Borges, Maria. "What can Kant teach us about emotions?." *Emotion, Reason, and Action in Kant*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 85–104. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350078390.0011>>.

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4

What can Kant teach us about emotions?¹

The pain model

It is a hard task to support my thesis that Kant can teach us something about emotions and bring important contributions to the contemporary debate about this issue. Kant has long been seen as the philosopher who denies any important role to emotions. To those who read just the first section of the *Groundwork*, it seems to be a clear-cut case that emotions do not possess intrinsic moral value. For instance, Kant writes that while the sympathetic philanthropist performs an action without moral worth, the absence of sympathy in the heart of the insensible one makes his action morally worthy.² This fact presumably inspired Sabini and Silver to claim in their article “Emotions, Responsibility and Character” that “a Kantian chapter on emotion and responsibility is easy to write and quick to read. The domain of the moral is the domain of the will expressed in action: it is the domain of that for which we are responsible. Emotions are beyond the will, and for this reason have no intrinsic moral value.”³

According to these authors, emotions have no moral value because they follow the pain model.⁴ Just like pain, which is a fact about us, regardless of values or other aspects of our character, emotions, even the most complex

ones, do not fall under the command of reason. Kant, just like more recent psychologists and physiologists, is said to embrace a model in which emotions are precognitive,⁵ mere perceptions of unspecified bodily states,⁶ or undifferentiated states of the sympathetic nervous system. Emotions, like pain, would be nothing more than the stimulation of nerves, disconnected from values, character, or reason. A supporter of the pain-like conception of emotions is Zajonc. In his paper “Feeling and Thinking, Preferences Need No Inference” he shows that there is a direct pathway from perceptual system to emotional responses. Accordingly, emotions are not connected with reasoning and values. According to Sabini and Silver, Zajonc’s model is the same as Kant’s. Both place the emotions completely out of the moral domain. Hence, we could be held responsible for the expression of our mental states, but not for having them. Besides this, in Sabini and Silver’s view, certain emotional states are like the pain of withdrawal for a drug addict, in which any responsibility for action is attenuated by the intensity of the stimuli.⁷

Marcia Baron, in her book *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology*, criticizes the Sabini/Silver position, objecting that the pain model is not the one Kant uses for explaining emotion:

This [Kantian] model, with its very strong notion of agency, is diametrically opposed to the picture drawn by Sabini and Silver, according to which emotions function, on Kant’s view, much as pain does. It is a serious mistake to think that Kant’s psychology even approximately fits the model of pain and that feelings such as sympathy “move us to act without our rational assent or assessment.” . . . Similarly, it would be more plausible to criticize Kant for attributing to us too much responsibility for our feelings and emotions than to attribute to him the position that we are not responsible for them.⁸

Baron’s position is radically distinct from Sabini and Silver’s: we are not passive regarding our feelings; we are responsible for the way we feel. Even if

the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Groundwork* could justify a negative conception of emotions, as phenomena incapable of being controlled by reason, Baron claims that this conception requires revision when later texts are taken into consideration, such as *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*.

I shall try to show that neither model can fully explain Kant's view of emotions. Baron has a point in saying that we cannot explain some emotions through the pain model, like sympathy and gratitude, which can be cultivated. However, Kant does describe some affects as involuntary and passive, such as fright in battles, which overcomes the agent regardless of his will, causing disagreeable physical effects. In this case, Baron's claim that we are not passive regarding our emotions does not apply to Kantian morality. I will argue that Kant does have a robust conception of agency, in spite of our being passive regarding some emotions. However, if emotions are not in our power, this does not imply that they lack cognitive elements. People can feel anger without wanting it, but they in fact feel anger because they think something unfair or harmful has been done. Baron is right that there are some feelings like sympathy that are not beyond rational control; however, they cannot be a model for all feelings.

My claim is that Kant presents us with a very colorful, wide range of emotions, which cannot be captured in one model type, be it a pain or a sympathy model. This diversity does not allow a simple answer concerning their voluntary or involuntary nature, or concerning the influence of physiological factors. Kant makes room for this complex picture when he connects them to our passive, active, or reactive self, as well as to superior and inferior faculties. My strategy will be, first, to present the taxonomy of emotions, and then place them in what I call a map of the self. After this first presentation of the Kantian picture, I will address some philosophical issues and relate Kant's theory to contemporary discussion on emotions.

Emotions in the map of the self

First of all, Kant does not use the term “emotion.”⁹ What we pre-analytically call emotion refers to at least three different kinds of phenomena: affects,¹⁰ moral feelings, and passions. These inclinations¹¹ can be mainly related to two faculties: the faculty of feeling pleasure and displeasure and the faculty of desire. Feelings of pleasure or displeasure caused by an object can be sensible or intellectual. The former are caused by sensation or imagination; the latter are triggered by a concept or idea (Ant, 7: 230). Pleasure and displeasure given by sensibility alone are feelings of gratification and pain. Sensible pleasure and displeasure admit also two other kinds of inclination, caused by imagination: sympathy and affects. The difference between them is that sympathy can be cultivated, while we are passive with respect to affects.¹²

Affects are feelings of pleasure or displeasure that hinder the reflection through which inclinations were to be submitted to rational maxims; they are sudden and rash, making reflection impossible (TL, 6: 408), such as water that breaks through a dam or a stroke of apoplexy (Ant, 7: 252). They can lead the agent to moral blindness, since they hinder deliberation, with the consolation that this tempest easily goes away and calms itself, allowing the subject to go back to a state where reflection is possible again. He cites the example of someone who marries out of love and is blind to the flaws in the character of her beloved, but regains her vision a week after marriage (Ant, 7: 253). The Kantian paradigmatic example for affect is anger, a tempestuous feeling by nature, and fickle like love. Sympathy, although it is a sensible feeling (TL, 6: 456), can be trained in order to help the accomplishment of moral actions, when respect for the moral law is not a sufficient incentive.

However, pleasures and displeasures are not all sensible; we also have the intellectual ones, caused by an idea or concept. These include feelings that make the mind receptive to the concept of duty, such as moral feeling, which is defined as “a susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure from the

consciousness that our actions are consistent or contrary to the laws of duty” (TL, 6: 399).¹³ Love for human beings belongs also to the receptivity of the mind to the concept of duty. Intellectual pleasures include love of benevolence, but not love of satisfaction. The former but not the latter could be ordered as a duty, since it would be contradictory to have a duty to feel pleasure. Love of benevolence admits of something like Aristotelian cultivation, for it is a disposition that can be awakened by habit.¹⁴

Kant’s realm of inclinations also includes passion, which is related to the faculty of desire and refers to a strong desire for something. Passions exhibit a contradictory nature. On the one hand, Kant says that they hinder the control of reason to compare at a particular moment, a specific inclination against the sum of all inclinations (Ant, 7: 265). On the other hand, they admit some rational deliberation about the means to obtain what the agent desires. One good case is given in the *Anthropology*, where Kant compares the inability of a man who feels the affect of love to seduce someone, to the skill of one who is taken by the passion of love. The first will not be successful, while the second can easily trap the helpless victim (Ant, 6: 265). The difference is that one is immersed in a full agitation of the mind, while the other keeps a cold blood to plot the way to obtain it. This case depicts the difference Kant makes between the meaning of affects and passion, a difference that is also illustrated in outstanding literary works, such as *Dangerous Liaisons*.¹⁵ While affects are outbursts of feelings, which cannot coexist even with a prudential rationality, passions show their cunning. The same difference can be seen when one compares the affect of hate with the passion of anger: while the latter is fickle, the former is a permanent disposition, which inclines the agent to plot a cold blood vengeance.

In order to improve our understanding of Kant’s model or models for emotions, it is helpful to locate them in relation to a Kantian sketch of the self.¹⁶ Kant claims there are three instances of soul¹⁷ in a generic sense, whose reference in each case is the self. The self can be observed in a triple

perspective: as passive, reactive, or purely active. This tripartite division of the self is connected with the superior and inferior faculties. The inferior faculty corresponds to the passive part; the superior faculty, as active, corresponds to the perspective of both a purely active self and a reactive one.

The superior/inferior distinction applies to all three faculties: the cognitive faculty, the faculty of desire, and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. As regards the faculty of feeling, we have pleasure or displeasure of sensibility alone through the inferior faculty, while the pleasures, given by imagination and understanding, belong to the superior faculty. This difference can be illustrated when one contrasts pain, which belongs to the inferior faculty of feeling, to the feelings of pleasure and displeasure in the superior faculty, such as moral feeling. Physical pain seems not to allow a rational control, because it is displeasure of the animal or appetitive soul. Pain is defined as “displeasure of sensation,” and is explained by the effect produced in the mind by the sensation of one’s physical condition. Totally opposed to physical pain, we have the pleasure or displeasure due to a concept, such as the moral feeling of *The Metaphysics of Morals*. This feeling is an effect of the concept of duty: the moral feeling “is the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty” (MS, 6: 399). Hence, there is a big contrast between pain and moral sentiments, even though they could both be classified as feelings: the first one is related to the inferior faculty of feeling, connected with sensibility; the second one is related to the superior one, connected with reason. While physical pain is an involuntary, precognitive feeling, moral feeling includes the concept of a right action. We cannot decide whether we will feel pain or not, while we can decide whether we will feel a moral pleasure, because this requires just that we act according to the moral law.

The inferior faculty of pleasure is responsible for purely sensible phenomena such as pain, hunger, and thirst. The superior faculty of pleasure relates to the reactive and active self. The sensation of displeasure that we feel when

we know that our actions are wrong is associated with the active self, since it is a feeling connected with a concept: the concept of duty. Between the pure passive and the pure active part of the self, abide the reactive feelings, which still belong to the superior faculty of feeling, and refer to affects and sensibility.

Kant, who was a well-known hypochondriac, illustrates in his *Lectures on Anthropology* the difference between passive, reactive, and active feelings with a case of a man who suffers from gout:

I cannot prevent the pain inflicted on my body from passing into my soul. I can only prevent that my soul reflects over this, e.g., when I have gout and think what will become of me in the future, how I will acquire my bread and this causes sadness over the state of my health, here *animus* agitates. The sickness of the mind is also what makes me miserable. Because such reflection never attaches to animals, they are never miserable. But finally the highest degree of sadness arises when my spirit abstracts from all pain and awakens in me a self-reproach, when it imagines to itself how I brought this illness upon myself and became unhappy through my own fault. (AntPa, 25: 247–48)

We can clearly see, in this quotation, the difference between three levels of displeasure. The first one is purely physical, beyond control, even indirectly. Since it is purely sensible, it is independent of any cognitive content; the subject feels a certain wound as pain. This is an example of the inferior faculty of pleasure and displeasure, where the feeling is given through sensation alone.

The second level relates to the displeasure of an affect, sadness, and allows a nonphysical cause: sadness is caused by the imagination that agitates the mind when the agent worries about the future. Here we have the reactive part of the self, which relates to the superior faculty of feeling. Sadness is aroused by imagination, which agitates the mind. Animals, Kant argues, are never miserable, although they can feel the pain of a wound. However, Kant claims in another lecture, “On Philosophers’ Medicine of the Body,” that animals do

have imagination, although in cattle “this force [of imagination] is not directed by any choice or deliberate intention of animal.” Since some animals do have imagination, Kant can conceive that a certain illness may oppress the mind of the animal when it is brought into captivity, “yet the black anxiety that afflicts the miserable human race escapes the animal, which knows nothing of worry.”¹⁸ To mention animal mind, which can be affected by sadness, *ipso facto* refutes the idea that Kantian affects fit the pain model, since even animals are supposed to have affects triggered by imagination. The very idea of being in captivity can trigger in their minds some emotions of sadness. In human beings, this faculty is supposed to be even stronger, giving a deeper force to affects. Animals may feel sadness, although their weaker imagination does not allow for deep anxiety. Their emotions, according to Kant’s account, are not always involuntary, nor are they always precognitive. The idea of captivity brings them the idea of a miserable future, which triggers the affect of sadness. Thus, the pain model will not even explain the emotions Kant ascribes to animals.

Humans have another level of emotions, the one connected with moral judgments. This third level, the displeasure of spirit, the pure active part of the self, is completely absent in animals, since it depends on reason that awakes self-reproach. The moral conscience would create in the agent the feeling of displeasure because she knows that she has not acted well. Self-reproach is, then, an illustration of an intellectual displeasure, caused just by a concept. As we have seen, in the classification of the faculty of pleasure and displeasure (*Ant*, 7: 230), we have the division between sensuous and intellectual pleasure. While the former can be produced by sensation or imagination, the latter is conceived by concepts or by ideas. In the case of self-reproach, displeasure is produced by the idea of moral law.

Passions, which belong to the faculty of desire, are also related to the active self, since agents form maxims according to their passions. The thirst for vengeance, evil as it may appear, is still a maxim of reason, developed out of an

injustice suffered. History gives many illustrations of plotted murders based on hatred, sometimes based on the ambition and lust of power. Such passions lead the mind to accept evil maxims, in order to accomplish its ends. That is why Kant claims that passions manifest certain characteristics of reason (Ant, 7: 270).

What should we conclude from this taxonomy of emotions? Since the pain model is obviously ruled out, should we assume that Baron is right? Are we, according to Kant, responsible for our emotions? Since Kant supposes that humans can have moral feelings of displeasure according to the rightness or wrongness of our actions, is it the case that we do have control over all emotions? The answer is negative, moral feelings are but one part of the wide range of emotions. The nature of moral feelings, as something produced by the concept of moral correctness, hence controllable, arises from its belonging to the active part of the self. Nevertheless, between the purely passive part, where the feeling of pleasure depends on the form through which the object affects sensibility, and the purely active part, in which the satisfaction should relate directly to a concept, we have a variety of intermediary phenomena, such as sympathy and affects.

This reconstruction gives us the following table, where emotions are in bold letters:

Faculty of feeling pleasure or displeasure			Faculty of desire			
Inferior faculty of feeling	Superior faculty of feeling		Propensity	Instinct	Inclinations	Passions (hate, greed, lust of power, ambition)
Passive self: soul, <i>anima</i> , <i>Seele</i>	Reactive self: mind, <i>animus</i> , <i>Gemüth</i>	Active self: spirit, <i>mens</i> , <i>Geist</i>				
Pain, hunger	Affects (anger, sadness, joy)	Moral feelings				

Sympathy and affects belong to the reactive realm of the soul. They are phenomena that are different from pain, in that they require other faculties

besides sensation, and they are different from moral feelings, in that they are not provoked by a concept. That is why neither the pain model nor Baron's model can explain them.

The affects are typically reactive agitations, or reactions to something that has affected our mind. Kant's view of these feelings, which include anger, joy, sadness, and fear, is usually negative: affect acts like a surprise through sensation, suspending the composure of mind. Therefore, emotions are precipitate and also have the unwanted property of growing to a degree of feeling that makes reflection impossible (Ant, 7: 252).

Being like a surprise, this kind of feeling cannot be directly controlled by the will. We can decide whether or not to perform a correct action, and hence whether we will feel moral pleasure or displeasure resulting from such action. But we cannot decide whether it is appropriate to feel anger in a particular situation. Sometimes, we feel anger, even if we do not desire to feel it, other times we can think it would be fair to feel it, although we are insensible in the situation. Kant illustrates this possibility in the *Anthropology*, mentioning Socrates, who was in doubt whether it would be good to be angry sometimes, since it is paradoxical to have emotion so much under control that one can cold-bloodedly deliberate whether or not one ought to be angry (Ant, 7: 253). We cannot deliberate about feeling angry, although anger does not lack cognitive content. The affects have fewer cognitive elements than moral feelings; however, they have more cognitive elements than pain or other mere physical feelings. Anger involves the perception that something unfair was done, which hurts the agent or is against her conception of justice. We do not feel anger the way we feel pain; we feel anger when we realize that something in a situation is offensive or unfair.

Sympathy is a sensible feeling that admits of choice. It can be cultivated, in order to give a correct response in situations where we need practical benevolence. It is a phenomenon of the reactive part of the soul, which can be changed by the active part. Sympathy, as referred to by Kant in the *Doctrine*

of *Virtue*, fits the conception of sensitivity mentioned in the *Anthropology*. It is a natural feeling, which should be cultivated and used when the respect for moral law is not sufficient to trigger moral actions.

Feelings from the animal (or passive) part of the self are involuntary, and cannot have their sensation controlled. This is the case with pain, thirst, hunger, and so on. In the other extreme, we have the pleasure and displeasure of the active self, such as moral feelings and the feeling of respect, which are controllable through our actions, since they are outcomes of good or evil actions. In between lies affect, a phenomenon of the reactive part of the self, which is connected with the imagination.

When we mention reactive feelings, such as affects, we should consider also that some strong affects have involuntary outcomes, which involve strong physiological arousal. Kant cites two highly illustrative cases in this connection, related to anger and fright. About anger, he mentions the situation of a man who enters one's room in anger in order to say harsh words:

If a person comes to your room in anger in order to say harsh words in great wrath, politely ask him to be seated, and, if you succeed in this, his scolding will already be milder because the comfort of sitting is a relaxation which does not really conform to the menacing gesticulations and screaming while one is standing. (Ant, 7: 252)

In this case, one should make the angry man sit down, because the comfort of sitting is a relaxation, which does not conform to a great wrath. As for fright, he mentions the disagreeable digestive effects that can affect soldiers before a battle (Ant, 7: 257). Kant's account of the incontrollable and even highly undesirable outcomes of these emotions agrees with contemporary findings in physiology, according to which emotions may cause effects related to the autonomic neural system.¹⁹ These physiological components of emotions are responsible for the difficulty to controlling them,²⁰ since they have an inertial component, which is not easy to handle.

Between the propositional attitude school and the feeling theory

For Kant, emotions do have evaluative components, but, with the exception of passion, they are also feelings, which have physiological features. This is why Kant recommends that we should soothe the movements of a mad man, making him sit down and relax. The soothing of movements will help to calm the affect of anger itself.

We can say that Kant is between the propositional attitude school and the feeling theory.²¹ According to Griffiths,²² the former explains emotional phenomena mainly by beliefs and desires,²³ while the latter claims that emotions are characterized by a quality and intensity of sensation. Kant proposes a view of the emotions according to which they are intentional states as well as feelings. They are intentional states²⁴ in so far as they are about something, or directed to something in the world beyond themselves. We are not only mad, as we feel pain, but we are mad with someone or at something, we are not in love without an intentional object, we are in love with someone. As intentional states, they have a propositional content, and also bring evaluation and cognitive elements, as feelings they present physiological arousal. In this way, he can overcome the dichotomy of thought and feeling. Kant will not deny that an emotion has mental content. However, it is not only a desire for, or a judgment *about* something. Physiological processes also accompany it.

He would agree with the propositional attitude school, in that there is no sense in attributing sadness without the idea that something valuable was lost, or anger without the idea of something offensive done by someone. We are angry *with* a specific person or *at* a determinate situation; anger consequently has an intentional object. However, he seems to acknowledge that for some strong emotions, such as anger, a physiological arousal seems to be a necessary condition for emotion. In the case of anger, the man has to sit in order to calm himself, because anger is accompanied by a strong

physiological arousal, which cannot be instantly overcome by the sole reasoning about the emotion.

Will this physiological arousal also accompany emotions related to the active part of the self, such as moral feelings? The answer is yes. Although moral feelings are ultimately caused by an idea, the idea of moral correction of an action, they are still feelings of pleasure and displeasure. Although here the physiological arousal is not as strong as in anger, the idea of feelings brings with it pleasure and displeasure, which is impossible without any physiological component.

All emotions that are feelings of pleasure and displeasure have both components: evaluative contents and physiological arousal. Emotions express beliefs. In the case of the man who suffers from gout, his sadness is related to the belief that a gloomy future is waiting for him. His feeling guilty is related to the belief that he has contributed to his actual misery. The pain model does not apply to the Kantian account of emotions, because beliefs and desires are constitutive of these mental states. However, Baron's picture is not accurate either, since emotions are also composed by physiological components, which are scarcely under our control.

What kind of cognition is involved in emotions? Kant will certainly deny that emotions are mere reflexes, like pain, without any moral evaluation of a state of affairs. Some affects involve moral assessment, and they can be valuable in giving us information about the moral salience of a situation.²⁵ Sympathy can give us information about someone in distress. However, to ascribe cognitive value to emotions is not to say they have normative value. Emotions cannot tell us what to do; this is the task only of reason. Sympathy could inform us about the existence of someone in need, but only reason can tell if it is morally correct to help this person in that situation. Sympathy is connected with the belief that someone needs our help. Yet this emotion cannot validate for itself that it is right to help that person. A student can feel sympathy for a colleague who cannot do his own assignment, and want to

do it for him. Reason will tell him this is not the right thing to do. Anger could inform us that someone did us some harm and trigger the desire of vengeance. Yet reason will tell that vengeance is not the right thing to do. As Michael Moore correctly remarks, for Kantian morality “the emotions that generate a moral belief are irrelevant to the truth of that belief.”²⁶ In that sense, good emotions could give rise to false as well as to true moral beliefs. This does not imply that emotions are not connected with beliefs. In the end, what Kant offers us is the more subtle idea that emotions are connected with moral assessment, yet a moral command based solely on emotion cannot be validated without further rational considerations. Our compassion for a murderer who has had an awful childhood could let us forgive his crimes; our sympathy for a friend who suffers could lead us to not telling her a sad truth. Yet these are not morally right courses of action.

If we take into account that passions can also be put under the *label* of emotions, then here we have a different relation between emotions and morality. While affects hinder momentarily the sound use of reason, passions are always evil. They also have a different relation with physiological arousal, and seem not to exhibit them just like feelings do. Thirst of vengeance, greed, lust of power, ambition can be accompanied by no physiological arousal, since they have characteristics of a cold-blooded reason. They are more desires than feelings, having a salient intentional object and lacking physiological disturbances.

We can still say that the majority of emotions usually have both intentional object and physiological arousal, since for the most part they are feelings. However, passions lack physiological arousal and can be conceived rather as a strong desire of something, being then defined more specifically as propositional attitudes than as internal feelings. Kant shows sophistication in dividing what we usually call emotions into two kinds of events: feelings of pleasure and displeasure and passions, both of which are composed by different components.

Are emotions useless for Kantian morality?

Emotions have cognitive and evaluative content; however, they are not trustworthy in showing us what to do. Is the cognitive content of emotions therefore useless for morality? I don't think this is Kant's answer, since he recommends, for instance, that one should visit places where people suffer in order to awake our natural sympathy. He presents a more sophisticated approach, where the content of our emotions should be scrutinized by reason.

What does the Kantian account of emotions teach us about the relations between feelings and morality? First, emotions do not constitute a radically different realm from cognition and morality. For Sabini and Silver, on the other hand, morality and emotions constitute two different realms, and for Baron they are concurrent domains. Radical difference, supported by Sabini and Silver, would make emotions irrational feelings; the total coincidence (Baron) would imply both that we can be considered responsible for what we feel, and that emotions can be easily controlled by reason. The former conception is wrong because texts such as the *Doctrine of Virtue* explicitly show how we could and should cultivate some emotions in order to accomplish benevolent actions, when respect for the moral law is not a sufficient incentive. But Baron's statement that we are responsible for the way we feel is also not true, because there are some emotions like fright and anger, that arise in our self without permission and do not permit easy control. Hence, the relations Kant establishes between morality and emotion are more complex than total distinction or total similarity.

There is no unique answer regarding the role of emotions in morality, since they have a multiple reference to a *continuum* ranging from reactive phenomena to active phenomena of the self. An example of the latter is moral feeling, which is generated by the consciousness of the moral value of an action. Most of what we call emotions, however, lies in the reactive part of the soul. But here also we have a *continuum*: from affects, which are the most

uncontrollable, such as anger or fright, to sympathy, which can be modulated by the will in order to help the accomplishment of moral actions. At one extreme, we have anger and fright, at the other, sympathy and moral feelings.

The mistake of commentators is to consider that emotions in Kant have only one model and refer to only one kind of event, when, in fact, they refer to a multiplicity of different phenomena, which demand different explanations. These mistakes in defining a correct concept of emotion result in a misunderstanding of its role in morality. Anger can bring with it moral assessment about the unfairness of a situation; however, since it is an affect, it will make deliberation more difficult and will be a hindrance to moral action. Sympathy, although sharing with affects some features, because it is still a feeling of the reactive self, can be shaped by the will in order to help morality. Moral feeling, as a feeling of the active self, is directly connected with morality and with the moral evaluation of a situation.

Passions have a special relation with morality: they are, with no exception, evil. They are not, like affects, only agitations of the soul, which hinder reflection and moral deliberation. Moreover, some affects can give us moral information about the situation, although they are immoderate and difficult to control. Passions, however, are quite the opposite: they are immoral desires for something. Thirst for vengeance and power, greed and ambition present a perversion of moral goodness, since they are related to an evil deliberation of a mind that is not disturbed by affections.

The role of imagination

One of the problems regarding the propositional attitude theory is that it cannot fully acknowledge the role imagination plays in the production of emotions. Kant makes room for imagination in his account. Emotions are not feelings without any cognitive content; therefore, they do not belong to the

realm of total involuntariness. They are feelings that can be awakened in us through imagination or reason, produced by the reactive or active self.

Imagination plays an important role in the arousal of reactive affects. Sadness, as we saw, results from the imagination of a future unwanted occurrence. It is related, like joy, to the reproduction or anticipation of events. Kant cites the homesickness of the Swiss as an illustration of the role of imagination: the Swiss, when transferred to other lands, have the feeling of homesickness, which is aroused by the recollection of places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life (Ant, 7: 178). Here, the recollection of good moments in the past can produce this feeling. In the case of the sick man, he becomes sad when he imagines a bad future and worries how he will make a living. Imagination can intensify the feeling of sadness, as the example of animals that are sad, but never miserable, shows, because they don't have the intensity of imagination human beings have.

In the text "On the Philosophers' Medicine of the Body," Kant ascribes to imagination an even stronger force: the power of imagination can heal or produce a disease. On the one hand, the confidence sick people put in their doctors helps them through the imagination that they will be healed. On the other hand, imagination could spread diseases like epilepsy, since it is able to alter bodily movements.²⁷ Since affects are movements of the mind that agitate the body (Rek, 15: 940) and imagination can alter bodily movements, it can also interfere with affects. However, this alteration should not be considered as an effect of the direct power of the will.

Imagination can modify affects by bringing images to mind that cause agreeable or disagreeable sensations. The role of imagination is clear in the case of fear: just like sadness, which is caused by the anticipation of a bad future, fear is caused by the anticipation of danger. These feelings, even though they belong to the reactive part of the soul, have some cognitive elements that go into the evaluation of images that come before the mind. The idea that affects are blind and completely precognitive is wrong. Feelings of sadness,

joy, anger, and fear depend upon an appraisal of a situation reproduced or anticipated by imagination.

However, from the fact that there is a cognitive judgment of images, we cannot infer that they are easily controllable, which is a mistake of other commentators who take sympathy as a model for all affects. Taking again the case of the *Lectures on Anthropology*: I could decide that a state of sadness is bad for my disease, even though, each time I think about my future, I become sad, against my will. However, if the sick man suddenly remembers that he has a million dollars in health insurance for gout, his future would suddenly appear to him as a nicer one, and these images of a good and nice future will arouse in him the feeling of relief. Moral feelings, like the pleasure or displeasure in the rightness or wrongness of our conduct, can be more related to judgment than to imagination. If the sick man were to reproach himself for his situation in the former case, now that he remembers he has health insurance, he could feel pleasure and self-satisfaction in being prudent and wise.

Can we be held responsible for our emotions and actions?

Can we be held responsible for our emotions? It is true that some emotions of the reactive self, such as joy, sadness, and longing, are intimately connected with imagination and this faculty does have the power to modulate affects. However, the power of imagination cannot deny the evidence for my belief in a bad or good future. Although we can modulate some affects through imagination, we cannot decide not to have them or to have them at ease. Imagination of a future state of pleasure or displeasure should be connected with a possible state of affairs. If the sick man could not work in the future because of his gout, he cannot prevent the feeling of sadness for the bad future he imagines. Or, he can even trigger for some moments the affect of joy when

he remembers his past moments, but as soon as he focuses on his future situation, this joy will be quickly turned into sadness.

If we are not responsible for our emotions, can we be responsible for our actions? Emotions are said to be an obstacle to moral deliberation, and Kant uses phrases such as *water that breaks a dam* in order to show the irrational force of these feelings. However, he also draws on a strong picture of freedom, which does not allow for pathological compulsion.²⁸ We have strong emotions, difficult to control, but we have means to tame them in order to act the way we want. Virtue is one of these means. We are not responsible for emotions, although we can be held responsible for actions, since the strength of emotions cannot be equated to compulsion, such as the compulsion for drugs. Recently, some philosophers have tried to establish this kind of parallel between strong emotions and addiction.²⁹ Kant would not accept this picture, because as strong as emotions can be, and as much of a problem for morality they can portray, the very idea of practical reason presupposes that agents can decide how to act. In fact, the Kantian picture here is more likely to be accepted by moral common sense, since a strong emotion can never be taken as a total excuse for a bad action. Agents can mention strong anger to explain their violent acts, yet not to forgive them. People are held responsible for wrong actions due to strong emotions, because it is presupposed that they could have acted otherwise.

What can Kant really teach us about emotions?

In order to explain emotions, philosophers have tried, with few exceptions,³⁰ to build a single model for something that they supposed was a single kind of mental event. But perhaps the key to the understanding of emotions is to grasp their complexity and the different weight of rational and irrational components each one has. Although Kant did not write one specific book on emotion, I

think he was very attentive to this variety of emotional events, particularly in his anthropological works.

In this brief reconstruction of what could be a Kantian theory of emotion and its relation to the passive, reactive, and active self, I have showed that this kind of feeling presents different relations with our passive and active self. Emotions cannot be explained by the pain model, because they are not outside the rational domain, since they are also composed of evaluative beliefs and judgments. They are not involuntary, nor are we responsible for feeling them. They are phenomena of the reactive and active self, which can be modulated by imagination or by reason, but we cannot provoke or extirpate them by the sole power of the will. We can be held responsible for our acts, but not for our emotions, which is what makes Baron's model mistaken.

Kant's model accepts features of both the propositional attitude model and the feeling model. From the first, it takes the idea that emotions have an intentional object, and from the feeling model, it takes the idea that emotions are accompanied by physiological arousal. Emotions involve evaluative beliefs and also physiological disturbances. The degree of physiological arousal depends on whether emotions belong to the active or reactive self. And among the later ones, there are emotions whose physiological arousals are stronger than others. This is the case with anger, if compared to the mild affect of longing or sadness.

Kant's theory is more likely to be accepted by our common moral sense, because it explains emotions as people actually feel them. It is a very sophisticated theory that confirms the complexity of its object and does not allow for unrefined explanations. And perhaps he shows his cunning in not using the word emotion, but instead, other terms such as "affects," "sympathy," "moral feelings," and "passions," in order to show that what we pre-analytically call emotions refer to a wide variety of states, which call for different philosophical categories. This insight agrees with some contemporary philosophers who have recently challenged the idea that emotions form a unique class of events.