelling? Does the value of morality (of the moral man) depend on our preferring to have as much of it as we can? Must a Kantian set morality the task of providing satisfaction for all human need? I do not think a Kantian must view morality as pervasive in this way. Ubiquitous, yes. But that is the matter of requiring that in the pursuit of what we value we not act in morally prohibited ways.

Rather than consider what refinements might be introduced to improve this argument, let us see whether the deep intuition behind such an argument can be accommodated in a Kantian view of moral motivation. It will be helpful to begin by examining the question of moral worth in a case of a helping action done by someone with both moral and emotion-based motives. The
necessary condition for a dutiful action having moral worth is that the action be done from the motive of duty. When the action is motivationally overdetermined (both motives are sufficient by themselves to produce the dutiful action), it must be the motive of duty itself on which the agent acted for the action to have moral worth. That is, we would not say the helping action had moral worth unless it was the idea that it was morally required that led to the giving of help. If the moral motive is present but does not produce the action, that the action is morally required is not what brings the agent to act. Then, as it makes no difference that the moral motive was present, there is no reason to credit the action with moral worth. (Kant would say the maxim the agent in fact acted on, since it was adopted for nonmoral reasons, had no moral content.)

Now, if the agent who is to help has both sorts of motive available and sufficient, and acts in a morally worthy way, Williams would say the recipient of the needed help might still have grounds for complaint. The presence of emotions and feelings will not eliminate the sense of inappropriateness when someone who cares for him comes to his aid out of a sense that it is the morally required thing to do. The feelings seem to be secondary; the concern for him second to the moral desire to bring aid to a needy person (who he happens to be). Such a sense of being treated badly seems to me in order. But if it is rational to prefer the emotion-based action over the dutiful one (even where emotions are present), then we would have to conclude that it is not always desirable to do a dutiful action in a morally worthy way.

Can a Kantian accept that it is better, in some cases, that a morally worthy act not be done? Can he allow that there are occasions when we could act from the motive of duty but it would be better if we did not? One is inclined to say no because of the place in Kantian theory assigned to the Good Will. It is of supreme intrinsic value, it is the sole thing ("in this world or out of it") that is unqualifiedly good, and it is good willing that morally worthy actions done from the motive of duty express.

This negative answer assumes that good willing is present only in actions done from the motive of duty. However, not all things required of the Kantian agent are required actions. For example, the duty of beneficence requires that the agent adopt a general maxim expressing a willingness (a commitment) to help others sometimes. Let us suppose, without argument, that what this amounts to is that we commit ourselves to help those in real need or distress, when we can, and when the help given does not involve great cost to ourselves. A helping act is a beneficent act only if the agent offers help from the motive of duty: if the agent conceives of what he is doing as an instance of what any moral agent is required to do when he can relieve
another's distress, and acts to help for that reason. Only such helping acts have moral worth. But we are also required to adopt a general policy: to be willing to help when the need is there. As we adopt this policy, we conform to moral requirements, and do so from the motive of duty. It seems right to say that when we commit ourselves to a policy of beneficence from the motive of duty, our will is good. But this good willing is not necessarily expressed in action. Moral worth is the mark of good willing in the sphere of action. It is not the only expression of the good will.

What I am suggesting is that the good will is as much present in the settled and sure commitment to beneficence as it is in the helping action done from the motive of duty. Thus in a case where one is unable to act beneficently (you do not have the necessary resources; someone else provides the needed help), one's will is not less good, so long as the general commitment to beneficence remains. It follows, then, that if the circumstances are such that one can aid, and one does, one does not have a better will just for being able to act effectively. We probably will perform more acts with moral worth the better our will is. The number of morally worthy acts performed, however, is not proportional to the will's goodness. (Making many promises and keeping them all from the motive of duty would surely increase the number of morally worthy acts performed. It would not indicate the presence of a spectacularly good will. Moral worth is an expression of good will in our actions. It is not a quantitative measure of good will.)

The problem that initiated this discussion of moral worth and the good will was that it seemed difficult for a Kantian to allow that a helping action which might be done from the motive of duty (in a morally worthy way), would be better if done from some other motive instead. If the relationship between moral worth and good willing is as we have suggested, it is no longer obvious that the Kantian must prefer the beneficent (morally worthy) action to the helping action done from a nonmoral motive.

Imagine a case where X needs help and both A and B can help him. A's help will be prompted by the motive of duty, B's will be emotion-based. X prefers being helped by B, because B's help is an expression of his feelings for X. On what grounds might one suppose the Kantian had to think either that X ought to prefer A's help, or that it would be better (morally) that A help? Only, it seems to me, if the Kantian holds that it is always morally preferable that when an action which would have moral worth is available, it be done. This thought makes sense only if the choice not to do the action which would have moral worth made someone's will less good. But as A is prepared to act beneficently, he has a good will. It will not be improved if he acts, nor will it be diminished if, in a case like this, he refrains from action,
deferring to B, whose help will bring X greater satisfaction. The duty of beneficence directs us to take the need of others as a reason for acting. If X is helped by B, A knows that X's need is met. Beneficence requires that A be concerned with X's good; it does not require that A be the one who brings it about that X has what is good for him. So if X's need would be met by the actions of either A or B, and X would prefer the help of B, the duty of beneficence does not prevent A from deferring to B.

If there is no loss of good will when a person willing to act beneficently defers to someone whose helping action is in other ways more appropriate, the same conclusion should be possible in the case of a single person. Suppose C's friend Y needs help. C has a settled and sure commitment to helping others, and his personal feelings for Y also move him to help. There is no moral reason why C would have to help Y beneficently: that is, help him with the sense of doing what any moral agent is required to do for any person with such need. He would be acting no less well in deferring to his feelings than A was in the earlier case when he deferred to B. As C was ready to help without regard to his feelings, and so from the motive of duty, he fully satisfied the moral requirement of beneficence. We might say: given his feeling for Y, C had no need to act out of a sense of duty.22

This suggests a reason why we should seek to produce "moral men." I may prefer that my friends help me out of their feelings for me, but it is rational to prefer that they be morally prepared to help as well, so that in the absence or distraction or exhaustion of such feelings they will still be there for me. It would only be if such moral preparedness stood in the way of acting from feelings that we might feel we had to choose between people with fully developed moral sensibilities and people of feeling. I do not think it does, although the issues involved are too complex to argue the matter here. What I have hoped to show is that there is nothing in the Kantian conception of acting from the motive of duty that requires an absolute preference for actions done from the motive of duty as a primary motive. What Kantian theory does require is that the motive of duty be present and effective in its limiting condition function. The Kantian moral agent is one who is motivationally prepared not to act in ways that are wrong. This is the routine expression of his autonomy.

We began with the question whether the motive of duty in Kantian ethics undermined integrity by devaluing the direct emotional responses we have toward others (especially those with whom we have strong ties of affection). If, as we have seen, it is not morally required that we always set the motive of duty between our feelings and our response to others, Kantian theory seems able to respect this aspect of our integrity as persons.
In taking seriously the ubiquity and authority of the motive of duty in its limiting condition function, we engage with the second line of Williams's criticism of Kantian ethics. He argues that our integrity as persons is essentially connected with our having and acting on a set of projects which partially constitute our character. Such projects and commitments make us the person we are: we identify ourselves with them; they mark us out from others. The importance of these projects to our identity is not in their uniqueness, but rather in the deep way they are ours: in acting from them we express ourselves in the world. How is all this threatened by Kantian moral principles that require us to regard ourselves and others impartially?

The argument seems to be this. In order to have reason to live at all, a person must have what Williams calls “categorical desires.” These are the desires that project a person into his own future, that provide him with a basis for caring that he exist rather than not. When these categorical desires support “ground projects” (so called because acting on them is basic to life’s having meaning for the person whose projects they are), the possibility of conflict with the requirements of impartial morality has radical implications. The problem is that “impartial morality, if the conflict really does arise, must be required to win; and that cannot necessarily be a reasonable demand on the agent.” This is so because “there can come a point at which it is quite unreasonable for a man to give up, in the name of the impartial good ordering of the world of moral agents, something which is a condition of his having any interest in being around in that world at all.” Thus the demands of impartial morality cannot respect, or make room for, the necessary and deeply personal conditions of individual character and integrity.

There is surely something true in the thought that our basic commitments and loves may be such that they make us morally vulnerable: in order to sustain our ground projects we may find ourselves wanting to do something that impartial morality condemns. And knowing that what we would do is wrong may not, in these cases, seem sufficient reason for us to desist. But Williams wants to claim something stronger. Suppose our ground projects are what give us a reason to go on with our lives at all. Then if impartial morality can interfere with the pursuit of a person’s ground project, there will be cases where an agent could not have reason to act as morality requires, for the only reasons he will have for acting are those that direct him to the impermissible pursuit of his ground project. It is not just that some projects that give meaning to lives are immoral; any basic project, even the selfless concern for justice, may lead one into conflict with other moral commitments. So the
Kantian idea that a rational agent will always have reason to act as morality requires is false. Since having ground projects is a condition of character (of having a character), the demands of impartial morality and those of character may conflict in deep ways.

This sketch of the relations between the conditions of character and morality places morality outside the projects that give meaning to a life, even when the projects the agent identifies with have moral content. However, an attachment to impartial morality can itself be a project that gives a life meaning. It is a defining feature of Kantian morality that one basic attachment, one self-defining project, be morality itself. (Kant describes the moral agent as someone who has a conception of himself as a self-legislating member of a kingdom of ends.) As one can define oneself in part through a variety of impersonally described roles (American, feminist, university professor), so living a moral life can be partially constitutive of character.

Williams could accept this much. The threat to character remains because being one among a set of ground projects does not capture the authoritative claim Kantian morality makes. It is not the usual sort of project. Its nature and purpose are to judge and regulate all of a person's activity. That is why it may conflict with what a person most wants to do (being moral is not, in a certain sense, a doing at all), even when a person has no more than a reasonable attachment to morality.

In his essay "Moral Luck," Williams sets before us a hypothetical Gauguin figure whose basic project is to be a certain sort of painter: in order for his life to have meaning, for him to want to go on living, he has to paint. And in order for him to paint the way he must, he cannot fulfill his (acknowledged) obligations to his family. Let us take it that under these conditions, impartial morality says "no" to his pursuit of his life's work. (It does not matter whether it would in this case; we can always imagine another where the moral transgression is more grave.) An attachment to morality (in the way impartial morality would have it) then stands in the way of Gauguin's acting on those desires with which he is most deeply identified. If I understand Williams, it is at this point that he wants to say such a demand cannot be reasonable: this is where you cannot ask a person to give up the activity constitutive of his being the person he is.

Williams is not misreading Kantian morality here. It does involve a requirement that one be prepared to set aside one's deepest projects if they require impermissible actions. The question is whether a moral agent committed to morality in this way would have his integrity as a person threatened. Utilitarianism is thought by Williams to threaten integrity because it demands that a person give up what his ground project requires in a given case "just if that conflicts with what he is required to do as an impersonal utility-maximizer when all the causally relevant considerations are in."
he can act as he would, the utilitarian agent must accept as the justifying reason for his action that it turned out to be the impartially preferred path. So he must not only be prepared to interrupt his projects when utility calls, he must also pursue his projects without the sense that what makes them worth his pursuing is connected to the fact that they are his.

The Kantian idea of morality as a limiting condition on the pursuit of ends does not have this result. Whereas utilitarianism places a moral requirement on all actions (that they maximize value relative to the available options), Kantian morality imposes a regulative ideal: some of the actions and goals one may choose will be judged impermissible. Those actions and projects that are judged permissible are not distanced from the agent's primary interest in them by that fact. He is not allowed to act only on condition that his action realize some impartial value in the world.

For morality to respect the conditions of character (one's integrity as a person), it must respect the agent's attachments to his projects in a way that permits his actions to be the expression of those attachments. Kantian morality, understood as a morality of limits, can do this. What it cannot do is honor unconditional attachments. The moral agent knows in advance that neither his identification of himself with a project, nor the (true) fact that if he is unable to act as he wants his life will be emptied of meaning for him, are sufficient to justify his acting against (serious) moral requirements. Indeed, given the possibility of grossly immoral projects or vile actions taken for the sake of morally neutral projects, it does not seem rational to want it otherwise.

While it is (psychologically) true that attachments to projects can be unconditional, it is not a requirement of the conditions of having a character that they be so. Unconditional attachments can be as much at odds with one's loves, one's other interests, even with the physical limitations on action, as they may be in conflict with limits imposed by morality. One who shapes or modifies his projects in light of physical and material limitations is attached, but not unconditionally, to his projects. That demands of a child may limit the possible scope of the parent's work does not prevent success at work from being a character-defining ground project. The Kantian argument is that at the limit, where conflict with morality is serious and unavoidable, morality must win. The "victory" of morality does not diminish the value of the project (unless it is the project itself that is judged immoral), and so does not constitute an attack on the agent's integrity. It is rather an indication that in this world, or in these circumstances, there is no permissible way to continue the project.

The attachment to morality is supposed to be unconditional. But this is compatible with the conditions of character: the moral agent is to be one who has a conception of himself as someone who will not pursue his projects in
ways that are morally impermissible. Such restraint is, in our ordinary way of speaking, a matter of integrity. For Kant, or for a Kantian like Rawls, commitment to impartial morality acknowledges the respect owed other persons. In his willingness to shape and limit his projects so that they do not conflict with principles of respect for others, the moral person expresses his conception of himself as a member of a community of equal moral persons.

This is not an argument that explains why a person should have a moral sense of himself. What I am arguing is that Kantian morality can be (and is meant to be taken as) defining of a sense of self, and that in having a moral character, a person will not have given up something in the way of integrity that standing aside from impartial morality would allow. In the light of this, it seems reasonable to think of ground projects as having more than one kind of structure. Some will direct us to goal oriented courses of action; others will have us act with respect to the needs of another. But pursuits and commitments are not the only basic attachments. We can have an idea of the whole: a project whose point is to shape and limit other projects so that they are compatible with an ideal sense of how a person ought to live. This is the kind of place Kantian morality is supposed to have.

In fact the appeals that Williams makes which would tell against this conclusion do not seem convincing. Two of these can be dealt with somewhat briefly. He argues that we do not condemn Gauguin because we value his painting. "The moral spectator has to consider the fact that he has reason to be glad that Gauguin succeeded, and hence that he tried . . . ."28 If we are glad that he tried, then we must be glad that morality is not always victorious. This would make it seem (intuitively, at least) that we are sometimes ready to reject the idea that the proper place for morality is as a most basic limit on actions. This argument involves a confusion. Given that Gauguin's paintings exist, that they are objects in our world, we value and enjoy them. It does not follow from this that we are committed to valuing whatever led to their production. Nor, even, that we have to think a world with Gauguin's paintings in it is preferable to one without them. While valuing the work, it would not be irrational to judge that the moral cost of the paintings had been too high.

Williams also makes much out of the fact that his Gauguin could not rationally regret his choice to abandon his family and pursue his art.29 As Gauguin took success at painting to be the project of his life, the achievement of success gives his life its deepest significance to him, and so constitutes the only standpoint from which he can assess previous choices. But couldn't this just mean that Gauguin is deeply satisfied with how his life turned out? Why must the moral spectator agree? The Kantian need not deny the possibility of deeply satisfying lives that have been built on morally impermissible actions.
Likewise, he need not deny that in altering his hierarchy of values, Gauguin put his action beyond the reach of moral criticism. What the Kantian must hold is that despite all of this, it is possible that Gauguin was wrong in acting as he did.

A third appeal fastens on the procedures of impartial judgment on the grounds that they lead an agent to make practical decisions in ways that compromise his integrity. In developing this idea Williams borrows an example from Charles Fried designed to show the role of deep personal attachments in moral deliberation. There is a shipwreck, and a number of people are drowning, including the agent’s wife. A moral agent following procedures of impartial judgment may determine that when there is more than one person in danger, it is morally permissible for him to save his wife if only one person can be saved. Williams does not object to the conclusion, but balks at the idea that morality would require judging first that it is permissible, making the decision to save a loved one’s life conditional on its perceived permissibility.

... this construction provides the agent with one thought too many: it might have been hoped (for instance, by his wife) that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be the thought that it was his wife, not that it was his wife and that in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one’s wife.30

There are things his wife might have hoped that I do not think we need to take very seriously. She might have hoped his love for her was such that he would save her, without a second thought, at no matter what cost to whom. Or, she might have thought that being his wife made her special, and therefore he would not need to think of anyone else. What fits with Williams’s argument is the idea that she might have hoped his saving her would be an expression of his love for her. The thought that he acts for her on the condition that it is permissible to save someone you are attached to signals a willingness not to save her if that were morally necessary. This willingness makes his saving her something other than an expression of his attachment. Williams concludes:

somewhere (and if not in this case, where?) one reaches the necessity that such things as deep attachments to other persons will express themselves in the world in ways which cannot at the same time embody the impartial view.31

The issue here is the nature of the space Kantian morality leaves for non-moral reasons, given the ultimate authority of moral over nonmoral considerations. Williams is quite right in thinking that the moralization of personal relations involves “righteous absurdity.” To preserve the domain of the personal, however, it is not necessary to divorce it from the moral. A Kantian might hold the following sort of view. While it is true that moral reasons are always relevant (and authoritative where they apply), part of being a moral
person involves the recognition of the limits of the moral: when moral reasons are not the appropriate reasons to act on. On the other hand, although non-moral reasons are often in order, their authority is limited, or conditioned by, morality. A moral person knows that he cannot just appeal to his love for another as a justifying reason in all circumstances: its fittingness as a justifying reason is itself a moral matter (although that does not make it a moral reason when it is appropriate).

Let us return to the “saving the spouse” case with the above in mind. Suppose we asked, after the fact, “Why did you save her?” We would get the answer, “Because I love her,” or “Because she’s my wife.” These are the reasons on which one acts, and the actions they support express the relationships they refer to. Moreover, it is morally appropriate (not in any way inappropriate) in these circumstances to act on these reasons. None of this is undermined by the agent’s awareness (he need hardly be thinking of it) that in some circumstances the reason would not be sufficient to justify his action. (Suppose he would have to throw a child overboard to reach her.) It is in this sense that “the thought that it was his wife” is not separate from moral considerations. It would be one thing if the husband paused to weigh the claims of his wife against those of others he might save; that would speak against his having the kind of attachment that might be hoped for by his wife. What the Kantian requires is only that he not view his desire to save his wife as an unconditionally valid reason. This does not stand in the way of the direct expression of attachments in action.

III

Something more needs to be said in defense of the claim that Kantian morality can attend to the elements of individual character and circumstance necessary to the maintenance of personal integrity. Generations of critics, after all, have begun from the sense that it is just obvious that the particular and the personal were what was abstracted from in Kantian moral judgments. The flavor of this criticism of Kantian “abstract” morality is nicely expressed by Stuart Hampshire:

An abstract morality places a prepared grid upon conduct and upon a person’s activities and interests, and thereafter one only tends to see the pieces of his conduct and life as they are divided by lines on the grid.

And again, contrasting Aristotelian and Kantian conceptions of morality:

The contrast can be represented as that between noticing a great number and variety of independently variable features of particular situations on the one hand, and on the other hand, bringing a few, wholly explicit principles to bear
upon situations, which have to be subsumed under the principles, as in some kinds of legal reasoning.\textsuperscript{34}

This is not a complaint that the moral point of view is removed from the agent's point of view; the concern is that in directing the moral agent or spectator to abstract from the particular context and personal texture of an action prior to assessment, something of moral relevance is eliminated. The consequence of this could be that abstractly similar cases which are judged in the same way in fact ought to be judged differently because of features lost in the abstraction; or, even when the final assessment of an action is unaffected, the way of reaching the conclusion ought to acknowledge particulars of context and person. To put this in Williams's terms: if to have a certain character is to have specific loves, projects, etc., then procedures of moral assessment which involve the impartial employment of abstract rules cannot register the importance of considerations of character in our moral thought.

This criticism of Kantian ethics depends upon a failure to distinguish moral rules from (what I shall call) moral principles. Rules are, by their nature, general. They are appropriate when there is a need to introduce uniformity in action. So rules are designed to ignore detail, and focus on "relevant" similarities in cases: rules must include general descriptions of persons and states of affairs to perform their sortal functions. And moral rules, as they are to be more than action-guiding, are presented as imperatives: Keep promises; Never lie; Extend charity to the elderly and infirm, etc. Such rules are abstract, impartial, and impersonal.

The tradition notwithstanding, the procedures of moral judgment in Kant's ethics do not call for the impartial application of general moral rules. The categorical imperative is a regulative moral principle which sets a standard to which actions (actually, maxims of actions) are to conform. It is a higher-order principle, not an abstract and general rule. Instead of including very general descriptions of actions under which the particular is to be subsumed, it provides a procedure for structuring the particular in a moral way. That is, since the categorical imperative is used to assess maxims, and maxims are the subjective principles on which agents in fact act, when an agent brings his maxim to the categorical imperative procedure, he is to include in it just that detail of person and circumstance necessary to describe his action.\textsuperscript{35}

The outcome of the categorical imperative procedure is to tell the agent whether the conditions he has taken as relevant in determining his course of action in fact give moral warrant to what he would do.

The moment of employment of the categorical imperative as a principle of judgment is characteristically when the agent is drawn to make an exception for himself to an acknowledged moral rule.\textsuperscript{36} That is, he knows his action
falls under a rule, yet he is inclined to believe that he is justified in acting against it. For the procedure to be effective, the maxim he brings to the test must include whatever makes the agent (sincerely) think his case is exceptional. The categorical imperative test procedure will, in effect, impose a moral analysis on an agent's projects—reweighing the relevant particulars to see if they have the justifactory significance the agent believes they do.

It is Kant's conviction that the usual use of the particulars of character and circumstance is to support "special pleading" for moral exemptions. And I think it is true that he supposes the categorical imperative will show that most of these, when sincere, rather show the force of moral temptation than any great variety in the judgment of moral permissibility. How such judgments would work out is beside the point. The central acknowledgment that the particulars of person and place need to be examined (and not merely abstracted from) leaves it open for them to make a moral difference.

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NOTES


5. That "agent-impartiality," and not utilitarianism's treating states of affairs as the ultimate bearers of all value, is at the root of Williams's dissatisfaction with utilitarianism is also argued by Nancy Davis in "Utilitarianism and Responsibility," *Ratio*, 22 (1980): 24–25.


7. Ibid.

8. This is Kant's phrase. See The *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. IV, 398.
9. The phrases 'acting from principle', 'acting from the motive of duty', and 'acting from the moral motive' are used interchangeably throughout; the choice is
determined by the issue being discussed.

10. An extended argument for this can be found in my "On the Value of Acting

11. Since I am introducing detail into arguments Williams only has sketched, I am
not sure he would develop the arguments in just these ways.

12. The fault here is not necessarily one of moral self-indulgence. The agent can
want to do the right thing without also being concerned with his own moral display,
that he is the one doing something right.

13. The motive of duty cannot, as a primary motive, direct the agent to merely per-
missible actions, as it is a matter of moral indifference whether such actions are per-
formed. In cases of dutiful action, the motive of duty can be the primary motive (with
other motives present); something else can be the primary motive and the motive of
duty functions as a limiting condition only; or, a nonmoral motive can lead to the per-
formance of a dutiful action without any involvement of the motive of duty (or
knowledge that the action is required).

I argue against the view that struggle with recalcitrant inclination is any special mark
of moral virtue.


16. Kant does not hold that morality is the sole source of value. The Highest Good,
after all, requires happiness as well as moral goodness.


18. Ibid.


20. There is usually good reason to think that if someone never offers help, he could
not sincerely be committed to beneficence. But it is possible that a combination of un-
likely circumstances, lack of resources, or a person's own great need, would make his
never helping anyone compatible with a strong commitment to beneficence.

21. One might argue that a general policy commitment involves a continuing act of
the will, and so it is the act of willing that has moral worth. I would resist this idea,
since it is more natural to describe such moral commitments in the language of virtue.
I take this to be the policy Kant adopts in his Doctrine of Virtue.

22. We would not say this if the moral element in the case involved a perfect duty,
where the obligation is to do something. If I have made a promise to do something for
you, it matters that I be the one who does it (or arranges it)—its being done by
someone else is not just as good, and it matters that it be done with the sense that I am
doing what I promised. This need not be grudging; but if I have no sense of doing what
I promised, then I have failed to appreciate something of what it means to make a
promise. (Imagine someone who keeps promises to avoid hurting others' feelings.)

23. Williams, “Persons, Character and Morality,” p. 11.


25. Ibid.

26. See John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory: The Dewey Lectures
1980," Journal of Philosophy, 78 (1980), for a contemporary elaboration of this
feature of Kantianism.

29. Ibid., pp. 27–36.
31. Ibid.
32. We do not want to forget that a normal moral agent knows things: he does not have to figure out whether it is permissible to save his wife. He knows it is, and that partly explains why he can act spontaneously, from feeling, and yet according to principle. No less a non-Kantian authority than Aristotle made this the charge of a moral education.
34. Ibid., p. 28.
35. To forestall the objection that there is no evidence for this sort of account of maxims in Kant’s writing, let me offer the following example from his Doctrine of Virtue. It comes in a note where Kant is objecting to the “superficial wisdom” in moral formulas such as “happy are those who keep the mean”:

What distinguishes avarice (as a vice) from thrift (as a virtue) is not that avarice carries thrift too far but that avarice has an entirely different principle (maxim): that of economizing, not for the sake of enjoying one’s wealth, but merely for the sake of possessing it, while denying oneself any enjoyment from it. In the same way, the vice of prodigality is not to be sought in the excessive enjoyment of one’s wealth but in the bad maxim which makes the use of wealth the sole end, without regard for maintaining the wealth. (Ak. VI, 403n)

For the purposes of this argument what we need to attend to is the fact that maxims are meant by Kant to describe particular agent’s willings; in order to know just what a particular agent has willed in a given case, you would need to know more than what could be abstractly and impersonally described.
36. Here the rule is thought of as a highly reliable moral guideline. The moment of employment of the categorical imperative is clearly described in each of the four well-known examples in Kant’s Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.
37. I am grateful to Miles Morgan for many helpful discussions and suggestions about this paper.