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Effort and Moral Worth

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> As to it's being to [G. E. Moore's] '*credit*' to be childlike, – I can't understand that; unless it's also to a *child's* credit. For you aren't talking of the innocence a man has fought for, but of an innocence which comes from a natural absence of a temptation.
>
> – Wittgenstein[1]

Many of us feel the pull of Wittgenstein's intuition that effort deserves moral credit. There's something admirable about effort expended towards some morally good end. But many of us also feel the pull of the opposite intuition – that the "natural absence of a temptation" deserves moral credit as well. I believe that we can consistently hold both of these intuitions. I also believe that exploring them leads to some interesting entailments about the moral assessment of effort. It's this – the moral assessment of effort – which I'll explore in this paper. Not everyone will share all the intuitions I'll attempt to elicit; but I take it that my intuitions are not idiosyncratic, and in any case it will be worthwhile for the reader to explore the specific intuitions he or she has. Some readers who don't begin with my intuitions may be persuaded to agree with them later.

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, quoted in Malcolm (1984, p. 116).

Consider two agents, both of whom perform the same rather ordinary morally good act: they donate $100 to UNICEF. Both donate for the same good reason: they want to help disadvantaged children, and both share the belief that money donated to UNICEF is an effective means to this goal. We will suppose that this is a reasonable belief – one both agents reached through considered moral reflection on the information available. Some of us will think the donation is morally required, others that it is supererogatory or perhaps one of various ways of fulfilling an imperfect duty, but this shouldn't matter much: intuitions about the agents will be similar, if perhaps of different magnitude, whatever one's views here. Both agents are in the same reasonably decent economic circumstances: $100 is a non-trivial amount of money for both, but not enough to deprive them of ordinary necessities. In fact, the only difference between the two agents is the *effort* involved in the two donations.

Janette, the first agent, effortlessly makes her donation. As she makes out the check, she feels no internal psychological resistance – no temptation to spend the money on something for herself or her family, and no temptation to add it to her savings account. She seems to have no morally bad desires working against her morally good desires. Sharing her resources is easy for Janette.

Nigel, on the other hand, struggles to make out his check. Like Janette, he has reflectively decided to donate to UNICEF and believes his decision to be a

good decision. But Nigel finds himself fighting a variety of inclinations against donating. Among them is a standard array of selfish desires to keep the money or buy something else. It's far worse than this, however. Nigel finds himself with very strong – even pathological – desires not to donate. Suppose that Nigel has some sort of *phobia* against donating: like the claustrophobic who finds it enormously difficult to enter a crowded elevator, Nigel is pathologically reluctant to part with his resources. For Nigel to act on his decision to donate is for him to trigger psychic turmoil and excruciating nightmares. Nigel believes that these responses are irrational, but this belief does not make them go away. Nevertheless, with enormous – even heroic – effort, Nigel mails his check.

Many of us would assign positive moral worth to both acts, even though Janette acted effortlessly and Nigel only with enormous effort. By "moral worth," I mean a second-order moral evaluation: some act is morally worthy if it meets some criterion for praise.[2] There are many candidate criteria for moral worth; among the factors in these criteria are motives, intentions, and effort. For now I'm

[2] For locutionary convenience, in this paper I will talk about the moral worth of actions. Agents and traits can also have moral worth. For a broader treatment of moral worth and its objects, see Arpaly (2004), and *{self-identifying reference omitted}*.

only interested in effort.[3] Assume Janette and Nigel are equivalent in other ways, but on opposite ends of the spectrum with respect to effort. Strangely, both Janette and Nigel's acts seem morally worthy and admirable. If so, effort is a more complex notion than is generally thought in discussions of moral worth. After more exploration, I think we'll be able to explain our apparently paradoxical evaluations of the moral worth of Janette and Nigel.

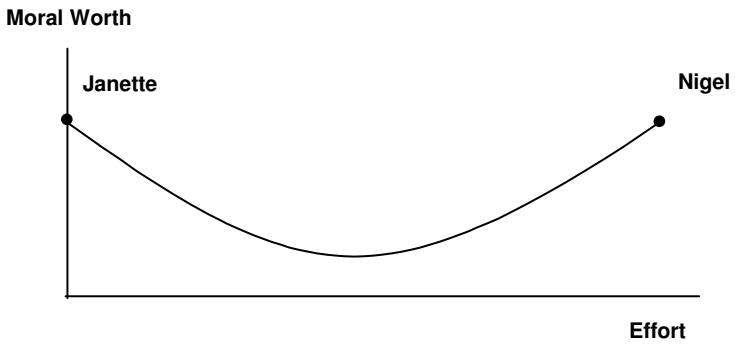
1. Effort Required and Effort Expended

Janette and Nigel appear to be on two ends of a spectrum of effort. How would we evaluate other cases along the spectrum? I believe that Figure 1 tracks many initial intuitions about effort. The Y-axis is moral worth; the greater an act's moral worth, the higher we plot it on the Y-axis. (Remember that for now we're only interested in moral worth as it is affected by effort). The X-axis is effort. The greater the effort involved in an act, the more to the right we plot it on the X-axis. Suppose that Janette donates effortlessly; this effortlessness has a high moral worth, as the diagram reflects. Now: what happens to our evaluations of moral worth as we imagine more and more effort involved in (successfully)

[3] Unless otherwise noted, when I use the term "moral worth," I'll only be talking about moral worth with respect to effort. Other factors are certainly relevant to moral worth; but I'll ignore them for now.

performing the same act – donating $100 to UNICEF? It seems to me that the moral worth of the action goes down; the more effort required to perform the act, the less admirable it seems. At some point, however, the trajectory changes. Once *enough* effort is expended, we seem to evaluate the moral worth of the act more and more positively. The more it approaches heroic levels, effort appears to be highly morally worthy after all.

Figure 1



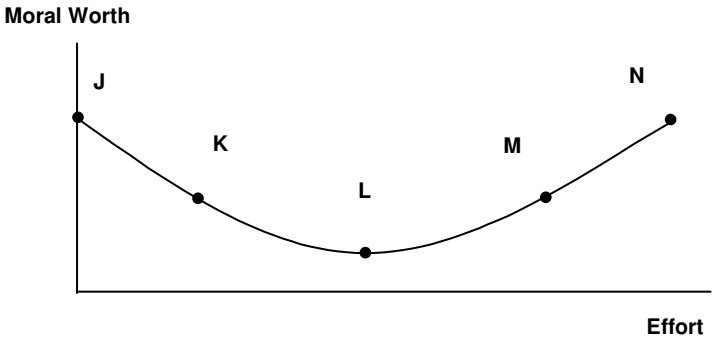
Consider some cases along the spectrum to help exercise our intuitions. Kent is similar to Janette; for Kent, little effort is involved in donating. Kent pauses as he writes out the check; he thinks for a few moments about the new briefcase he'd like to purchase with the $100, but finally shrugs and puts the check in the mail. More effort was involved in Kent's donation than Janette's, and accordingly his action seems to be less morally worthy. (Perhaps it helps to move in the opposite direction. First, imagine the moral worth you would assign Kent

for his donation, including his brush with selfishness. Now imagine the moral worth you would assign to someone who donated with no self-interested resistance at all. Pure effortlessness seems more admirable.)

Lori is another step further away from Janette. Lori feels a variety of self-interested desires to keep the money or spend it on something for herself. She feels these contra-moral self-interested desires with enough strength that it finally takes her *considerable* effort to write out her check. Lori's act seems to have even less moral worth than Kent's, if any at all. After all, it's only $100 – a non-trivial amount for all the agents, but not enough to impact their lifestyles deeply. Donating shouldn't be as hard as it is for Lori, and accordingly we don't seem to find her act very praiseworthy.

Max feels all of the contra-moral self-interested desires Lori feels, but he expends even more effort. Lori's battle with these desires took place within a few minutes at her desk; but it's even harder for Max. Max gets up from his desk and paces; he starts to sweat as he rehearses to himself the importance of donating. He knows $100 isn't a lot of money, but he finds himself struggling very hard to go through with his intention to donate. Hours later, after a great deal of internal struggle, he drops a check in the mailbox.

Figure 2



Effort seems to *taint* the praiseworthiness of the donation as we move from a case like Janette's to a case like Kent's. It's a good thing that both donated, of course; but Janette's act seems morally special in a way that Kent's is not; and Kent's action seems more morally special than Lori's. Lori's various pedestrian temptations threaten to rob her action of most of its moral worth. But evaluations of moral worth seem to turn a corner from Lori to Max. There's something morally admirable, if not morally ideal, about Max's hard-won victory. Nigel seems even more worthy of praise – he donates, even though in doing so he fights against severe nightmares and pathological internal turmoil.

At this point, some readers will be uncomfortable: graphs of the sort I offer above are often associated with quantification, precision, empirical inquiry – inquiries all importantly different from most ethical theorizing. Graphs do not

belong in ethics, the worry continues, because they import improper approaches from the sciences. But in fact the graph above (and those that follow) need not commit us in this way at all. These graphs portray only trajectories and contours; to note the contours of our starting views about effort and moral worth is not to believe that one can *quantify* praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. For the same reason, the graphs also need not entail *precision*: they represent contours, something one can know without knowing with precision the moral worth of someone's donation. Finally, one need do no fieldwork or gather *empirical data* to draw these diagrams, except in the unusual sense in which our starting intuitions about moral matters are a sort of data.

In fact, graphs of the sort employed here are a powerful and underutilized methodology in ethics. Graphs can help identify issues and entailments that are hard to see otherwise. And graphs can also extend the power of the reflective equilibrium approach that has generated so much rich philosophical work in the last decades. Only recently have ethicists begun to employ graphical resources, but the results have been impressive.[4]

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[4] Some of the best examples include Parfit (1984), Kagan (1999), Hurka (2001), and Temkin (1996). Some uncomfortable readers will not be assuaged by this list, since all of these authors are consequentialists. Perhaps consequentialists find it more natural to think in terms of graphs. But I see no necessary connection here: non-consequentialists can certainly benefit from diagrammatic methodology as well.

Let's turn back to the specific diagram above. What explains the somewhat odd intuitions that it portrays? I think there are two separable notions of effort in these evaluations. Distinguishing them should help clarify our intuitions about effort and moral worth.

The first is the *Effort Required* to perform an act. Individuals differ in the amount of effort each must put forth to perform a given action. Various factors explain these differences: the balance and strength of moral, non-moral, and contra-moral desires, intellectual capabilities, physical capabilities, etc. For Janette, no effort is required to donate; for Lori, *considerable* effort is required to donate; and for Nigel, *immense* effort is required to donate. We might picture Janette as having no non-moral or contra-moral desires that oppose her strong moral desires to help children. On the other extreme, we can imagine Nigel overwhelmed by non-moral and contra-moral desires, as well as significant psychological obstacles. In terms of Effort Required alone, we seem to evaluate actions *less and less positively as the Effort Required to perform them increases*. That Lori, Max, and Nigel are the sort of people who have to try as hard as each does to donate indicates something morally defective about their acts.[5] Of the five

[5] Some think that only the desires and capabilities one has voluntarily, or as the result of voluntary choices and actions, count in the evaluation of moral worth. In other words, Max's obstacles count against his act's moral worth only if he has somehow voluntarily brought them on himself. Others disagree (see Adams, 1985). Readers in the first group should restrict their attention to those

donations, Nigel's has the least moral worth in terms of Effort Required – it takes the most effort for him to perform an ordinary moral act, and this doesn't seem praiseworthy. Janette's donation is the most praiseworthy in terms of Effort Required, since the only effort it takes for her to donate is the bare physical energy to move her hand to make out the check.[6]

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obstacles that are voluntarily obtained. (Note that this group may have some difficulty imagining that Nigel could have voluntarily come to feel such intense pathological resistance to donating.) Readers in the second group can think more ecumenically about obstacles.

Relatedly, some think it matters whether the obstacles come from circumstances outside or instead inside the agent's character. Again, readers in the first group will need to focus on a restricted set of obstacles. See Foot (1978, pp. 11-14), Hursthouse (1999, pp. 94-99), and Sidgwick (1981, pp. 224-225, 429). My thanks to Steve Sverdlik for discussion here.

[6] Kant also believed that minimal Effort Required can be morally worthy – a fact that may come as a surprise to those who only know him through the *Groundwork*. For Kant, the path to becoming a good human being requires both a change of heart and a "gradual reform of sensibility" – that is, a reform of one's sensible or empirical nature (Kant, 1999, 6:47). One's "sensibility" includes inclinations and passions and other mental states that an agent has passively, with no active contribution of his own. For Kant, agents with high moral character have actualized those counterfactual situations where one's sensible nature is brought more into accord with reason and the moral law. Agents who have done so are moral not so much by *habit*, since that connotes something merely mechanical and automatic, but instead by what Kant calls *proficiency* or *facility* [*Fertigkeit*]. (Kant discusses "proficiency," or the "subjective perfection of the capacity of choice," in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, 1996, 6:407). He also says this elsewhere: "Reason gradually

The second aspect of effort is the *Effort Expended* in performing an act. Again, since individuals differ in terms of their desires and capabilities, they will expend different amounts of effort in performing the same acts. Janette expends no effort, Lori expends considerable effort, and Nigel expends immense effort in their successful attempts to perform a moral action. We picture Max and Nigel working very hard in order to do what they (correctly) believe is right. In terms of Effort Expended alone, we seem to evaluate actions *more and more positively as the Effort Expended increases*. Max and Nigel put forth energy and effort that the other agents don't, and that expenditure of effort seems to command our respect. Of the five agents, Janette has the least moral worth in terms of Effort Expended – she expends only the smallest imaginable effort in making out her check. Nigel has the most moral worth in terms of Effort Expended, since he worked the hardest of any of the agents.[7]

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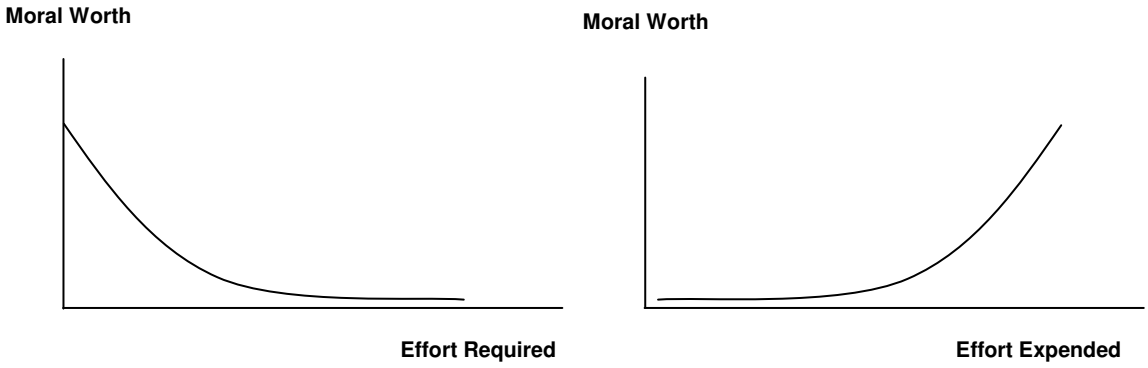
draws sensibility into a state of proficiency (*habitus*)" (*Reflexionen* 5611, 252; quoted in Munzel, 1999, pp. 91-92).) Actualizing counterfactual situations where one is morally proficient has a very high moral value for Kant. That Kant's considered position is close to Aristotle's is a surprise to many.

[7] Just as it might comes as a surprise to some that Kant can value minimal Effort Required, so it might come as a surprise that there is evidence that Aristotle values high degrees of Effort Expended. Aristotle says that "both art and virtue are always concerned with what is harder; for even the good is better when it is harder" (1984a, 1105a10; see also 1984b, 1365a). Aristotle is

We seem to evaluate these two aspects of effort differently – in fact, *oppositely*. The moral worth associated with each aspect of effort seems to rise in opposite directions, as the following diagrams show.

Figure 3



If we were to combine the diagrams – that is, add together their respective weights for moral worth at each point – we would create a single diagram that looks like Figure 2 above. But we would now understand that diagram to represent two different evaluations of effort. Call Figure 2 the Combined Diagram. In general, call diagrams that attempt to represent both Effort Required and Effort Expended *combined effort curves*. As long as we remember that there are two aspects of effort at work in Figure 2, this combined curve will help us visualize other issues in the moral evaluation of effort.

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speaking in this context of someone (like Nigel) who is not an ideal agent – someone for whom performing a good action means fighting against contra-moral pleasures. But Aristotle finds at least something to admire even in this non-ideal agent.

What *kind* of values are Effort Required and Effort Expended? For most of the claims I want to make, the specific account is not important, but here is one plausible view. The value of effortlessness (that is, little or no Effort Required) is a relation between doing a right action and the virtuous state of character that makes the action easy. If the former were absent – if an agent didn't actually do the right thing – there would be no value of this specific sort. Effort Expended is a relation between doing a right action and the deficient state of character that makes the action hard. Again, if the former were absent – if an agent didn't actually do the right thing – there would be no value of this sort. Conceived in this way, the two are what we might call dependent or second-order values; their intrinsic value depends on the existence of a first-order intrinsic good: i.e. the doing of a right action.[8]

[8] This account parallels Michael Slote's view that the value of some goods is dependent on other goods (Slote, 1983), and Thomas Hurka's related defense of virtue and desert as dependent or higher-level intrinsic values (Hurka, 2001a). For Hurka, virtue is a relation between attitudes and more basic intrinsic goods. For instance, the intrinsic value of virtue obtains when an agent feels pleasure at the pleasure of another person, or (in the case of compassion) pain at another's pain. Desert has a parallel higher-level structure. The intrinsic value of desert obtains when an agent is virtuous and also feeling pleasure, or (for fans of retributivism) is vicious and also feels pain.

Hurka notes that certain combinations between lower-level states are intrinsically bad. In the case of virtue, feeling pleasure at another's pain (sadism) is intrinsically bad. The same seems true for the two kinds of effort above – certain combinations are bad. Being able to act rightly

There are at least two competing accounts of *why* Effort Required and Effort Expended have intrinsic value. Again, for most of the claims ahead, it doesn't matter which account is correct, although some readers will find that only one of them supports the relevant intuitions. Both accounts fit the structural claims about effort in the previous paragraph. The first account is Aristotelian: it says that Janette's effortlessness has value because she has settled, robust good character traits – traits that dispose her to benevolence and unselfishness – and because donating $100 to UNICEF actualizes those traits. The settled character traits have value in themselves, and, importantly, the additional value of effortlessness is explained by the actualization of those traits. A second account attends only to the agent's occurrent psychological state – her state at the moment

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with virtuous ease, combined with not acting, may be bad; and being able to act rightly only with significant effort, combined with not acting, is also bad.

I have described effort as a relation between some state of character and *doing* a right action. This means that what we might call *external* considerations can contribute to the moral worth of effort. For instance, an agent's being able to successfully perform an action can depend on outside influences – Janette and Nigel can't write a check to UNICEF if others, say, physically restrain them from doing so. Those who believe moral worth is only ever constituted by *internal* factors will want to change the sample account above in the following way: effortlessness is a relation between *intending* a right action and the virtuous state of character that makes the action easy; and effort expended is a relation between *intending* a right action and the deficient state of character that makes the action hard.

of action. Whether Janette has settled, robust traits does not matter; all that matters is that a good action is supported by a set of psychological components that make it easy.[9] The two accounts also say parallel things about Nigel. An advocate of the first (Aristotelian) account will tend to conceive of Nigel's effortful action as valuable because he has settled, robust traits that dispose him to conquer strong contra-moral temptations, and also because he actualizes those traits in the UNICEF donation. The settled pro-moral conquering traits and the apparently settled temptations have different value valences, but, again importantly, the value of the effortfulness is explained by the successful actualization of the conquering traits. Aristotelians will think Nigel's continent action is clearly less worthy than Janette's effortless action, and as we will see below, there are additional reasons for thinking so. But an Aristotelian account can certainly explain why Effort Expended has at least some value.[10] The second account of why effortful action is valuable is more straightforward, since only the agent's occurrent psychological state matters. All that matters in evaluating Nigel is that he mails the check because at the time he has enough psychological strength to successfully donate.

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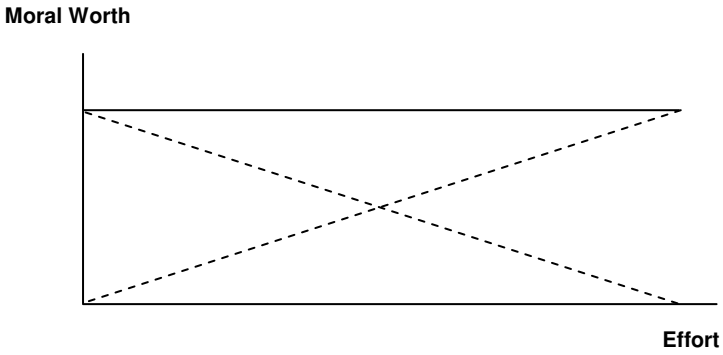
[9] The second account fits the views of W. D. Ross and Thomas Hurka. For a defense of an occurrent state account of virtue, see Hurka (2006).

[10] Recall the Aristotle text from note 7, which, although it does not specify *settled* traits to expend effort, does seem to permit Aristotelians to value continent Effort Expended.

Turning again to Figure 3, four elements of the diagrams already need defense. The first is a feature of the individual lines. I've drawn both lines as *curves* – curves with not much slope as they first move up from the X-axis, then with increasingly steep slope as they go on. I could have instead drawn *straight* diagonal lines for both diagrams; in that case, the Combined Diagram would not be a bowl, but a straight horizontal line (see Figure 4). Adding the weights of Effort Required and Effort Expected would yield the same value at any point on the diagram.

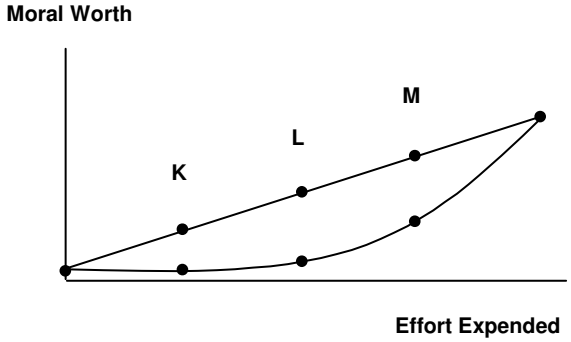
Figure 4



But Figure 4 does not match our considered intuitions: it represents all five agents – Janette, Kent, Lori, Max, and Nigel – as having equivalent moral worth with respect to effort. To see why Effort Required and Effort Expended should be represented with curved lines, consider each individually. First take Effort Expended. We don't think of expended effort as morally special or praiseworthy

in modest quantities. That's why the initial part of the curve has almost no slope: Kent's brief thoughts about buying a briefcase and Lori's multiple self-interested desires require both to work harder than Janette to donate, but neither aspect of effort seems significant enough to be worthy of much praise. By contrast, the curve rises more steeply from Max to Nigel; at heroic levels of expended effort, an action seems worthy of exponentially higher praise. If the line were straight – that is, if increases in Effort Expended raised moral worth proportionately – Kent, Lori, and Max's moral worth would be higher than they seem to be on our considered intuitions (see Figure 5).

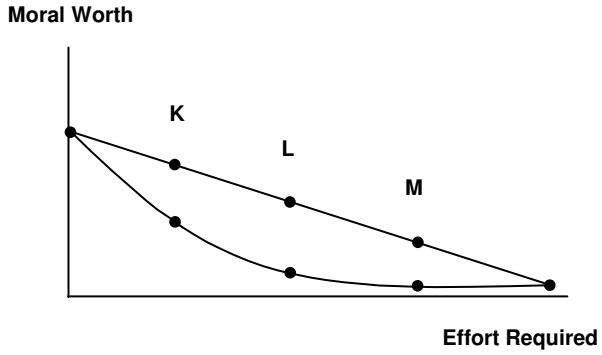
Figure 5



The considerations for Effort Required are similar. That it takes Kent and Lori much effort at all to perform a relatively ordinary moral act seems to *taint* the moral worth of their donations *more rapidly* than a straight-line characterization would capture. Nigel is evaluated as not much below Max in Figure 6 on the

assumption that at higher levels of required effort, less and less moral worth is lost.

Figure 6



The second element of these diagrams that needs defense is this: Effort Required has a maximum value for moral worth, but Effort Expended may not. In other words, moral worth due to Effort Required has a *logical limit*: zero or no Effort Required. Janette represents this logical limit. It can't take less effort for Janette to donate than no effort at all. Does Effort Expended have some similar logical limit? The answer to this question depends on how we conceive of Effort Expended. On the one hand, if we conceive of Effort Expended as the *percentage* of effort an agent could possibly exert, then it has a logical limit: 100%. Call this view the Percentage View. On this view, Nigel is close to exerting all the effort he possibly can to donate. On the other hand, if we conceive of Effort Expended as an *absolute* value, it has no such limit. Nigel's heroic expenditure of effort can

be bested by anyone with more capacity for moral resistance. Call this view the Absolute View. On this account, there may be some empirical *human* limit for Effort Expended – say, some limit beyond which any member of homo sapiens would perish. But this would be different from a logical limit. I'll bracket the question of which of these accounts of Effort Expended is preferable by assuming that Nigel is near *both* sorts of limit: suppose Nigel is exerting close to 100% of his possible effort, and suppose he is near the limit of effort beyond which any human being would perish.[11] I'll tend to discuss Effort Expended in terms of the Absolute View in what follows, with observations about the Percentage View generally left in footnotes.

The third element of these diagrams that needs defense is the *symmetry* of the two curves. That is, I've drawn the curves so that Janette's moral worth "score" is the *same* as Nigel's in Figure 2, with both equidistant from Lori in terms of Effort Required and Effort Expended. Both sides of the "bowl" shape are symmetrical with respect to the other side. But this may not be correct. Consider three issues.

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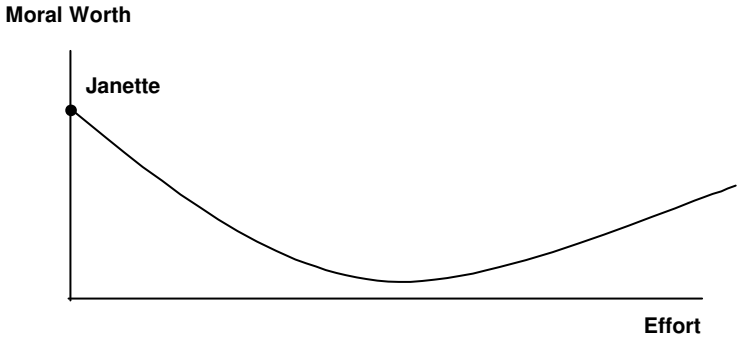
[11] Note that on the Percentage View of Effort Expended, any agent can get a high moral worth score: agents with modest capacities for exerting effort can score as high as agents with tremendous capacities for exerting effort, as long as they are exerting all the effort they possibly can. On the Absolute View of Effort Expended, agents with modest capabilities for exerting effort cannot score as high as agents with greater capabilities for exerting effort.

First, perhaps the individual curves in Figure 3 have different *slopes*. For example, it's possible to think that Effort Required counts *more* towards moral worth than Effort Expended. If this is so, the curve for Effort Expended will rise more gently, and the combination of the two figures will generate a curve like Figure 7.

Figure 7



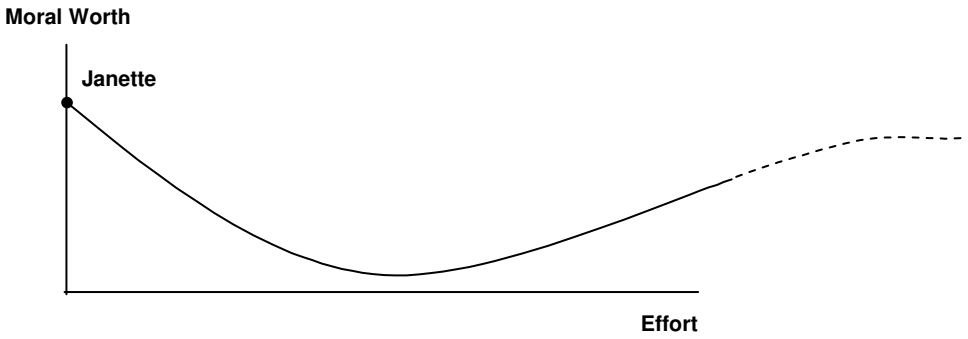
The second point is similar but stronger. It's possible to hold that *no* amount of Effort Expended will ever be able to equal the pure absence of Effort Required. On this view, one can never achieve as much moral worth for expending effort as one can for not needing to.[12] On the Percentage View of

[12] What about the opposite intuition – that no lack of Effort Required will ever be able to equal high amounts of Effort Expended? I'll set this intuition aside for this paper, but here are a few brief notes about it. In this case, Nigel's moral worth score would function as a sort of limit that a no-effort-required agent like Janette act could never reach. Graphically, we could represent this in at least three ways. First, the left (Effort Required) side of the curve could rise more gently

Effort Expended, this view is expressed naturally in Figure 7: the right side of the curve simply *ends* below Janette's moral worth score. On the Absolute View of Effort Expended, we'll need to say more. Here, perhaps the right side of the combined curve flattens out at the top as it goes on (the dotted line in Figure 8), with Janette's moral worth score functioning as a sort of asymptote that an effort-expending agent's act can never reach. I'll need to refer to this position later; so I'll call combined effort curves that match it *effort-expended asymptotic*.

(similar to the way the right side rises more gently in Figure 7). Second, the left (Effort Required) side of the curve could flatten out on the top (similar to the way the right side flattens out in Figure 8). Either of these two approaches would fit a Percentage View of Effort Expended. A third approach takes advantage of the fact that Effort Required has a logical limit – zero or no Effort Required (Janette) – but Effort Expended on the Absolute View does not. On this approach, we don't flatten or change the slope of either side of the curve, but rather let the Effort Expended side outrun the Effort Required side by letting it go on. To match the intuition being explored in this footnote, Effort Expended would need to outrun Effort Required within the empirical human limit for Effort Expended noted above.

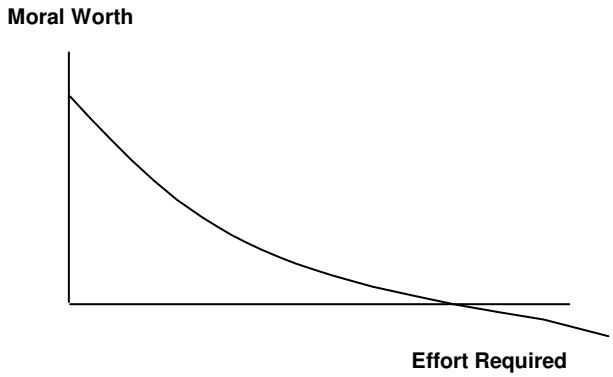
Figure 8



Third, perhaps the individual curves themselves are different in some important way. For example, I'm inclined to believe that the Effort Required curve does not flatten out on the bottom. Instead, I think it looks like Figure 9. If this is right, the Effort Required part of Nigel's moral worth is significantly lower than Max's, contrary to what I assumed in Figure 6. Combining the Effort Required curve in Figure 9 with the standard Effort Expended curve from Figure 3 may yield Figure 8. Let me put all this another way: if the Effort Required curve drops in a certain way at the bottom, it may *explain* the intuition that combined effort curves are *effort-expended asymptotic*.[13]

[13] Remember that effort-expended asymptotism assumes the Absolute View of Effort Expended. But Figure 9 is also relevant to the Percentage View. Here's how. Combining the Effort Required curve in Figure 9 with the standard (Percentage View) Effort Expended curve from Figure 3 may yield Figure 7. Put another way, if the Effort Required curve drops in a certain way at the bottom, it may explain the intuition that combined effort curves have a more gentle slope on the right side.

Figure 9



On to the fourth element about the diagrams that needs defense: Can the two kinds of effort legitimately be combined in the same graph at all? Some think not: the praiseworthiness associated with minimal Effort Required is of a quite different, perhaps even incommensurable, type than the praiseworthiness associated with strong Effort Expended. The moral worth of minimal Effort Required is the moral worth of a stable, developed character – the sort that Aristotle most admired. By contrast, strong Effort Expended is mere continence, a term Aristotelians use to pick out something not just less admirable than stable character, but also different in kind: continence is a stopgap measure employed by those without an admirable settled character, and so doesn't deserve to be charted on the same diagram.

I think the two sorts of effort can indeed be thought of together graphically. First, unless one believes in a very stark form of incommensurability,

nothing prohibits us from thinking about how different types of effort might be evaluated together. Second, it's not always true that strong Effort Expended is a desperate stopgap measure. As the Aristotelian defense of Effort Expended noted earlier, the capacity to exert oneself strongly against contra-moral desires may itself be an element of strong, developed character. In fact we should be surprised if any agents in the real world ever manage without such a capacity. For the considerations that remain below, Aristotelians in particular can assume that Nigel, Max, and others in the right zone of the graph are stable effort expenders by way of good moral education and training.

There is one more crucial difference between Effort Required and Effort Expended; I discuss it in section 4 below.

2. Demandingness

For simplicity, so far we've only been considering various agents' effort and moral worth with respect to the same ordinary act. But agents aren't the only thing that can vary in these evaluations; acts themselves come in degrees of demandingness. The act of giving $100 to UNICEF is more demanding than the act of giving $1, and acts of giving much more – $10,000, *all* one's resources, perhaps even one's very life – can be very demanding indeed. How does what we

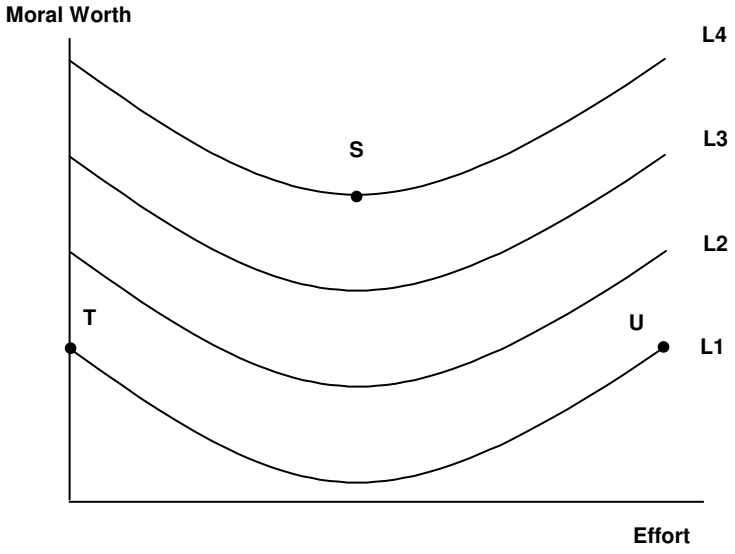
might call the *objective demandingness* of the act figure in to the diagrams we've been considering?

Set aside for a moment the considerations just above about candidate asymmetries; let's return to the symmetrical, bowl-shaped Combined Diagram (Figure 2). Our intuitions are that the more demanding an act is, the more morally worthy it can be. Put another way, more demanding acts have greater potential for moral worth; less demanding acts have less potential for moral worth. The notion of demandingness here is objective, not subjective: Janette might subjectively experience giving $100 and $10,000 as equally easy, but on some appropriate external standard the two acts seem to have different moral worth. Conveniently, we can represent these intuitions by adding additional lines to the Combined Diagram, with each line representing a more demanding or less demanding act (Figure 10). Let's associate the lowest line with a trivially non-demanding moral act: donating $1 (L1). The second line is the line from the Combined Diagram for donating $100 (L2). The third and fourth lines represent donating $10,000 (L3) and all one's resources (L4), respectively.[14] There are a few things to note about this diagram. First, this diagram matches the intuition that the more demanding

[14] More demanding acts than L4 are possible, of course – for instance, an agent may sacrifice his or her *life*. I don't mean to treat L4 as a maximally demanding act. But I think our intuitions about life-sacrifice cases are bound to vary considerably because of the plural religious and non-religious convictions we have. I set extreme or maximally demanding acts aside because of this complexity.

the act, the higher the *minimum* moral worth possible. Donating all one's resources under the *worst* possible combination of Effort Required and Effort Expended ("S" in Figure 10) still has a higher moral worth than donating $1 with no Effort Required or heroic Effort Expended ("T" and "U" in Figure 10). Second, drawing things in this way allows us to preserve and compare both the differences in agents (that is, the Effort Required and Effort Expended for individual agents) and the differences in the demandingness of acts.

Figure 10



Consider three issues about combined effort curves and the objective demandingness of acts. First, must all morally good acts have positive moral

worth?[15] If they do, then Figure 10 is correct: even at the bottom, *no* bowl-shaped curve goes below the X-axis. On this view, any morally good act is praiseworthy, no matter what the amount of effort required or expended. One could also think the opposite: that any morally good act can be blameworthy (at least, under the worst effort conditions); on this view, *every* curve dips below the X-axis at some point. I believe that some position between these is the most plausible. It seems to me that undemanding moral acts can indeed have negative moral worth, but that some demanding moral acts have a positive moral worth, no matter what effort is required or expended. Take L1 (donating $1); if it takes Lori considerable effort to donate only one dollar to a moral cause – if she struggles against selfish impulses for some time before she finally puts forth the effort to donate – then her donation seems to have *negative* moral worth. On the other hand, if she struggles in a similar way for some time before she finally manages to donate $10,000, her act nonetheless seems to have positive moral worth. We expect more demanding moral acts to require more effort, and our evaluations of moral worth should reflect this. On this *mixed* position about demandingness and negative moral worth, Figure 11 captures our intuitions more adequately.

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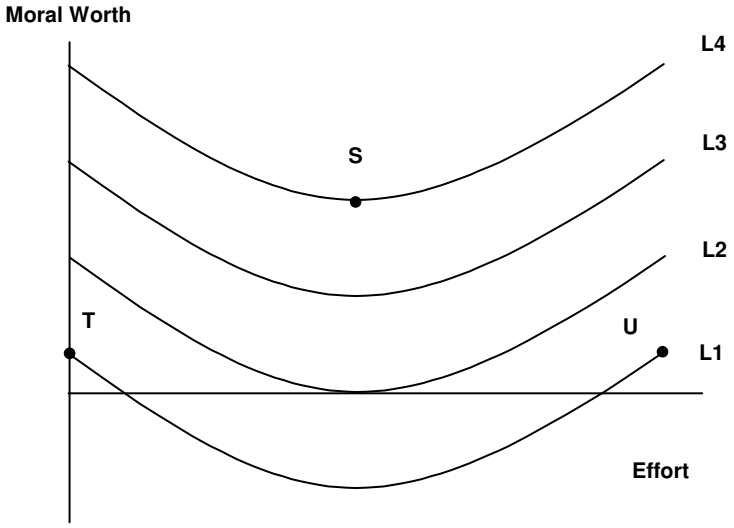
[15] This is a good place for a reminder that whenever I use the term "moral worth" in this paper, I mean only moral worth *with respect to effort*. Other factors certainly figure into overall moral worth; but I'm not concerned with them here.

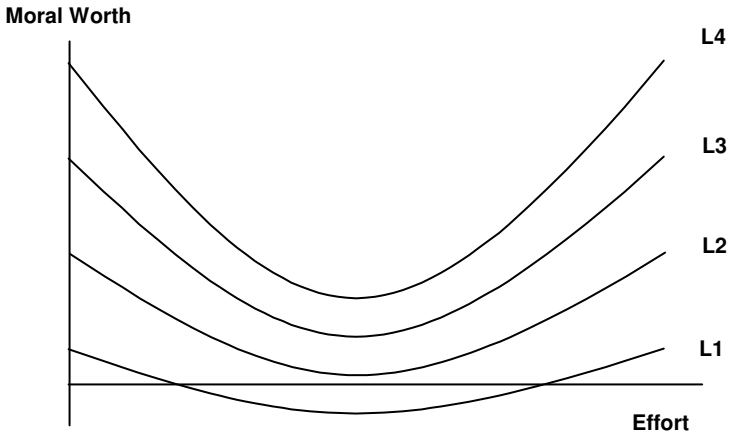
Figure 11



Second, it's not obvious that the bowl of the curves should be symmetrically *deep*. Figure 11 suggests that the difference between the *highest* and *lowest* moral worth possible for any act (of any level of demandingness) is the same. This is counterintuitive. It seems odd to think that there could be much difference in moral worth between Janette's donating $1 and Lori's donating $1. These considerations lead to the view that *the less demanding an act, the flatter its combined effort curve.* Similarly, the more demanding an act, the deeper its combined effort curve. On this view, there is little difference in moral worth between Janette and Lori, or Nigel and Lori, for donating $1. After all, it's only a dollar; it would be strange for wide divergences in moral worth to exist over such a trivial contribution. On the other hand, it seems that rich differences could exist in the moral worth of more demanding acts. Janette's purity in giving away all her

resources, or Nigel's Herculean effort exercised in giving away all that he has, may far outrun Lori's considerable effort to do the same. In their own respective ways, Janette and Nigel would be almost superhuman, and the moral worth of their actions should be proportionately higher than Lori's.[16] Figure 12 reflects these views.

Figure 12



[16] These are my intuitions about the moral worth of very demanding acts; but I can imagine others. Some will think that Janette's purity and Nigel's effort would be *so* superhuman in these cases that our intuitions about moral worth run out. It's hard to praise agents that hardly seem to be human beings anymore. Another way to describe these intuitions would be this: the moral goodness of Janette and Nigel would be such that we can no longer evaluate it as *human* goodness. For these sorts of intuitions, see Nussbaum (1990, pp. 365-391). How would someone with these intuitions draw L4 (the most demanding line) in Figure 11? Perhaps as a deep bowl as in Figure 11, but with leveled-out, flat lips – or perhaps instead as a deep bowl as in Figure 11, with incomplete, cropped lines near the top of the bowl.

Third and finally, it may be the case that the two sides of the bowl are not consistently symmetrical across all levels of demandingness. This is to return to some considerations raised at the end of the last section. There, we saw that it's possible to think that combined effort curves are *effort-expended asymptotic* – that is, that the moral worth of Effort Expended may not ever "catch up" with the highest possible moral worth for effortlessness. Two obvious positions are these: *all* combined effort curves are effort-expended asymptotic, or *no* combined effort curves are effort-expended asymptotic. But of course, with objective demandingness now on the table, more complex positions are possible. In fact I think the following more complex position matches our considered intuitions: *combined effort curves for more demanding acts are more effort-expended asymptotic; combined effort curves for less demanding acts are less (or not) effort-expended asymptotic*.[17] Call this position *demandingness asymptotism*

[17] By "more effort-expended asymptotic," I mean that combined effort curves for very demanding acts approach their asymptotes even more slowly than somewhat demanding acts. By "less (or not) effort-expended asymptotic," I mean that combined effort curves for somewhat demanding moral acts approach their asymptotes aggressively; and undemanding moral acts may have no asymptote at all. This position raises a question. If we extended combined effort curve lines infinitely to the right along the X axis – as we can on the Absolute View of Effort Expended – it would seem that the non-asymptotic curves would eventually *"catch up" with and cross* the asymptotic curves. I take it that our intuitions say that at the extremes of human expended effort, L1-L4 *should* come

(mercifully, "DA" hereafter). DA is represented in Figure 13. My intuitions are fainter here, but DA strikes me as plausible because of the following considerations. First, no matter how impressive the effort Nigel expends in donating all his resources (L4), it just doesn't seem as morally special as Janette's pure, effortless donation. The moral worth of Janette's act seems unreachable by effort expended alone. By contrast, imagine Nigel expending the same Herculean effort to donate $1 to UNICEF (L1). Janette's ease of donation seems not only much less morally special here, but also equaled or outrun by Nigel's expended effort. Second and relatedly, Figure 13 shows that Nigel has a smaller *range* of possible moral worth "scores" than Janette. This matches the view that for high values of Effort Expended, the particular act is less important – it's primarily the raw effort that impresses us, not so much the act that occasioned it. Put another

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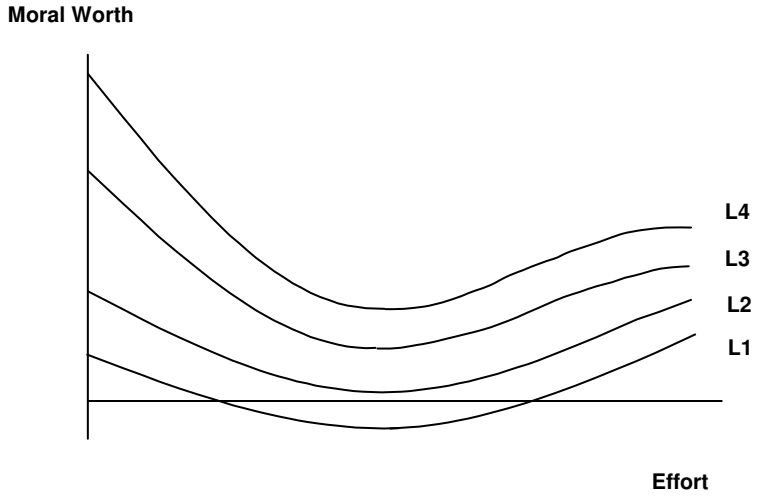
closer to "catching up" with each other; see my comments on "Effort Expended Merging" below. But I do not think the non-asymptotic curves *cross* the asymptotic curves. I should note that I hold the latter view on the basis of a moral, not a logical or graphical, claim. The moral claim is this: a more demanding act could never be less morally worthy than a less demanding act at the same level of effort. With this (moral) constraint in place, instead of crossing, L1-L3 would *join* L4 and track it. In any case, even without this constraint, the catching up and crossing would seem to happen beyond the empirical human limit of Effort Expended. As I said above, I'm supposing that the maximum magnitude of human effort runs out not far beyond Nigel.

way, demandingness is less relevant to the moral worth of Effort Expended than it is to the moral worth of Effort Required. Call this *Effort Expended Merging*.[18]

Figure 13



What do we gain by introducing objective demandingness into combined effort curves? For one thing, the curves capture our intuition that a *less* demanding act can be more morally worthy than a *more* demanding act. In Figure 13, Janette's effortless donation of $100 is more morally worthy than Lori's labored, effortful, donation of $10,000. Second, if I'm right about the intuitions I quoted to support DA, we see that Effort Required and Effort Expended vary asymmetrically with the objective demandingness of acts. This would explain our

[18] Note that Effort Expended Merging is also compatible with the *Percentage View* of Effort Expended. L1-L4 come close to merging before they stop at 100% of an agent's effort.

seemingly paradoxical intuitions about the balance between the two principal aspects of effort. Extreme effort of the sort put forth by Max and Nigel *counts more* toward moral worth *for less demanding acts*.

3. Other Effort Modifiers

In the last section, I introduced a new factor into our evaluations of effort. This factor, objective demandingness, acted as a modifier on the original Combined Diagram in Figure 2. There are other modifiers as well. For each of these modifiers, our intuitions seem to be less settled. I won't develop all of them, but each deserves some notice. I will briefly explore the last modifier I am about to mention here – agent self-evaluation – in order to provide some idea about how incorporating such a modifier might go.

First, I've said nothing so far about the *source* of Effort Required or Effort Expended. Consider two possibilities here. (1) Suppose that Janette's ability to donate effortlessly is the result of a naturally good character – suppose, that is, that Janette has *always* found it easy to share her resources. For some, this will *lower* the moral worth of her donation, since her effortlessness is the result of luck. For others, this will *raise* the moral worth of her donation, since purity is all the more praiseworthy the longer it goes back. (2) Now suppose instead that Janette's ability to donate effortlessly is the result of years of trying to do moral

acts; as Aristotle predicted, the more she donated, the easier it became, until finally donating takes no effort at all. Again, evaluations will go two different ways here. For some, this will lower the moral worth of Janette's donation, since her effortlessness is acquired and recent. For others, this will raise the moral worth of her donation, since her effortlessness is the result of persistent labor.

Second, Effort Required and Effort Expended may each be *composites* of different factors; if so, the curve that describes each could change as the individual factors change. Take Effort Required: we've treated Effort Required as "the *balance or strength* of various moral, non-moral, and contra-moral desires..." But perhaps balance and strength can act separately as modifiers of combined effort curves. For example, I've been characterizing Janette as lacking contra-moral and non-moral desires that work against her moral desires. But to describe Janette this way is to say nothing yet about the *strength* of her moral desires. Suppose we could assign a number to the strength of moral desires; Janette's moral desire strength rating (MDSR) is +50, but Janette's sister, Jeri (who is equally free from contra-moral and non-moral desires) has a MDSR of +30. It seems that Jeri's moral worth would be lower than Janette's, even though both act effortlessly. In other words, the strength of an agent's moral desires is another modifier of the combined effort curve. Similarly, the *balance* among an agent's

desires – moral, non-moral, and contra-moral – may modify the combined effort curve.[19]

A third issue about effort is the *agent's own evaluation of the effort* involved in his or her act. For instance, individuals can *underrate* or *overrate* either their Effort Required or Effort Expended, and this may affect *our* evaluations of their moral worth.[20] There are a variety of ways to cash out what it means for an agent to evaluate effort. First, an agent may be *reflective* to varying degrees about his or her effort. Some think that individuals who are unreflective about the effort required or expended for an act are more morally worthy than reflective agents. Others disagree: how can unreflective effort, which may be accidental and inconsistent, generate a higher moral worth score than reflective effort? A second way to cash out agent effort self-evaluation is this. Suppose that an agent *reflectively* evaluates his or her effort, but evaluates it *inaccurately*. Again there seems to be an unresolved disagreement about whether this should increase or decrease moral worth.

Let's take this second sense of agent effort self-evaluation and see what influence it has on combined effort curves. (The first sense would be interesting

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[19] For a helpful discussion of the role of strength and balance among moral, non-moral, and contra-moral desires, see Smith (1991). See also *{self-identifying reference omitted}.*

[20] For more on agent self-evaluations, see Driver (2001), especially chapter two, "The Virtues of Ignorance." See also Richards (1992).

to investigate as well; my choice to take the second is arbitrary. I merely want to explore one sort of self-evaluation modifier for combined effort curves.) For simplicity, I'll only consider inaccurately *low* self-evaluations – that is, I'll only look at cases of agents who *underrate* both the Effort Required and Effort Expended for a given act. (Inaccurately *high* self-evaluations, or *overratings*, would also be interesting to examine. Again my choice is arbitrary. I'm simply interested in exploring one case of a self-evaluation modifier for combined effort curves.) I won't try to settle the disagreement about whether inaccurate self-evaluations increase or decrease moral worth. Instead, I'll play out both sides. Finally, and again for simplicity, I'll leave aside issues about asymptotes. For this section, we'll return to the simple bowl-shaped combined effort curve from Figure 2. We could presumably combine the results of this section with the position we decide to take about asymptotes.

Call the view that claims that agent underratings of effort *raise* moral worth the Modesty View. (By using the term "Modesty," I do not mean that the agent correctly evaluates his real effort, but at the same time publicly downplays it. Rather, I mean that he actually underrates his effort while sincerely believing he has evaluated it correctly.) Call the view that agent underratings of effort *lower* moral worth the Accuracy View. I don't pretend to develop either of these

views comprehensively; I merely want to offer some sample modifiers of combined effort curves.

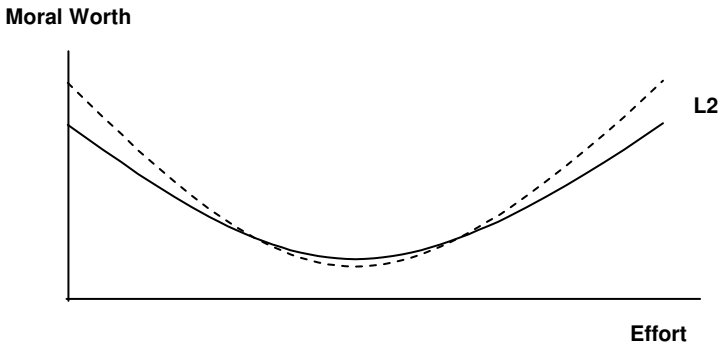
First consider how the combined effort curve might be modified by agent underratings on the Modesty View. Suppose that Nigel underrates his effort. "Some effort was involved in my donating, but it's no big deal," he says, reporting his beliefs sincerely as he mails his check for $100. On the Modesty View, this self-evaluation raises Nigel's moral worth.[21] Janette's case is tricky. What does it mean for her to underrate her Effort Required (the dominant, and in fact the only, aspect of effort in her case)? She *can't* think she requires less effort to donate than really is the case, since she requires *no* effort. But she might undervalue her donation in another way. Recall that we defined Effort Required as the result of various factors: the balance and strength of moral, non-moral, and contra-moral desires, intellectual capabilities, physical capabilities, etc. Perhaps, then, Janette thinks she has a less favorable balance of desires, or weaker morally good desires,

[21] Recall that I stipulated above that we're interested in cases where the agent underrates *both* Effort Required and Effort Expended. It may be that on the Modesty View, Nigel's underrating his Effort Expended counts positively, but his underrating his Effort Required counts negatively. Still, since Effort Expended is the dominant aspect of effort with respect to moral worth in Nigel's case, it seems reasonable to suppose that his underratings result in a net positive increase in moral worth. This is yet one more simplifying assumption I'll make in this section: that the "dominant" aspect of effort is the one that dictates what we think of self-evaluations as modifiers of moral worth.

than she actually has. This would be to underrate her Effort Required score in a different way, and in a way that the Modesty View would see as raising her moral worth.[22] What about Lori? I described Lori as beset with pedestrian self-interested desires as she tries to donate. In this case, for Lori to underrate both the Effort Required and the Effort Expended seems to not raise her moral worth at all. In fact, perhaps Lori's moral worth is *lowered* by her underrating. Even on (one plausible version of) the Modesty View, someone hindered in acting morally by non- and contra-moral desires is hardly more praiseworthy for reflectively underrating these hinderances. These cases suggest that the Modesty View of agent underratings affects the basic combined effort curve as indicated in Figure 14. The dotted line in Figure 14 represents the combined effort curve after agent underratings have been added in.

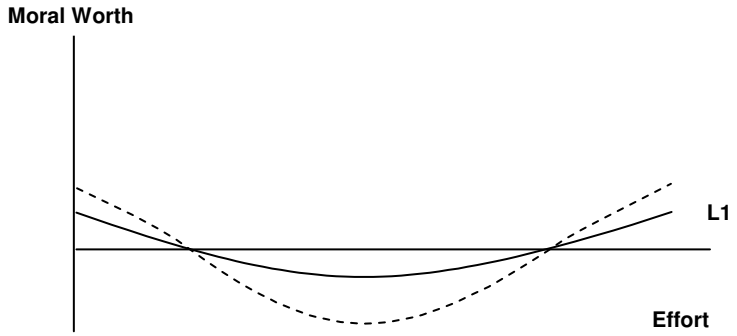
[22] More specifically, the *object* of Modesty would have to be different in Janette's case. We imagine Nigel as underrating the effort he made. But we imagine Janette as underrating something different: the balance of her desires. I do not pretend to identify all possible objects of modesty here. I am also assuming that modesty towards either object that I do identify has the same effect.

Figure 14



Are there other factors that change the way that agent underratings modify combined effort curves on the Modesty View? I think the answer is yes. Here's an example. When combined effort curves dip below the X-axis, it's reasonable to suppose that agent underratings *lower* negative moral worth *more dramatically*. In the last paragraph, I suggested that agent underratings could *lower* moral worth; I'm now suggesting that below the X-axis, the lowering effect is more drastic. In section 2 I said that Lori's donation of $1 appears to have negative moral worth. For Lori to underrate how difficult such a trivial act is for herself makes it all the less morally worthy. So perhaps agent underratings "deepen" the bowl of combined effort curves *more dramatically* for combined effort curves that drop below the X-axis, as the dotted line suggests in Figure 15. (Relatedly, perhaps agent underratings make more impact on combined effort curves at lower levels of objective demandingness.)

Figure 15



So much for some quick intuitions about the Modesty View. Now for the Accuracy View. On the Accuracy View, agent undervaluings always lower moral worth. The proponent of this view finds nothing praiseworthy about inaccuracy; modesty (of the sort discussed above) is no real virtue, since it depends on incorrect judgments. Nigel is less morally worthy if he evaluates his effort as lower than it really is. The same goes for Janette: even if her donation requires no effort, her incorrect evaluation of the balance and strength of her desires and capabilities counts against moral worth. Perhaps the Accuracy View of agent underratings results in a straight drop of the combined effort curve without a shape change. More likely, agent underratings may reduce moral worth *more* at the bottom of the curve. If this is the case, agent underratings would change the combined effort curve to the dotted line in Figure 16.

Do other factors change the way that agent underratings modify combined effort curves on the Accuracy View? Again, I think the answer is yes. Both objective demandingness and whether the curve dips below the X-axis seem to change the way that agent underratings modify combined effort curves. I think these changes parallel the changes these factors made on the Modesty View above: on the Accuracy View, agent underratings both "deepen" sub-X-axis curves, and agent underratings make more impact on combined effort curves at lower levels of objective demandingness (see Figure 17).

Figure 16

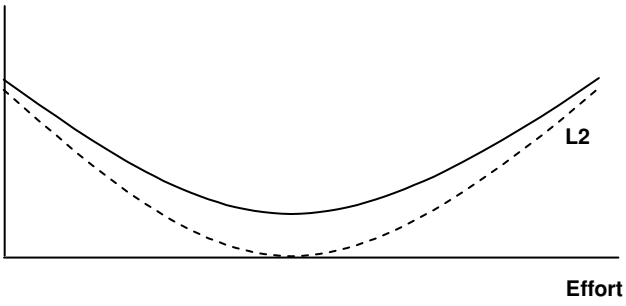
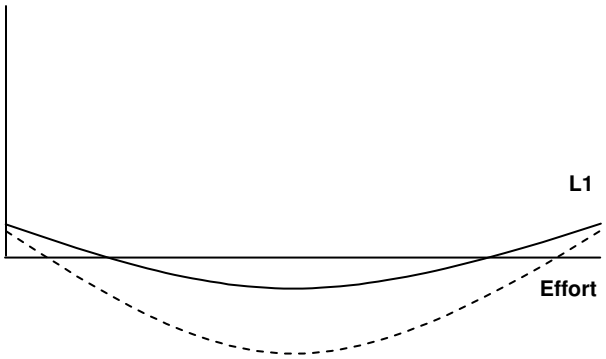


Figure 17



My intuitions are faint on the specific ways in which agent self-evaluations affect combined effort curves. But the considerations in this section show how one might go about adding other modifiers about effort.

4. Admirability and Increasability

In section 3, I mentioned several candidate modifiers of the Combined Diagram – the basic U-shaped curve in Figure 2. I now want to turn to an issue that exists in even this simple diagram, apart from any modifiers.

Consider Lori. There are two ways her donation can become more morally worthy:[23] either she becomes more like Kent (the kind of person for whom *less* effort is required to donate, and who expends that effort), or she becomes more like Max (the kind of person for whom *more* effort is required to donate, and who expends that effort). Note that from the point of view of moral worth, it's *arbitrary* which of the two she becomes more like. Either way, her moral worth score will rise. This may seem counter-intuitive for at least two different reasons. The first sort of counter-intuitiveness can be addressed with tools from the previous sections. The second sort of counter-intuitiveness comes from a misunderstanding.

The first sort of counter-intuitiveness is this: from the point of view of moral worth, perhaps it is arbitrary whether Lori becomes either like Kent or Max; but it *doesn't* seem arbitrary whether Lori becomes either like *Janette or Nigel*. If Lori can become more like one of these agents, she should choose Janette. But this response may just amount to an acceptance of the position that combined

[23] Recall that by "moral worth," I mean only "moral worth *with respect to effort*."

effort curves are *effort-expended asymptotic*. On this position, Lori can attain the highest possible moral worth only if she becomes more like Janette. The answer still leaves arbitrary which way Lori goes in the (vertically) *lower* regions of effort – the space between Kent and Max, for example. But this is as we would expect: if what I've claimed above is right, our intuitions are that even with effort-expended asymptotic combined effort curves, someone like Kent and someone like Max can be equally praiseworthy.

The second sort of counter-intuitiveness is based on the intuition that if one had the choice, it would just be *better* to be more like Kent and Janette than to be like Max and Nigel. Who wouldn't prefer to be like Janette or Kent, for whom moral action is easy, rather than like Max or Nigel, who have to struggle to do what is right? But this intuition misunderstands the arbitrariness in question here. The arbitrariness I'm calling attention to in Lori's decision is merely arbitrariness *with respect to moral worth*. Our *broader* moral intuitions certainly seem to be that it would be better to be Kent than Max; but one can believe this and still hold that from the pure point of view of moral worth, Kent and Max are equally praiseworthy.

It's worth dwelling on our broader moral intuitions for a moment longer here. If what I've said above is correct, we've come closer to capturing and explaining some complex intuitions about effort and moral worth. But we seem

to have quite divergent broader moral intuitions about the two key components of combined effort curves: Effort Required and Effort Expended. Minimal or no Effort Required – call it *Effortlessness* for convenience – is the sort of moral value we seem to want to *increase*.[24] In contrast, we do *not* want to increase the amount of Effort Expended. Put another way, it's a good thing if more and more people find it easy to do moral acts, but it's generally *not* a good thing if more and more people find themselves having to expend tremendous effort to do moral acts. Effortlessness and Effort Expended are different with respect to whether we want *more* of them or not. Effortlessness and Effort Expended are both (at least partly) intrinsic moral values; they seem to be valuable apart from or in addition to any ends to which they contribute. An interesting entailment, then, of the difference between the two is that *admirability* can come apart from *increasability* for intrinsic values. That is, our intuitions about Effort Expended show that an intrinsic value can be admirable without it necessarily being a good thing to increase its instances or amount.[25]

The importance of the distinction is this: with this distinction in hand, we now have an *explanation* for our reluctance to think that it's arbitrary from the

[24] I say "increase" instead of "maximize" in order to include satisficers. A satisficer may want to increase the Effortlessness up to a certain threshold.

[25] I thank Allen Wood for helpful discussion here.

broader point of view of morality which "direction" Lori goes. This distinction about intrinsic values explains our view that it's better for Lori to become more like Kent and Janette.

Given his negative assessment of Moore, it's reasonable to assume that Wittgenstein found morality to be a struggle. If what I've said above is correct, our moral evaluations of effort are rich enough to give credit to both Moore's "innocence" and Wittgenstein's struggle – without inconsistency. Effort has proved to be a more complex notion than it at first appears. Moral worth proper, of which effort is merely one factor, is thus all the more complex as well.