they are "our sovereign masters." Kant argues that reason can be sovereign, at least some of the time. When reason governs our will, we are not driven by the desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Our capacity for reason is bound up with our capacity for freedom. Taken together, these capacities make us distinctive, and set us apart from mere animal existence. They make us more than mere creatures of appetite.

What Is Freedom?

To make sense of Kant's moral philosophy, we need to understand what he means by freedom. We often think of freedom as the absence of obstacles to doing what we want. Kant disagrees. He has a more stringent, demanding notion of freedom.

Kant reasons as follows: When we, like animals, seek pleasure or the avoidance of pain, we aren't really acting freely. We are acting as the slaves of our appetites and desires. Why? Because whenever we are seeking to satisfy our desires, everything we do is for the sake of some end given outside us. I go this way to assuage my hunger, that way to slake my thirst.

Suppose I'm trying to decide what flavor of ice cream to order: Should I go for chocolate, vanilla, or espresso toffee crunch? I may think of myself as exercising freedom of choice, but what I'm really doing is trying to figure out which flavor will best satisfy my preferences—preferences I didn't choose in the first place. Kant doesn't say it's wrong to satisfy our preferences. His point is that, when we do so, we are not acting freely, but acting according to a determination given outside us. After all, I didn't choose my desire for espresso toffee crunch rather than vanilla. I just have it.

Some years ago, Sprite had an advertising slogan: "Obey your thirst." Sprite's ad contained (inadvertently, no doubt) a Kantian insight. When I pick up a can of Sprite (or Pepsi or Coke), I act out of obedience, not freedom. I am responding
I am obeying my thirst.

People often argue over the role of n
behavior. Is the desire for Sprite (or othe
the genes or induced by advertising? For K
point. Whenever my behavior is biologi
conditioned, it is not truly free. To act
to act autonomously. And to act autonom
law I give myself—not according to the
convention.

One way of understanding what Ka
mously is to contrast autonomy with its o
to capture this contrast—*heteronomy*. Wh
according to determinations given outsid
tion: When you drop a billiard ball, it falls
billiard ball is not acting freely; its mover
of nature—in this case, the law of gravity.

Suppose that I fall (or am pushed) fr
ing. As I hurtle toward the earth, no on
freely; my movement is governed by the l
liard ball.

Now suppose I land on another person
not be morally responsible for the unfor
the billiard ball would be morally respo
height and hit someone on the head. In
ject—me or the billiard ball—acting fre
object is governed by the law of gravity.
there can be no moral responsibility.

Here, then, is the link between freed
idea of morality. To act freely is not to cho
end; it is to choose the end itself, for its
man beings can make and billiard balls (a

obedience, not freedom. I am responding to a desire I haven't chosen. I am obeying my thirst.

People often argue over the role of nature and nurture in shaping behavior. Is the desire for Sprite (or other sugary drinks) inscribed in the genes or induced by advertising? For Kant, this debate is beside the point. Whenever my behavior is biologically determined or socially conditioned, it is not truly free. To act freely, according to Kant, is to act autonomously. And to act autonomously is to act according to a law I give myself—not according to the dictates of nature or social convention.

One way of understanding what Kant means by acting autonomously is to contrast autonomy with its opposite. Kant invents a word to capture this contrast—*heteronomy*. When I act heteronomously, I act according to determinations given outside of me. Here is an illustration: When you drop a billiard ball, it falls to the ground. As it falls, the billiard ball is not acting freely; its movement is governed by the laws of nature—in this case, the law of gravity.

Suppose that I fall (or am pushed) from the Empire State Building. As I hurtle toward the earth, no one would say that I am acting freely; my movement is governed by the law of gravity, as with the billiard ball.

Now suppose I land on another person and kill that person. I would not be morally responsible for the unfortunate death, any more than the billiard ball would be morally responsible if it fell from a great height and hit someone on the head. In neither case is the falling object—me or the billiard ball—acting freely. In both cases, the falling object is governed by the law of gravity. Since there is no autonomy, there can be no moral responsibility.

Here, then, is the link between freedom as autonomy and Kant's idea of morality. To act freely is not to choose the best means to a given end; it is to choose the end itself, for its own sake—a choice that human beings can make and billiard balls (and most animals) cannot.

Persons and Things

It is 3:00 a.m., and your college roommate asks you why you are up late pondering moral dilemmas involving runaway trolleys.

"To write a good paper in Ethics 101," you reply.

"But why write a good paper?" your roommate asks.

"To get a good grade."

"But why care about grades?"

"To get a job in investment banking."

"But why get a job in investment banking?"

"To become a hedge fund manager someday."

"But why be a hedge fund manager?"

"To make a lot of money."

"But why make a lot of money?"

"To eat lobster often, which I like. I am, after all, a sentient creature. *That's* why I'm up late thinking about runaway trolleys!"

This is an example of what Kant would call heteronomous determination—doing something for the sake of something else, for the sake of something else, and so on. When we act heteronomously, we act for the sake of ends given outside us. We are instruments, not authors, of the purposes we pursue.

Kant's notion of autonomy stands in stark contrast to this. When we act autonomously, according to a law we give ourselves, we do something for its own sake, as an end in itself. We cease to be instruments of purposes given outside us. This capacity to act autonomously is what gives human life its special dignity. It marks out the difference between persons and things.

For Kant, respecting human dignity means treating persons as ends in themselves. This is why it is wrong to use people for the sake of the general welfare, as utilitarianism does. Pushing the heavy man onto the track to block the trolley uses him as a means, and so fails to respect him as an end in himself. An enlightened utilitarian (such as Mill) may refuse to push the man, out of concern for secondary effects that would diminish utility in the long run. (People w on bridges, etc.) But Kant would maintain to desist from pushing. It still treats the w ment, an object, a mere means to the hap live, not for his own sake, but so that oth without a second thought.

This raises the question of what gives takes us from Kant's specially demanding ic demanding notion of morality.

What's Moral? Look for t

According to Kant, the moral worth of a consequences that flow from it, but in the i is done. What matters is the motive, and t tain kind. What matters is doing the right for some ulterior motive.

"A good will is not good because of wha Kant writes. It is good in itself, whether or this will is entirely lacking in power to carr utmost effort it still accomplishes nothing shine like a jewel for its own sake as somet in itself."[4]

For any action to be morally good, "it *conform* to the moral law—it must also be d law."[5] And the motive that confers moral wo of duty, by which Kant means doing the rig

In saying that only the motive of duty action, Kant is not yet saying what particul yet telling us what the supreme principle simply observing that, when we assess the we assess the motive from which it's dor produces.[6]

diminish utility in the long run. (People would soon be afraid to stand on bridges, etc.) But Kant would maintain that this is the wrong reason to desist from pushing. It still treats the would-be victim as an instrument, an object, a mere means to the happiness of others. It lets him live, not for his own sake, but so that other people can cross bridges without a second thought.

This raises the question of what gives an action moral worth. It takes us from Kant's specially demanding idea of freedom to his equally demanding notion of morality.

What's Moral? Look for the Motive

According to Kant, the moral worth of an action consists not in the consequences that flow from it, but in the intention from which the act is done. What matters is the motive, and the motive must be of a certain kind. What matters is doing the right thing because it's right, not for some ulterior motive.

"A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes," Kant writes. It is good in itself, whether or not it prevails. "Even if . . . this will is entirely lacking in power to carry out its intentions; if by its utmost effort it still accomplishes nothing . . . even then it would still shine like a jewel for its own sake as something which has its full value in itself."[4]

For any action to be morally good, "it is not enough that it should *conform* to the moral law—it must also be done for the sake of the moral law."[5] And the motive that confers moral worth on an action is the motive of duty, by which Kant means doing the right thing for the right reason.[6]

In saying that only the motive of duty confers moral worth on an action, Kant is not yet saying what particular duties we have. He is not yet telling us what the supreme principle of morality commands. He's simply observing that, when we assess the moral worth of an action, we assess the motive from which it's done, not the consequences it produces.[6]

If we act out of some motive other than duty, such as self-interest, for example, our action lacks moral worth. This is true, Kant maintains, not only for self-interest but for any and all attempts to satisfy our wants, desires, preferences, and appetites. Kant contrasts motives such as these—he calls them "motives of inclination"—with the motive of duty. And he insists that only actions done out of the motive of duty have moral worth.

The calculating shopkeeper and the Better Business Bureau

Kant offers several examples that bring out the difference between duty and inclination. The first involves a prudent shopkeeper. An inexperienced customer, say, a child, goes into a grocery store to buy a loaf of bread. The grocer could overcharge him—charge him more than the usual price for a loaf of bread—and the child would not know. But the grocer realizes that, if others discovered he took advantage of the child in this way, word might spread and hurt his business. For this reason, he decides not to overcharge the child. He charges him the usual price. So the shopkeeper does the right thing, but for the wrong reason. The only reason he deals honestly with the child is to protect his reputation. The shopkeeper acts honestly only for the sake of self-interest; the shopkeeper's action lacks moral worth.[7]

A modern-day parallel to Kant's prudent shopkeeper can be found in the recruiting campaign of the Better Business Bureau of New York. Seeking to enlist new members, the BBB sometimes runs a full-page ad in the *New York Times* with the headline "Honesty is the best policy. It's also the most profitable." The text of the ad leaves no mistake about the motive being appealed to.

> Honesty. It's as important as any other asset. Because a business that deals in truth, openness, and fair value cannot help but do well. It is toward this end [that] we support the Better Business Bureau. Come join us. And profit from it.

Kant would not condemn the Better Bu
honest business dealing is commendable. B
moral difference between honesty for its ow
sake of the bottom line. The first is a princip
prudential one. Kant argues that only the pri
with the motive of duty, the only motive tha
an action.

Or consider this example: Some years ag
land sought to combat a widespread cheatin
dents to sign pledges not to cheat. As an in
took the pledge were offered a discount card
25 percent at local shops.[8] No one knows h
ised not to cheat for the sake of a discount at
most of us would agree that bought honesty
discounts might or might not succeed in r
cheating; the moral question, however, is wh
by the desire for a discount or a monetary
Kant would say no.)

These cases bring out the plausibility of
motive of duty—doing something because
useful or convenient—confers moral worth
ther examples bring out a complexity in Kan

Staying alive

The first involves the duty, as Kant sees it, t
Since most people have a strong inclinatio
duty rarely comes into play. Most of the pr
serve our lives therefore lack moral conten
and keeping our cholesterol in check are p
ones.

Kant acknowledges that it is often difficu
people to act as they do. And he recognizes

Kant would not condemn the Better Business Bureau; promoting honest business dealing is commendable. But there is an important moral difference between honesty for its own sake and honesty for the sake of the bottom line. The first is a principled position, the second a prudential one. Kant argues that only the principled position is in line with the motive of duty, the only motive that confers moral worth on an action.

Or consider this example: Some years ago, the University of Maryland sought to combat a widespread cheating problem by asking students to sign pledges not to cheat. As an inducement, students who took the pledge were offered a discount card good for savings of 10 to 25 percent at local shops.[8] No one knows how many students promised not to cheat for the sake of a discount at the local pizza place. But most of us would agree that bought honesty lacks moral worth. (The discounts might or might not succeed in reducing the incidence of cheating; the moral question, however, is whether honesty motivated by the desire for a discount or a monetary reward has moral worth. Kant would say no.)

These cases bring out the plausibility of Kant's claim that only the motive of duty—doing something because it's right, not because it's useful or convenient—confers moral worth on an action. But two further examples bring out a complexity in Kant's claim.

Staying alive

The first involves the duty, as Kant sees it, to preserve one's own life. Since most people have a strong inclination to continue living, this duty rarely comes into play. Most of the precautions we take to preserve our lives therefore lack moral content. Buckling our seat belts and keeping our cholesterol in check are prudential acts, not moral ones.

Kant acknowledges that it is often difficult to know what motivates people to act as they do. And he recognizes that motives of duty and