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Can we act without feelings? Respect, sympathy, and other forms of love

Can we act without any sensible incentive?

In his article “Kant and Motivational Externalism,” Karl Ameriks insists that “if a Kantian still wishes to reach a truly cosmopolitan audience, it makes sense to step back beyond the perspective of Kantian scholarship alone, and to reflect on the basic features that contemporary philosophers would insist that any acceptable theory treat with sensitivity.”¹ Iain Morison, in the introduction of the book *Kant and the Role of Pleasure in Moral Action*, also considers this problem in the following terms: “How can Kant account for moral motivation while divorcing the basis of morality from the pathological, and therefore motivational side of human agents?”² I will go back to Kant’s texts, in order to locate where we can find sensibility or sensitivity and in which sense these feelings are necessary to action.

Can we act morally without any sensible incentives? For a traditional reader of the *Critique of Pure Reason* the answer is unequivocally positive. Kant is explicit about this possibility in A 534/B 562:

The human power of choice is indeed an *arbitrium sensitivum*, yet not *brutum* but *liberum*, because sensibility does not render its action necessary, but in the human being, there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independent of necessitation by sensible impulses. (KrV, A 534/B 562)

In the *Groundwork*, the answer seems to be also positive. Not only *can* one, but one *should* act without any moral feeling. Sympathy³ for other people's fortune, as a feeling that leads to beneficence, is analyzed in the well-known example of the *Groundwork*. When explaining the difference between acting from duty and according to duty, Kant presents the example of two philanthropists, distinguishing the one who possess a strong pleasure in spreading joy to his fellow human beings from the one who helps other people out of duty:

Suppose, then, that the mind of this philanthropist were overclouded by his own grief, which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of the others, and that while he still had the means to benefit others in distress their troubles did not move him because he had enough to do with his own; and suppose that now, when no longer incited to it by any inclination, he nevertheless tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination, simply from duty. (G, 4: 398)

Kant also asks if we should not consider that his action would have a higher worth if nature had put little sympathy in his heart, but the answer is negative: "By all means! It is just then that the worth of character comes out, which is moral and incomparably the highest, namely, that he is beneficent not from inclination but from duty" (G, 4: 399).

We can clearly distinguish in the example of the two philanthropists an action done according to duty and an action done from duty: the first is performed out of compassion and the second is carried out even if the philanthropist does not care about other peoples' misery. The difference between one and the other is that the incentive of the first is sympathy, which is a sensible inclination, while the action of second philanthropist is performed from respect to the

moral law. Kant considers that if compassion for other people's luck is the incentive of an action, then this action does not have a true moral value. If we consider this example in the light of the history of philosophy, we see that it is clearly provocative. To affirm that the benevolent action of a man who is touched by other people's misery does not have any moral value obviously emphasizes the difference between Kant and the Empiricists, such as Hume and Hutcheson, who attribute to the natural feelings of sympathy the role of a virtuous incentive of moral actions.⁴

The example of the philanthropists in the *Groundwork* clearly indicates that the mere presence of moral feelings makes an action without moral value. On the other hand, the analysis of the majority of commentators, as we have seen in Chapter 1, grants that the mere presence of some feelings, such as sympathy, does not make an action morally unworthy, if respect for moral law was a sufficient incentive for the accomplishment of the action. This thesis is corroborated by the difference that Kant establishes between utility and moral feeling. In the *Groundwork*, when analyzing the role played by moral feeling in Hutcheson's philosophy, Kant argues that this feeling is closer to morality than the principle of utility, which only teaches us how to calculate better. Despite the fact that they are both empirical principles and do not give us the necessary pureness and formality of a moral principle, at least the moral feeling remains closer to morality:

On the other hand, moral feeling—this supposed special sense . . . nevertheless remains closer to morality and its dignity inasmuch as it shows virtue the honor of ascribing to her immediately the delight and esteem we have for her and does not, as it were, tell her to her face that it is not her beauty but only our advantage that attaches us to her. (G, 4: 443)

But from the fact that Kant prefers moral feeling to utility as a reason for moral action it does not follow that he claims moral feelings are necessary conditions to moral actions. Both in the *Groundwork* and in the *Critique of the Practical*

Reason, the necessity to support morality in a nonmaterial practical principle leads, obviously, to the refusal to ascribe the role of moral incentives to feelings such as love, benevolence, and affection.

The aim of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is to prove at least the possibility of practical reason; that is, that reason is capable of driving us to act morally, in spite of the good or bad feelings we have. To prove that pure reason can be practical is to prove that it can, alone, determine the will. We would fail to prove it if the will were always dependent on empirical conditions. If the will were always based on feelings or passions, this would mean that the pure reason cannot be practical and that the causality of freedom is impossible. The *Groundwork*, as well as the *Critique of Practical Reason*, has the aim of obtaining, respectively, the categorical imperative and the moral law, in an attempt to prove that reason can determine the will, without the help of empirical incentives. In this context, Kant refuses to ascribe the role of an incentive to benevolent feelings, since these would be empirical and contingent, not being able to be taken as a ground for the determination of the will. In these texts, Kant states clearly that a feeling is a subjective incentive, being inappropriate for the establishment of morality and its foundation upon reason.

In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, however, Kant surprises us with the claim that there are some feelings which are subjective conditions of receptiveness of the concept of duty (MS, 6: 399). These are moral feeling, conscience, love of human beings, and self-respect. Moral feeling is defined as “the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent or contrary to the law of duty” (MS, 6: 399). This ambiguous feeling can be pathological or moral: pathological if it “precedes the representation of the law,” moral if it “can only follow upon it” (MS, 6: 399). Moral feeling seems to be a product of the representation of moral law; consequently it is not an incentive to act morally. However, Kant is ambiguous when he claims that moral feeling is not a sense for the morally good, but a susceptibility on

the part of free choice to be moved by pure practical reason. He also asserts that “no human being is entirely without moral feeling, for were he completely lacking in receptivity to it he would be morally dead” (MS, 6: 399). Here it seems that the answer to our question of whether one can act morally without moral feelings is negative, although it does not imply that moral feelings precede the moral action and act as incentives.

What could be the role of moral feeling, if it is not an incentive? Moral feeling can be understood as a satisfaction through the understanding, as a pleasure in the concept of moral law. As Kant writes in the *Nachlaß*, 1020:

The *causa impulsiva* is either an impression or a concept, a representation of satisfaction or dissatisfaction through senses or the understanding, of the agreeable or the good: The first impel per *stimulo*, the second per *motiva*. The *arbitrium immediate determinatum per stimulus* is *brutum*. . . . The *motive intellectualia pura* are what pleases immediately in the concept, now this is nothing other than a good will, since everything else can only please conditionally as a means. (*Nachlaß*, 15: 456)

The pleasure in the concept of moral law, the motive *intellectualia pura*, is not an incentive for moral actions. But what about the respect for moral law? Could this be considered an incentive to moral action? Is Kant presenting us an explanation concerning a sensible motivation for morality?

Kant is a bit ambiguous about that. In the *Groundwork*, he states that “the determination of the will by the law and the consciousness of this determination is respect” (G, 4: 401), apparently encouraging the interpretation that respect is not a feeling. However, he also states that respect is a feeling (*Gefühl*), although not created by an external object.

There are three possibilities to be considered here: (1) respect is not a feeling, but only a consciousness of moral law; (2) respect is a feeling and does not motivate moral action; (3) despite respect being a feeling, it can motivate moral action.

In one of the most complete analyses of respect in Kant, Iain Morrison has argued for the third possibility. He asserts that

it is possible to read Kant as saying that respect is a complex feeling—made up of feelings of pleasure and pain—that is somehow produced or caused by (and therefore, distinct from) the moral law. On this view, respect is not identified with the moral law. Instead, it is a feeling caused by the moral law, and it motivates insofar as it is made up of a combination of feelings of pleasure and pain.⁵

My position here is different from Iain Morrison's. Although I recognize, as he does, that respect is a complex feeling and not only the conscience of moral law, I sustain that this feeling is not what motivates us, because no feeling should motivate us in a pure moral action. And that is what made Kant different from his sentimentalist predecessors. Morrison considers that only the cognitive dimension of respect motivates moral action. For me, what Morrison calls the cognitive dimension of respect is nothing more than the thought of moral law, and not the feeling of respect itself. Then, I am inclined to sustain thesis 2: respect is a feeling caused by moral law and is not the incentive to act morally, but it is only an effect of the acceptance of moral law.

Frierson, in the book *Kant's Empirical Psychology*, calls attention to the debate between "intellectualists" and "affectionists":

Intellectualists (Allison, Guyer,⁶ Reath) claim that morally good action is motivated solely by cognition or consciousness of moral law, with a feeling (of respect) generally seen as an effect of moral motivation rather than its cause. Affectionists (McCarthy, Singleton, Herrera, Morrisson, Nauckhoff) argue that the feeling is the immediate cause of moral motivation, the means by which an otherwise inert cognition of the moral law can give rise to an action.⁷

According to Frierson, the intellectualist-affectionist debate presents textual evidence for both sides. However, I maintain that the stronger evidence is on

the side of the intellectualists. In the *Groundwork*, Kant claims that “immediate determination of the will by means of the law and consciousness of this is called respect, so that this is regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject and not as the *cause* of the law” (G, 4: 402). Also, in chapter III of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant claims the following:

If the determination of the will takes place *conformably* with the moral law but only by means of a feeling, of whatever kind, that has to be presupposed in order for the law to become a sufficient determining ground of the will, so that the action is not done *for the sake of the law*, then the action will contain *legality* indeed, but not *morality*. (KpV, 5: 71)

In this sense, I agree with some commentators, such as Reath, for whom the feeling of respect cannot be a motivation for the moral action. Frierson claims that affectionists have a point if we consider the texts where Kant claims that respect is a feeling produced by an intellectual ground (KpV, 5: 73) or a feeling self-wrought by means of a rational concept (4: 401n). He tries to solve the problem by appealing to a distinction between empirical and transcendental psychology.

I think that there is no contradiction to solve, because to claim that respect is a feeling does not entail that this feeling should have the role of an incentive or motive for a moral action. Also, the fact that respect is a feeling self-wrought by a rational concept does not imply that respect lacks sensible properties. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant claims that feelings of pleasure and displeasure can be an effect of an idea or concept (Ant, 7: 230). Then, an intellectual feeling, as he calls it, does not mean that a feeling is itself a concept, lacking sensible properties. It means that it is a feeling (*Gefühl*) and has sensible properties, but was caused by an idea. A misunderstanding of the sensible property of something that can be caused by an idea is the source of some Kant scholars' mistakes.

Kelly Sorensen in his article “Kant’s Taxonomy of Emotions”⁸ explains the nature of respect, when he analyses the relation between desires and feelings:

Desire necessarily involves feelings, but desire is of two sorts, depending on whether the pleasure associated with it is the *cause* of the desire or instead its *effect* (K3 5: 221–2; M M 6: 212). Kant calls *pleasure-caused desire* “desire [*Begierde*] in the narrow sense” (MM6:212). In this case, an agent seeks to bring about the existence of some object or state of affairs because of some antecedent pleasure. When these desires are habitual, Kant gives them their own term: inclinations. In the case of the other sort of desire, pleasure is the *effect* of the desire. Here it is *reason* that causes the desire, which in turn results in pleasure. As early as the *Groundwork*, Kant recognizes the existence of at least one such *reason-caused desire*: he calls the feeling necessarily connected with it “respect” or “moral feeling.”⁹

He also shows that the treatment of respect and moral feeling in Kant’s treatment of respect in the third *Critique* is consistent with the characterization of these emotions in the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*. In the *Critique of Judgment* (KU, 5: 289), Kant claims that when an *a priori* principle determines the will, there is pleasure associated with that, the moral feeling, that is the consequence of that determination. This is not in contradiction with what is stated in the *Groundwork*, where respect is said to be “a feeling self-wrought by means of a rational concept” (4: 401n).

Sympathy in *The Metaphysics of Morals*

Sympathy, an affect that does not have any intrinsic moral value in the *Groundwork*, comes out in the *Doctrine of Virtue* as a feeling of pleasure and displeasure that should be used to promote benevolence, being itself an incentive for moral actions:

Sympathetic joy and sadness (*sympathia moralis*) are sensible feelings of pleasure and displeasure (which are therefore to be called “aesthetic”) at

another s state of joy or pain (shared feelings, sympathetic feeling). Nature has already implanted in human beings receptivity to these feelings. But to use this as a means to promoting active and rational benevolence is still a particular, though only a conditional, duty. (MS, 6: 456)

In this quotation, Kant explicitly admits the possibility of using the feeling of sympathy as an incentive, a way to activate benevolent actions. More than that, to use sensible feelings is a conditional duty called humanity. It seems that here we are confronted with a modification in the understanding of the role of feelings as incentives. Does Kant change his mind about the role of feelings in the later texts, such as the *Doctrine of Virtue* (1797)? A provisional answer can be found in the remark he makes about the duty of humanity: “It is called the duty of humanity (*humanitas*) because a human being is regarded here not merely as a rational being but also as an animal endowed with reason” (MS, 6: 457). In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant seems to have abandoned the pure *a priori* domain of practical reason. It is not anymore a matter of incentives that work for pure rational beings, but incentives that work for animals endowed by reason. If one is not anymore in the pure practical domain, why call this work *The Metaphysics of Morals*?

Kant admits that a *Doctrine of Virtue*, as part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, should be built upon a system of concepts, which are independent of empirical intuitions: “A *philosophy* of any subject (a system of rational cognition from concepts) requires a system of *pure rational* concepts independent of any conditions of intuition, that is, a *metaphysics*” (MS, 6: 375).

The philosopher who wants to construct a metaphysics of morals looks for rational pure concepts, unconstrained by empirical conditions. To be faithful to the spirit of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Doctrine of Virtue* should give us a system of rational pure concepts:

If one departs from this principle and begins with pathological or pure aesthetic or even moral *feeling* (with what is subjective rather than

objectively practical); if, that is, one brings to the matter of the will, the end, instead of with the form of the will, the *law*, in order to determine duties on this basis, then there will indeed be no *metaphysical first principles* of the doctrine of virtue, since feeling, whatever may arouse it, always belong to the order of nature. (TL, 6: 376–77)

A *Doctrine of Virtue*, being a part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, cannot be based on feelings, since feelings are always physical, related to pain and pleasure. Although in the Preface of *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant clearly states that morality cannot be based on empirical feelings, here we come across the duty to love in the first chapter (*Of the Duty to Love other Men*) of the second part (*Of the Duties of Virtue in Relation to other Men*) of the *Doctrine of Virtue*.

In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant intends to build a system of duties, which are free from pathological feelings. In this context, how can we have a duty to love? Another problem that occurs here is the possibility of a *a priori* construction that leads to a theory of virtue, since virtue is usually defined as habits that belong to the empirical domain. Aristotle defines virtue as a *héxis proairetiké*—that is, a habit to act deliberately. If we accept this definition, a theory of virtues would belong to the technical-practical domain. But Kant seems to look for a way to establish a metaphysics of morals in the pure practical domain. Does he actually do so?

To answer this question, it will be necessary to correctly understand the conception of a metaphysics of morals, as that doctrine that contains in it principles of application of the universal law to the “particular nature of the human beings, which is only known by experience” (MS, 6: 217). The other side of the metaphysics of morals is a moral anthropology, which gives the conditions of the acceptance or rejection of the moral law by human beings. Kant claims that “a metaphysics of morals cannot be based upon anthropology,” “but can still be applied to this” (MS, 6: 217). In the *Groundwork*, Kant clearly distinguishes between a twofold metaphysics: a

metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of morals (G, 4: 388). Both parts of metaphysics belong to pure philosophy and refer to *a priori* principles. Twelve years later, however, the idea of a metaphysics of morals includes in itself an empirical knowledge on the nature of human beings, without which it would not be possible to determine a concrete system of duties for the human beings. Allen Wood correctly analyzes this displacement in the conception of a metaphysics of morals that occurs between 1785 and 1797, regarding the separation between the empirical and pure part of the ethics.¹⁰

According to Wood, when Kant alters the content of a metaphysics of morals in order to encompass the empirical nature of human beings, he is not abandoning or modifying his basic thesis, that the basic principle of morality is totally *a priori*. He is only restricting its previous thesis that a metaphysics of morals is only related to the ideas and principles of a possible pure will. In other words, Kant does not consider anymore that a metaphysics of morals is composed only of a set of pure moral principles, but it is a system of duties that result when the pure moral principle is applied to the empirical nature of the man.

The application of the pure moral principle to the empirical nature of the man gives us a system of virtues, defined as ends that are also duties. Kant enumerates two ends that should be considered as duties: self-perfection and other people's happiness. These two ends lead to two different kinds of duties: the duties of man related to him, and duties related to others, among which we find the duty to love, which consists in promoting the happiness of others. However, this virtuous love is not a love related to the pleasure experienced in the presence of other person, but it is a principle to do benevolent actions:

In this context, however, *love* is not to be understood as *feeling*, that is, as a pleasure in the perfection of others, love is not to be understood as *delight* in them (since others cannot put one under obligation to have feelings). It must rather be thought as the maxim of *benevolence* (practical love), which results in beneficence. (TL, 6: 449)

By the duty to love, Kant means, not the love of delight (*complacentia*), but the love of benevolence (*Wohllollen*, *benevolentia*), since the latter could be demanded from someone, but not the former, given that it would be a contradiction that somebody should have the obligation to feel pleasure. The love of benevolence, since it is not a feeling of pleasure, is something close to Aristotelian cultivation, a disposition that can be awakened by habit. Kant writes:

So the saying “you ought to love your neighbor as yourself” does not mean that you ought immediately (first) to love him and (afterwards) by means of this love do good to him. It means, rather, *do good* to your fellow human beings, and your beneficence will produce love of them in you (as an aptitude of the inclination to beneficence in general). (TL, 6: 402)

For this reason, Kant distinguishes the virtue of love from the love in which one feels pleasure or satisfaction. Moreover, we cannot have a duty to love, if love is understood as a feeling or pleasure, because a duty cannot constrain someone to have pathological feelings, nor can moral law induce someone to love somebody.

The duty to love must be understood as a principle of benevolence, which consists not in wanting the good of others without practically contributing to this, but in a practical benevolence, or beneficence, which consists in considering the good of others as end in itself. *The benevolence principle* will produce, in turn, *duties of beneficence* (to help the ones in need to find happiness) and of *recognition* (to honor a person due to a favor that was received) and of *affection* (*Teilnehmung*). Kant accepts that to participate in the pain or joy of others is, without a doubt, a feeling, apparently falling again in a material determination for morality. The introduction of this feeling of sympathy must be, however, interpreted, not as a ground of determination for the action, but as a natural feeling that we must use in order to accomplish benevolent actions. It will be our duty, therefore, to cultivate in us those

sympathetic feelings, although the moral law should not be based on that, but on the pure reason.

In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant presents a more complex moral theory on the role of the feelings related to moral actions. Even though sympathy can be an incentive to the accomplishment of a moral action (or an incitement to practical love), this does not mean that all sharing of feelings is positive. We can see it in the division of humanity in *humanitas practica*, “the capacity and the will to share in others’ feelings” and *humanitas aesthetica*, “the receptivity, given by nature itself, to the feel of joy and sadness in common with others” (TL, 6: 456). The first is desirable, but not the second, because the first is free and depends on the will, while second is spread among people “as the susceptibility to heat or the contagious diseases” (TL, 6: 457).

The reason for praising *humanitas practica* and disapproving of *humanitas aesthetica* is that compassion, when not followed by a practical action, is a way to increase the evil in the world. If a friend is suffering and I can do nothing to diminish his pain, I do not have a duty to be sympathetic to his feelings, because this would only make me increase the suffering and troubles of the world.

Kant without a doubt recognizes that feelings of sympathy may play the role of a moral incentive, when the representation of duty by itself is not enough, “for this is still one of the impulses that nature has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish” (TL, 6: 457). If the representation of the law will not be enough to bring about the action, it is a duty to promote our natural good feelings to add a natural incentive to a rational moral one. Going, therefore, beyond the spirit of the *Groundwork*, Kant admits that sympathy, duly cultivated to answer to the correct situations, can be the incentive of a correct action. In this case, this duty must be understood on two levels: first, one to carry out moral actions; second, a derived duty to use natural feelings when consideration about the moral correction of the action is not enough to start the action.

The role that Kant attributes to sympathy is, therefore, of a provisory moral feeling, which can assist in the accomplishment of good actions, when the feeling of respect for the moral law is not yet developed enough. As Nancy Sherman notes, this is a morality *faute de mieux*, that is, a kind of provisory morality: it is a morality of an inferior kind, an immature morality that finally will be substituted in the progress of the individual. Nancy Sherman, however, admits that feelings such as sympathy, compassion, and love possess a perceptive moral role in Kant, that is, that “we still need the pathological emotions to decide where and when these ends (of the moral law and its spheres of justice and the virtue) are appropriate.”¹¹

Sherman seems to be correct and faithful to the texts when she examines the provisory role of feelings such as compassion, love, and affection, since Kant really admits a function for these in the accomplishment of moral actions, when mere respect for the law is not strong enough to trigger the action. The perceptive role, however, is more doubtful, since the idea that emotions are blind seems to remain a constant in Kant’s work, without variations from the *Groundwork* to the *Doctrine of Virtue*. The critique of sympathy as a possible incentive for a moral action was based, in the case of the philanthropist, not on the contempt for sympathy in itself, but on the idea that sympathy alone could not show us which course of action is the moral one. A good example given in contemporary literature is supplied by Barbara Herman: we hear somebody crying out for aid to load something heavy, we help this person, and later we come to know that a sculpture at an art museum was stolen by a thief. In this example, one ended up helping a thief to carry out his wrong act. And this was done out of sympathy.

In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, sympathy can play the role of a moral incentive, if it is trained and controlled by the will, which will also inform us when this feeling must be activated. This is the reason why humanity is divided into free and non-free humanity. Free humanity (*humanitas practica*) is the capacity and the will to use the feeling of sympathy to promote the happiness of others, which includes a procedure to decide in which cases I must set in motion

this feeling. A stoic who decides that he will not set in motion his feelings of sympathy acts in such a way because he knows he cannot do anything to help his friend; however, if he had something practical that he could do, he would activate his feelings of compassion, since these would have as a consequence a real beneficent action. Consequently, in this new vision of sympathy presented in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, this feeling is controlled by reason, which differs from the negative approach of sympathy presented in the *Groundwork*, that is confirmed by the Mrongovius notes on anthropology (84/85), according to which one of the reasons that sympathy is inappropriate as an incentive is its sensible register: “If [sympathy with the joy and pain] becomes an affect, then the human being becomes unhappy. The human being becomes, through sympathy, only sensible and he does not help the others” (AntM, 25: 1348).

So, in order to make sympathy effective and turn it into beneficence, one should go to hospitals and other places, in order to see other people’s suffering; it is a duty, says Kant “not to avoid the places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out, and not to shun sickrooms or debtors’ prisons and so forth in order to avoid sharing painful feelings one may not be able to resist” (TL, 6: 457). This *habitus* does not aim at developing compassionate personalities, but at training our feelings of compassion and sympathy so that they can be used as a means to accomplish good actions. However, the feelings of love, sympathy, and compassion are, in themselves, morally blind, depending on moral principles to be set in motion in the correct situation.

Desire, affect, and passion: The anthropologic modalities of love

In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant presents his division of faculties: the faculty of knowledge, the faculty of pleasure, and the

faculty of desire. In his division, affects, appetites, or inclinations in general belong either to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, or to the faculty of desire. To the faculty of desire belong the instincts, propensities, inclinations, and passions (Ant, 7: 265); affects belong to the faculty of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure.

A first and primitive level of love could be attributed to instinct, a second division of the faculty of desire. The mating instinct is common to human beings and animals, and sexual desire in itself does not possess anything related to morality or to the promotion of dignity. In the *Doctrine of the Right*, Kant defines the sexual union as a use that a human being makes of the sexual capacities of the other; “in this act,” he claims, “a human being makes himself into a thing, which conflicts with the right of humanity” in his own person (MS, 6: 278). The only way to reconstitute his personality is to possess the other equally as a thing. The difference between prostitution and marriage consists in the fact that marriage preserves the right of humanity in one’s own person only by adding the contractual aspect, that of the right to use the other in turn. Both husband and wife have the right to use each other’s sexual organs, and they also have the exclusive right to use them. But this is not the case, for instance, in prostitution and that is one of the reasons why Kant condemns it. The only possibility of making sexual relations a relationship according to the principle of right is the warranty of the exclusive use of one another’s sexual organs.

After this first instinctive and natural level of love, there is a second one, which belongs to the category of affects, stormy and temporary feelings, which make reflection and deliberation on action difficult. The love-affect must be distinguished from the love-passion, since passion, even if it is violent, may coexist with reason and it is deliberative in order to reach its purpose. Kant metaphorically explains the differences between affect and passion:

Affect works on health like a stroke of apoplexy; passion works like consumption or atrophy, affect like an intoxicant which one has to sleep off,

although it is still followed by a headache; but passion is looked upon as an illness having resulted from swallowing poison. (Ant, 7: 252)

It can be seen here that love-affect differs from love-passion regarding the intensity, duration, and degree of danger of each emotion. The first is more intense, however, it is shorter lasting and less dangerous than passion. For this reason, Kant affirms that, where there is much affect, there is little passion, since stormy emotions deplete quickly, and do not allow the cold evaluation of the lived situation and deliberation: "Affects are honorable and unconcealed, while passions are deceitful and hidden" (Ant, 7: 253). The innocence of the love-affect and its incapacity to control its manifestations can be evidenced in the following situation:

A serious lover is often restrained, awkward, und captivating in the presence of his beloved. But he who only pretends to be madly in love, and who has no other talent, can play his role so naturally that he lures the poor, deceived maiden wholly into his snare, just because his heart is uninhibited and his head clear. (Ant, 6: 264)

The love-affect resembles the feeling of falling in love with someone, denoting a romantic, uncontrollable love, whose manifestation can make the person blind to the defects of the objects of desire: "Whoever loves can keep his vision intact; but the person who is in love is inevitably blind to the mistakes of the beloved object, although the latter will usually regain his vision a week after the wedding" (Ant, 7: 253). The emotion of this passionate person is an affect, in Kantian terms. The term passion is reserved for more deliberative attitudes, being able to coexist with a cunning dissimulation, since this, as shown in the example above, can contribute to possessing the object of desire. Therefore, Kant affirms that passions are not like affects; affects, at least, may coexist with good intention, while passions reject any attempt of improvement. Such is the case when a person acts moved by a strong affect, what Kant characterizes as weakness of the will. Passion, on the contrary, chooses a principle in accordance

with inclination. The passion of love, however, possesses an advantage regarding other passions, such as ambition, vanity, or greed, which are illnesses of reason because they possess a permanent character, since, according to Kant, “they are never satisfied” (Ant, 7: 266). The passion of love ceases when the desire, or the physical love, is satisfied. If it is possible to go crazy due to obsession caused by other passions, such as ambition, vanity, and greed, the saying one “became crazy because of love” contains something implausible, because the one who goes crazy due to refusal of the loved being, was already disturbed to have chosen the wrong person as the object of his affect and desires. Such was the case, very common at the time of Kant, of people who fall in love for others with a superior social standing: “To get passionate themselves for a person of a higher social class and to wait of this the madness of a marriage is not the cause, but the consequence of a previous disturbance” (Ant, 7: 217).

Love, in the form of affect or passion, even in its most violent manifestation, is not as harmful as the passions of ambition, vanity, and greed. However, it is not as helpful to morality as the feeling of sympathy, since love implies a feeling between dissimilar people. Or, Kant writes in one of the *Reflexionen* grouped in the *Nachlass* on anthropology: “We need more to be honored than to be loved, but we also need something to love with who we are not in rivalry. Then we love birds, dogs or a young, fickle and darling person” (R 1471, *Nachlass* 15: 649).

Apparently, this claim denounces a prejudice of the time regarding women. However, in another *Reflexion*, Kant affirms that “men and women possess a reciprocal superiority one in relation to the other” (R 1100, *Nachlass* 15: 490). Despite the fact that this superiority of each one is relative to different aspects, the reciprocal inequality is what stimulates and promotes love as affect or passion. The fact that these feelings need a reciprocal moral inequality indicates that their place is strange to morality, which consists of considering the other as equal and promoting her happiness.

The figures of love assume different positions in Kant’s philosophy—some have moral value, others do not. Love as benevolence can be considered a

practical principle: to do good and to help people, from which the love for others can also be awakened. This was clear in the analysis of the Kant's texts, where it is said that it was not necessary to love and, due to this, to do good to human beings, but to act morally, and through this habit, to promote feelings for human beings. The feeling of sympathy can also be used by the agent to stimulate moral actions in which the respect for the moral law was not strong enough as an incentive. This is not in opposition to what is explained in the *Groundwork*, in which the moral value of an action resides in the respect for the law. To use the feeling of sympathy is only a provisional morality that, empirically, can and must use these feelings of pleasure and displeasure for other people's luck to encourage good actions, until our respect for the law is sufficiently strong to be a possible incentive.

Relative to affects and passions, even if both were criticized as illnesses of the reason, the negative effect of the love-affect would be less dangerous than the persistence and inversion of principles in the love-passion. However, since the passion of love ceases when its physical desire is satisfied, it does not have the persistence of other cultural passions. But such feelings of love are not useful to morality, since the love-affect or love-passion is awakened from an idea of inequality alien to morality.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the analysis of feelings, inclinations, and passions in the *Doctrine of Virtue* and *Anthropology* does not contradict the spirit of the *Groundwork*, since the action with true moral value is still the one whose incentive is respect for the law, which does not hinder us in using our sensible feelings, such as sympathy, for the purposes of reason.

What should we take for granted?

In his book *Kant and the historical turn*, Karl Ameriks argues that Kantians should prove moral law can move the agent to act, because action is not a

matter of mere judgment. If one has an impulse to do something, this could not be a mere thought.¹²

If we take for granted that only feeling could move us to action, Kantians should explain what kind of feeling moves the agent, or how can we act without feelings. As Ameriks himself stressed in an earlier work, “Since the ground of duty is defined independently of all our natural inclination, it seems that Kantian morality leaves the very motivation of moral activity unexplainable.”¹³ However, if we do not take for granted that one should act from feelings, then we do not have to prove anything.

In fact, Kant does not take for granted that we need feelings in order to accomplish moral actions. On the contrary, tender feelings make the heart weaker and not stronger. Since virtue for Kant is before anything else strength, teaching tender feelings will build a weak character, which cannot meet the exigencies of morality:

In our times, when one hopes to have more influence on the mind through melting, tender feelings or high-flown, puffed-up pretensions, which make the heart languid instead of strengthening it, than by a dry and earnest representation of duty, which is more suited to human imperfection and to progress in goodness, it is more necessary than ever to direct attention to this method. (KpV, 5: 157)

The method mentioned here is the moral education of young men. In order to really develop moral character in children, it is not useful to tell stories about magnanimous and noble actions. Is it worthwhile to call attention to the holiness of duty alone? In pedagogical terms, this is more useful, because feelings do not develop character since they calm down and the organism tends to go back to its natural vital motion.

All feelings, especially those that are to produce unusual exertions, must accomplish their effect at the moment they are at their height and before they calm down; otherwise they accomplish nothing because the heart

naturally returns to its natural moderate vital motion and accordingly falls back into the langor that was proper to it before, since something was applied that indeed stimulated it, but nothing that strengthened it. (KpV, 5: 158)

A possible objection from a sentimentalist would refer, not to the duration of the incentive, but to its force. Even if feelings cannot last for a long time, they give us a more intense incentive to the moral action. Kant would not disagree with that, he would even give us an example of someone who tries in extreme danger to save people from a shipwreck, finally losing their own life in the attempt. In this case, there is more “subjective moving force as an incentive if the action is represented as a noble and magnanimous one than if it is represented merely as a duty in relation to the earnest moral law” (KpV, 5: 158). However, the incentive presented in the pure law of duty is the most elevated of all.

Not only it is possible to act from the motive of duty alone, but it is also desirable. And the conscience of moral law should be a sufficient motive for us to act from it.

What is wrong in acting morally out of emotions?

People usually make a portrait of Kant's philosophy and the relation between action and emotion as if Kant has said that we know what to do, but sometimes, because of the weakness of the will, we can fail to accomplish doing the right thing. But is this always true? First, is it a good picture of human nature? Does Kant really say that?

Here there are two different situations. We can act out of emotions that are commonly taken as anti-moral emotions, such as rage, envy, ambition, jealousy, or greed. First, we have the possibility of someone taken by a strong emotion who cannot figure out what is the right thing to do. People taken by

the strong emotion of rage not only have the tendency to fight someone, but also think that revenge is the right thing to do.

But we can also have emotions that lead us to moral actions, such as sympathy. Although Kant acknowledges that sympathy can be part of a morality *faute de mieux*, the benevolent action done out of sympathy does not have intrinsic moral value.

Kant has been criticized by many authors who support the view that acting from duty is repugnant. The anti-Kantian literature has illustrated this assumption with a well-known example: the example of someone who visits her friend in the hospital out of duty.

This example was first formulated by Stocker and discussed, among others, in Baron's book *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology*.¹⁴ Suppose that someone goes to the hospital to visit a friend and, when asked by her friend why she is doing that, she answers that she is visiting her friend out of duty. This example is supposed to be a critique of Kantian system, in which it is supposed that to be cold or insensible is a virtue.

But is it really so? In fact, Kant is not concerned with what is more comfortable or warm in a psychological way, he is asking what is the right thing to do and what should be a right motive. In saying that the right motive is duty, Kant is not condemning warm feelings, but is only saying that we should visit our friends in the hospital even if we do not have any inclination to go to the hospital. In fact, few people really like to go to hospitals. If going to the hospital should be dependent upon a feeling of friendship, compared to the bad feeling of entering a hospital, perhaps in most cases the feeling of sympathy for a friend will not be enough to counterbalance the feeling to avoid being in a hospital.

One of the main criticisms against the supposed coldness of Kantian morality has come from feminist philosophy. According to this critique, some ingredients that are important to female identity, such as emotion, love, empathy, and cooperation, are not in consideration in Kantian ethics.

Sally Sedwick expresses this criticism when she says that because moral agency in Kant's view is a function of acting from reason rather than from feeling, it is said to reflect features more of a male than of a female identity.¹⁵ She, however, supports Kant against the critique of a misunderstanding of human psychology. What Kant is saying is not that we are—or should be—cold people without any feeling or that in our meaningful relations feelings should not play an important part. What he is claiming is that empirical motives do not have moral weight.

Only motivations motivate?

Paul Guyer offers a challenging version of Kant's philosophy.¹⁶ He acknowledges that Hume and Kant offer two opposing views on moral matters. While for Hume reason cannot give a motive or end for action, only a means for the realization of ends, Kant admits that pure reason can provide a sufficient motive. For Guyer, however, even if they are considered antagonists in moral matters, they share the internalist principle, according to which a principle can give us a motive to action:

Hume and Kant share the "internalist principle" that any genuine moral principle must be a motive for action: that principle is the premise for Hume's argument that reason cannot be the source of genuine moral principles, because he does not see how reason can be motivating, but it is equally the basis for Kant's conviction that reason must be capable of producing a distinctive moral feeling, because he also assumes that some sort of what Hume would call an "affection" must be the proximate phenomenal or empirical cause of any action, and therefore infers that pure reason must produce a moral feeling that can in turn cause the action that reason requires.¹⁷

The internalism in Kant is given, according to Guyer, by the fact that pure practical reason motivates us to act *through* feelings, such as respect for moral law or moral feeling. Guyer explains:

Although Kant's Metaphysics could have allowed him to argue that pure practical reason sets moral ends and principles and determines us to act in accordance with them entirely independently of any feelings or desires, he does not do so, but instead supposes that pure practical reason motivates us to act precisely by creating a feeling, namely moral feeling or the feeling of respect for moral law, which can then move us to act.¹⁸

Guyer reconstructs Kant's arguments in a way that indicates that feelings play the role of motivations in Kant, as well as in Hume, narrowing the difference between them. The feelings that could play the role of moral motives are not only respect or moral feelings, but sympathy as well. In this sense Kant would be an internalist, because pure practical reason will produce a feeling that operates as a motivation in Hume's sense.

Iain Morrison shares this conception with Guyer. For Morrison, respect for the law is the incentive for moral action. In this interpretation, respect is not only the effect of the moral law, but what determines the moral action.¹⁹ Patrick Frierson, in discussing the role of respect in the motivation of a moral action, classifies commentators as "intellectualists" and "affectionists," and erroneously puts Guyer among the former. In the quotation just cited, Guyer undoubtedly takes the latter position, since he acknowledges that only respect, as a feeling, can trigger a moral action.²⁰

Paul Guyer understands the Kantian theory of action as if the motive of the law produces its own incentive and this incentive is what really determines the moral action. However, in Kant we do not need an incentive to motivate. The mere thought that something is right is sufficient to trigger the right action.

In his criticism against Kant, Bernard Williams²¹ points out that Kant does not have a place for emotions and blames him for the suspicions moral philosophers

have against emotions. In my view, the first criticism is wrong. Kant has a place for emotions, and even for moral emotions. He explores the role of emotions in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, when he analyses the role of sympathy and moral feeling. It is true that most emotions for Kant are considered bad for the tasks of morality, mainly affects such as anger or passions such as ambition, greed, or vanity. It is even true that in some texts, he says that we would like to get rid of all our inclinations or that affects and passions are sores of reason. However, in *The Metaphysics of Morals* and in the *Anthropology* he acknowledges that some feelings can work as a morality *faute de mieux*.

The second criticism, however, is right: Kant could have been a strong influence on moral philosophers to despise emotions. Kant is not against emotions in morality, he only aims at constructing a morality which does not depend upon emotions. Emotions are fickle, they are dependent on aspects such as humor, or temperament, or even contingent facts of our daily lives, and consequently they cannot be a stable basis for morality.

Williams is also right in pointing out that Kant does not attribute to emotions the role of moral incentive and supports the view that an action can be done without any empirical motivation. Williams claims that a desire or a disposition should be present as an antecedent of any action and holds that intentional actions, even those which accomplishes moral ends, should be motivated by something else than mere beliefs, since beliefs alone do not motivate.

This is undoubtedly a criticism against Kant, who supports the view that pure reason—without any help from emotions or desires—can be immediately practical.

Where might Kant fall on the map of contemporary positions regarding moral motivation? It is interesting to understand how philosophers answer to the following questions: (1) Are emotions and feelings necessary for the determination of the morally right? (2) Are emotions and feelings necessary for moral motivation? Kant will certainly answer “no” to these two questions.

Jesse Prinz, in the book *The Emotional Construction of Morals*,²² states that perhaps the most fundamental division in moral philosophy is between those who think that feelings and emotions are essential to morality and those who think they are not. Kant stands among the second; Prinz, among the first. He calls his theory “Emotionism,” according to which morality is based on emotions.

There are two versions of *emotionism*. According to the first, the *metaphysical emotionism*, moral properties are essentially related to emotions;²³ according to the second, *epistemic emotionism*,²⁴ moral concepts and judgments are essentially related to emotions.

Classical utilitarianism denies *epistemic emotionism*, because they deny that moral concepts are related to emotions. However, they define the good according to happiness, what lead Prinz to classify them as metaphysical emotionists. Emotivists are the reverse of utilitarians, because they do not accept *metaphysical emotionism*, while endorsing *epistemic emotionism*. For emotivists, to judge that something is wrong is the same as expressing an emotional rejection to it.

A Kantian would reject both forms of *emotionism*. According to Kant, nonmoral actions are those that I cannot universalize and not those that arouse my sensible rejection. Moral properties are not related to emotions, but to the possibility of being universalized in a coherent way, or, in Kantian terms, without contradiction. Kantians also reject *epistemic emotionism* because the concept of right and wrong is not based on emotional states. In fact, moral judgments would be better if we ignored our emotions.