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5

Physiology and the controlling of affects in Kant's philosophy

In this chapter,¹ I discuss Kant's theory of emotions, particularly the possibility of controlling affects. I also address the following questions: Is the Aristotelian cultivation of emotions an unreachable end? Does Kant acknowledge the possibility of cultivation of a character in an Aristotelian way? My aim is to criticize some Aristotelian readings of Kant. I argue that Kant's theory of affects is connected with the eighteenth-century physiology and the concept of excited states, which make affects difficult to control merely by the force of mind. The possibility of controlling affects depends upon a mild temperament. Although in some cases Kant allows for cultivation of character, the limits of this cultivation will depend on the natural temperament of the agent. Kant presents some indirect—or even medical—ways to deal with the strong affects that are not under our control, since apathy is essential for Kantian virtue.

I conclude that Kantian philosophy not only is a matter of *a priori* principles, but is also dependent on empirical anthropology. The task of Kantian ethics is to attain freedom of strong affects, in order to better attain virtue.

Virtue and the controlling of inclinations

Kant is categorical about the relation between virtue and the controlling of inclinations:

Since virtue is based on inner freedom it contains a positive command to a human being, namely to bring all his capacities and inclinations under his reason's control and so to rule over himself.²

Virtue presupposes apathy, in the sense of absence of affects.³ Kant brings around the stoic ideal of *tranquilitas* as a necessary condition for virtue: "The true strength of virtue is a *tranquil mind*."⁴ In the *Anthropology* and the *Doctrine of Virtue*, apathy is taken in the sense of freedom from affects.⁵ In these texts, Kant maintains that we must strive toward a state in which affects are absent. Kant praises the stoic aim of apathy, as a desired state of self-control and self-possession when emotions are suppressed:

The principle of apathy, that is, that the prudent man must at no time be in a state of affect, not even in that of sympathy with the woes of his best friend, is an entirely correct and sublime moral precept of the stoic school, because affect makes one (more or less) blind.⁶

Although Kant undoubtedly sides with the stoic moral aim, he points out that to control affects is a difficult task. I will show that his strategies for controlling affects rely on a special physiology of emotions, in which they are related to certain bodily movements that cannot be directly controlled by reason. This is so because these movements, once they begin, depend upon physical causation that acts on organs and fluids. Such a standpoint can be found, for instance, in Descartes's *Passions of the Soul*.⁷ According to Descartes, an essential ingredient of passions is the movement of fluids called spirits, contained in the cavities of the brain. In the passion of fear, for instance, the spirits go from the brain to the nerves that move the legs and allow us to run. The soul

cannot have full control over its passions because they are accompanied by disturbances, which take place in the heart and through the blood and spirits: "Until the disturbance ceases, they remain present to our mind in the same way as the objects of the senses are present to it while they are acting upon our sense organs."⁸

The soul can overcome the lesser passions, but not the violent ones, and it can also prevent itself from feeling a slight pain; however, it cannot stop the pain caused by a fire that burns the hand. We can only overcome strong passions after the disturbance of blood and spirits has gone away. While the disturbance is still agitating the blood and spirits, the only thing the will can do is to inhibit the movements of which the disturbance disposes the body: in anger, it can stop the hand to strike a blow, in fear, it can stop the legs.

I suggest that Kant's aim is similar to that of the stoic: he believes that the extirpation of the emotions is an ideal that human beings can only rarely achieve. Having or not having emotions is not under our control, although Kant sometimes acknowledges that reason can cultivate some moral feelings, such as sympathy, or even attenuate some emotions, such as the fear related to shyness. However, he endorses the physiological model connected to most of our affects. If Kant, like the stoics, thinks that emotions are bad for the health of the soul, he nevertheless remains pessimistic about the possibility of extirpating them.

Kant endorses apathy and the stoic extirpation of emotions as the appropriate direction for one who wants to obtain both moral and nonmoral ends. Nevertheless, the controlling of emotions is a hard task and depends on natural character or temperament: some people are blessed by nature with pale emotions that can be tamed by reason; some are not. Kant distinguishes two kinds of character: "Sometimes people say that a certain person has this or that (physical) character; and sometimes people say that a person has simply character (a moral character) which defines him as an individual and no one else."⁹ To the first sense of character belongs his/her nature and

temperament; to the moral character belongs his mode of thinking. The nature and temperament of a person indicate “what can be made of a person,” the moral character indicates “what man is prepared to make of himself.”¹⁰

Kant distinguishes four different temperaments: the sanguine, the melancholy, the choleric, and the phlegmatic, and he also admits that “temperaments, which we attribute only to the soul, may perhaps be influenced mysteriously by the physical condition of a person” (Ant, 7: 286).

The account of four temperaments is not only an early distinction in Kant, since it appears also in the *Anthropology* published in 1797. In the *Anthropology*, Kant continues to accept the existence of temperament, although he distinguishes it from character: “What Nature makes of man belongs to temperament, and only what man makes of himself reveals whether he has character” (Ant, 7: 292).

The idea that temperaments are influenced by the physical condition of a person makes the stoic aim, if not impossible, at least very difficult. Emotions cannot be reduced to beliefs, because they carry a physiological inertial component. There are temperaments, which can count on a natural gift of apathy, such as the phlegmatic: the phlegmatic person “has been equipped by nature with a rather average share of reason” and “his fortunate temperament takes the place of reason.” Kant agrees that apathy, as the freedom of affects, is a natural gift:

Nature’s gift of apathy, in the case of sufficient spiritual strength, is, as has been said already, happy self-possession (in the moral sense). He who is gifted with it, is not yet a wise man, but he enjoys the favour of Nature to become wise more easily than others.¹¹

When Kant refers to this natural gift of a mild character, he is referring to someone’s temperament or natural character—that is, an incentive to the use of sound reason. Kant does not deny moral character as the possibility of choice-making. However, natural temperament may sometimes be an impediment

or incentive to deliberation. Whoever has a phlegmatic temperament is gifted with apathy. While the person who has a choleric temperament is quickly ablaze like a straw fire (Ant, 7: 289), the phlegmatic person “warms up slowly” (Ant, 7: 290).

Not only natural temperament has a physiological component; affects have them as well—mainly the strong ones, such as anger or fright. Kant follows here a physiological account, according to which these feelings get out of our control in connection with certain bodily movements. The example of anger is a good one: a man’s anger will decrease if we prevent him from screaming and gesticulating.¹²

The way to control affects proposed here is the relaxation of the body. If the movements are lessened, so are the feelings. For stronger emotions, when even the control of bodily movements is useless, we should wait until they go away, since our rational mastery is impotent.

Physiology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

Although there is no evidence that Kant read *The Passions of the Soul*, my hypothesis is that Descartes and Kant share a common background whose roots lie in the physiology of emotions. I will also argue that Kant’s discrepancy between the aim of apathy and his doubts about our ability to attain it finds an interesting analogy in the polemic between two main schools of physiology in the eighteenth century: the animists and mechanists. I argue that, even if Kant explicitly supported the first against the second, mechanist elements are present in his account of emotions.

Kant’s discussion concerning the power of the mind over affects is encompassed in a more general discussion on the power of the mind over the body. It is not without reason that the *Anthropology* and the *Doctrine of Virtue*

include a number of medical references. The main physiological debate in the eighteenth century involves animists and mechanists. Kant was aware of this discussion, and explains quite well the difference between the two schools as to whether the art of medicine should be practiced on man in the same way as on cattle:

Those who pursue purely mechanical medicine, such as doctors trained in the school of Hoffman, maintain that it should be practiced in the same way, in so far, to be sure, as the similar constitution of the body in either kind of living being allows. The followers of Stahl, who decide in favor of treating man differently, proclaim the remarkable force of the mind in curing diseases or bringing them to head. It is for the philosopher to turn his mind to the latter.¹³

Here Kant refers to two doctors who held the Chair of Medicine at Halle at different times: Georg Ernst Stahl (1660–1754) and Friedrich Hoffmann (1660–1742).¹⁴ Hoffman was a proponent of the mechanist view. His most important work is *Medicina Rationalis Systematica*, where he claims that the human body is like a hydraulic machine.¹⁵ A nervous fluid whose features are similar to Descartes's spirit produces the activity of the body: it is an ether-like fluid, secreted by the brain and distributed through the body by the nerves and the blood. If the fluid is excessive there will be a spasm; if the fluid is not enough there will be atony. Hoffman divides diseases into spasmodic and atonic and prescribes antispasmodics and sedatives for the first and stimulating remedies for the second.¹⁶

Stahl holds a different viewpoint. In *Theoria medica Vera*, he argues for the theory of animism. According to Ralph Major's *History of medicine*, "Disagreeing with Descartes, who distinguished sharply between the life of the soul and that of the body, Stahl taught the important role of the *anima*, the supreme life principle, which in health regulates all the functions of the body but which disappears at death."¹⁷ Kant shows that he is aware of the medical

debates of his time. Apart from the references to the Hoffmann and Stahl, he also cites John Brown in the *Anthropology*:

Affects are generally morbid occurrences (symptoms) and may be divided (according to analogy with Brown's system) into *sthenic* affects as to strength and *asthenic* affects as to weakness. Sthenic affects are of the exciting and frequently exhausting nature; asthenic affects are of a sedative nature which often prepare for relaxation.¹⁸

Many eighteenth-century medical writers had recognized that the causes of diseases are excesses or irregularities in human activity. Boerhaave (1668–1701)—who, with Stahl and Hoffmann, dominated the medical scene of the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century¹⁹—cited the case of a man who was ordered to carry letters to Utrecht. By excessive running, he forced the grosser parts of his fluids into the vessels, and rendered the obstruction of the vessels incorrigible.²⁰

John Brown (1735–88), toward the end of the century, also thought that the same external powers of nature that produce life and health also produce sickness and death. He saw the decline of the organism in quantitative terms, as a loss of excitability, which decreases slowly in quantity everywhere in the body from childhood to old age.

John Brown was a Scottish doctor who worked with William Cullen. Cullen (1710–90) agrees with the mechanist Hoffman, in that life is a function of nervous energy. In *Elementa Medicinae*, Brown presents a system that is supposed to compete with Cullen's, although it shares some features with Hoffmann's. Brown explains his theory of life as derived from external and internal exciting powers. Life is nothing but a forced state; if the exciting powers are withdrawn, death necessarily follows. The cause of diseases is an increase or decrease of excitability. Sthenic diseases are caused by an excess of exciting powers; asthenic diseases by a loss of exciting powers. The sthenic diseases can be illustrated by the explanation of its symptoms:

The increase of the force of the senses, of motions, of the intellectual faculty, and the passions, depends upon the increase of excitement in every one of their organs, by which, beside other effects, the motion of the blood through them is quickened.²¹

The symptoms of asthenic diseases, in contrast, show a lack of exciting powers:

All the senses are dull, the motions, both voluntary and involuntary, are slow; the acuteness of genius is impaired; the sensibility and passions become languid. The following functions are all in a state of languor, as is discoverable from the annexed marks: The languor of the heart and arteries is discernible in the pulse; as is also that of the extreme vessels on the surface, from the paleness, the dryness of the skin, the shrinking of tumours, the drying up of the ulcers, and the manifest absence of sthenic diathesis, to produce any symptoms like these.²²

Therapy consists in giving sedatives for sthenic diseases and stimulants for asthenic ones.²³ Brown's division of diseases parallels Hoffmann's account of the spasmic/atonic states, although they disagree with each other on the ultimate cause of excitability. For Hoffman, the exciting agent is the nervous fluid, for Brown, it could be physical or mental.

Like Brown, Kant talks about affects as physiological states of excitement or release. Laughing with emotion (a sthenic affect) is an example of the first; weeping with emotion (an asthenic affect) is an example of the second. Furthermore, many other affects are related to bodily functions: anger, if one can scold freely, is a way to aid digestion (Ant, 7: 261) and fear in battle could be related to acid indigestion.²⁴

Both Hoffman and Brown share the idea that we have excited states. Even if, for Brown, mental forces can produce these states, one needs to interfere with sedatives or stimulants to correct states of excessive or deficient excitement. Excited states can be produced by the mind, but they have a physiological component, which calls for chemical intervention. Kant, following Brown's

division in his classification of affects, also borrows this inertial physiological feature. Once affects are activated, we may not have control over the process.

Kant, as a philosopher-doctor, would like to control the physiological aspects of the body. He claims, inverting the famous saying of Epicurus, that the doctor's business is "to help the ailing mind by caring for the body," while the philosopher's business is "to assist the afflicted body by a mental regimen."²⁵ However, he should also acknowledge that some mental phenomena are beyond his control:

In many diseases of the mind, when imagination turns savage and the patient's head resounds with great, unheard of things, or he is cast into the depths of depression and tormented by empty terrors, the mind has been dethroned and bleeding the patient is likely to produce better results than reasoning with him.²⁶

When the mind is assaulted by strong affects like a profound sorrow or a strong fright, the possibility of controlling these emotions by the discipline of the mind should give room to physiological intervention. The same applies to strong affects like anger. That is the reason why Kant proposes to calm the angry man by making him sit and relax and does not propose a direct control of this affect by the will.²⁷ This example from *Anthropology* has an interesting parallel with *Passions of the Soul*, where Descartes argues that we can easily overcome the lesser passions, but not the violent ones, except after the disturbance of the blood and spirits has died down. The most the will can do while this disturbance is at its full strength is to inhibit many of the movements to which it disposes the body.²⁸

In the example of the angry man, Kant seems to accept the inertial component of affects. This example shows us something about the functioning of a strong affect in general: while we are taken by these strong feelings, we cannot do anything but wait for them to go away. Evidently, what Kant says about anger cannot be generalized to all affects. As we have seen in the previous

chapter, he presents a *continuum* of emotions, one that goes from the most strong and irrational affects, like anger, to those that are less passive and likely to be modulated by reason. This is also the case with moral feelings in general, including sympathy, moral courage, and enthusiasm for the moral law (Ant, 7: 254). Another example of an emotion created by reason is the astonishment felt by men while contemplating the wisdom in Nature. This is an emotion that can only be aroused by nature: “It is a kind of sacred awe at seeing the abyss of the supersensible opening before one’s feet” (Ant, 7: 261).

As a general term, “emotions” refers to a wide variety of states, which Kant calls affects, sympathy, moral feelings, and passions. In general, they all have intentional objects, which is to say, they are about something. Besides, they are also connected with physiological arousals. Even among affects there are some whose physiological arousals are stronger than others. This is the case of anger if compared with shyness. If it is possible to control shyness by habituation, Kant is not that optimist regarding affects whose physiological arousals are very strong. This is the case with anger, fear in battle, and so on.

Cultivation of emotions

In the last decades, many commentators have pointed out that Kant makes room for cultivation of emotions, in the Aristotelian tradition. If we cannot rid ourselves of passions and affects, perhaps we can cultivate and modulate them, in accordance with the Aristotelian viewpoint, by trying to have the *right* feeling about the *right* things in the most appropriate way. I shall argue that the idea of cultivation appears only in relation to a few feelings, which can be cultivated to respond adequately in the right context. Strictly speaking, the only feelings that could be modified in an Aristotelian way are sympathy and moral feelings, which can be trained and cultivated in an Aristotelian way, and shyness, which can be diminished through habit. But even so we always have

the burden of temperament. The one who is gifted by nature with a phlegmatic temperament, for instance, can control his anger better than the one who has a choleric temperament.

Nancy Sherman, in her article “The Place of Emotions in Kantian Morality,”²⁹ curiously sees in the example of the angry man a proof of the possibility of cultivation of emotions. From the possibility of diminishing the anger of a person who enters a room shouting, by making him sit, Sherman draws the conclusion that “the natural emotions can be cultivated and it is suggested that there is a measure of responsibility in their cultivation.”³⁰ Although in a later passage, Kant claims that “hot temper can be controlled gradually by inner discipline of the mind,”³¹ the example where anger is moderated by decreasing the force of movements attests rather to the view that affects have their own physiological causation, which can be indirectly modified only by means of another physical movement. This is different from the classical idea of cultivation through habit, which presupposes the possibility of a trained, correct emotional response. Moreover, in this example we are only attenuating someone’s emotion. The man who enters the room is supposed to be taken by the emotion of anger and to be incapable of self-control, which is the reason why the other person makes him sit and relax.

One of the most common strategies for controlling the emotions is found in Aristotle’s theory of virtue. Aristotle claims that to be virtuous is to have the appropriate emotion befitting the situation, that is, to have these emotions “at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end and in the right way.”³² In order to become virtuous, we should cultivate emotions in such a way that they become appropriate for each situation. The implication here is that we have the ability to rationally control them through habituation. Concerning this first position, Kant thinks it is nonsensical to deliberate about something that is not entirely rational. He illustrates this point when he mentions Socrates’s doubt about intentionally having or not having the emotion of anger as a paradoxical task:

Socrates was in doubt whether it would not be good to be angry sometimes, but to have emotion so much under control that one could cold-bloodedly deliberate whether or not one ought to be angry appears to be something paradoxical.³³

We can surely deliberate about what to do, in spite of our anger, but the occurrence of this affect escapes the rational control of the will. With respect to such a feeling we are passive, and it is beyond our power to control it. Is it always the case? Is the Aristotelian cultivation of emotions an unreachable end in Kant's theory? Does Kant acknowledge the possibility of cultivation of a character in an Aristotelian way?

The possibility of the classical idea of cultivation is not completely absent in Kant's approach, but it can be found only in his discussions of sympathy, moral feelings, and shyness. The cultivation of sympathy is expressed in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, where Kant maintains that sympathy can be an incentive of moral action, even if it is related to feelings of joy and sorrow:

Sympathetic joy and sadness (*sympathia moralis*) are sensible feelings of pleasure or displeasure (which are therefore to be called "aesthetic") at another's state of joy or pain (shared feeling, sympathetic feeling). Nature has already implanted in human beings receptivity to those feelings. But to use this as a means to promoting active and rational benevolence is still a particular, though only a conditional, duty.³⁴

In relation to sympathy, Kant states that we can and should cultivate sympathetic feelings to help us carry out what the moral law dictates, when the mere respect for the law is not sufficient to trigger the obligatory action. He also mentions cultivation regarding moral feeling³⁵ and practical love.³⁶ Although they are feelings, they are not to be called affects. The only affect that can be trained by habituation is the fear connected to shyness of talking in public: we can practice with persons whose judgment we care less about, before we talk in the presence of people for whom we have a greater respect. But even if Kant

does indicate a way of getting rid of the fear of talking in public, this is not the case regarding strong fear in battle, which cannot be controlled. When Kant talks about it, he mentions disagreeable outcomes, which implies that fright is out of control: "Fright in battle even produces salutary evacuations which have proverbially given rise to jesting (not having one's heart in the right place)."³⁷

The possible cultivation of sympathy or shyness has led some commentators to overstate the possibility of controlling emotions in general. Marcia Baron,³⁸ for instance, maintains that "it's evident that Kant's position in his later ethical works—the *Religion*, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, and the *Anthropology*—is not that inclinations are in themselves bad, but only that we must control them rather than let them control us and must not ever subordinate duty to inclination."³⁹ It is true that in the *Religion*, Kant states that "considered in themselves," inclination are not bad, consequently we should not mistake Kant's praise of apathy for hostility to all inclinations. However, it does not follow from this that passions are bad and affects are not, as Baron claims:

There are passages in the *Anthropology* which, if read in isolation from the surrounding text, might seem to confirm the view that Kant thinks everything affective is bad. . . . But passions are, in Kant's taxonomy, but one type of affect, so we cannot read off his view of affect in general from his remarks about passions.⁴⁰

I agree with Baron that passions are worse than affects in Kant's philosophy, because we can form maxims upon passions and that is not the case with affects. I also do not deny that passions are worse than affects. However, I would like to emphasize that there is also a problem with affects. They are not as harmless—let alone as useful—as Baron and Sherman claim. Kant states clearly that "to be subject to affect (*Affekt*) and passion (*Leidenschaft*) is probably always an illness of mind, because both affect and passion exclude the sovereignty of reason."⁴¹ Although Kant sometimes is ambiguous when he speaks of apathy,⁴² in the *Doctrine of Virtue* he argues for moral apathy, which

is not freedom from moral feelings, but absence of affects. Kant's account of apathy differs from the stoic one in the sense that, for the stoic, all feelings are harmful to morality, while Kant acknowledges that some feelings can be produced by reason and are subjective conditions of the receptiveness to the concept of duty (TL, 6: 399). These feelings are moral feeling, conscience, love of one's neighbor, and self-esteem. However, I would put them under the label of moral feelings, instead of affects.

In the *Religion*, Kant claims that there are three levels of evil. Undoubtedly passion is worse than affect because it is related to the third degree of evil, while affect is related to the first one, called weakness of the will or frailty (*fragilitas*). Although affects are not that harmful, they are still puzzling, since we can decide what to do and which maxim to follow and fail to follow it, because that "which is an irresistible incentive objectively or ideally (*in thesi*), is subjectively (*in hypothesi*) the weaker (in comparison with inclination) whenever the maxim is to be followed."⁴³ Were inclinations and affects under complete control, there would not be a first degree of evil—that is, the weakness of the will. In Kant's view, both passions and affects are diseases of the will. The only difference between them is that the former is a persistent perversion of reason while the latter is ephemeral.

Kant gives examples in the *Anthropology*, mainly about women, where the expression of emotions can be good for health: "A widow who, as the saying explains, will not allow herself to be comforted, that is, who does not want to know how to dry up the flow of tears, unknowingly or unintentionally takes care of her health."⁴⁴ This example does not lead to the conclusion that emotions are good in themselves or that we can control them; it only points out that, if it so happens that someone has strong emotions, it is better for her/his health to express them. Furthermore, affects are only good for health if they are moderate. Even unrestrained joy, which could be commonly considered a good feeling, is said in the *Anthropology* to kill more people than grief, showing the life threatening aspect of immoderate emotions.

I agree that passion is the main problem for Kant, but since he acknowledges the weakness of the will, the uncontrollable outcome of at least a strong affect *is also* a problem for a philosophy that states we are always able to follow the dictates of reason.

The Kantian viewpoint to the effect that emotions in general play an important role in the moral life is usually drawn from passages about sympathy in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. The statements and conclusions about this feeling should not be taken as a general remark about all emotions. Moreover, even in the passages about sympathy, the conclusion drawn by contemporary commentators is, sometimes, clearly beyond what is stated in the text. An example could be Sherman's⁴⁵ reference to Kant's statement according to which we should cultivate sympathetic and natural (aesthetic) feelings and, for this reason, we should not avoid places where we shall find poor and sick people because this is one of the "impulses nature has implanted in us to do what the thought of duty alone might not accomplish" (DV, 6: 457). She calls this function the "perceptual claim of emotions": "Certain states of emotions—she argues—such as sympathy, compassion and love, enable us to apply moral principles by alerting us to circumstances that have a moral dimension and may require moral actions."⁴⁶ Although Kant really encourages us to cultivate sympathetic feelings in order to use them as provisional incentives to accomplish the ends of moral law and virtue, Sherman goes too far by stating that "we still require the pathological emotions to know when and where these ends are appropriate."⁴⁷

It seems to me that Kant's point is not that pathological emotions do enable us to know when and where to apply moral principles, but that such an application is judged by the duty of humanity, which rationally decides in which cases we should activate our natural sympathy and in which cases we should prevent it from happening. Thus, as far as the "Place of Emotions in Kantian Morality" is concerned, it is a clear overstatement to claim, as Sherman does, that "for a practical interest in the moral law to be truly practical, the interest must work through emotional (pathological) sensitivities."⁴⁸

As I see it, though, Sherman's remark is a misconception of Kant's real intentions. Emotions, according to Kant, will always have a secondary role in morality. Kant does claim that we should cultivate sympathetic and natural feelings to accomplish what the thought of duty alone might not accomplish, but it is still a *faute de mieux* morality. We should use these sympathetic feelings when the thought and respect for duty are not yet mature enough to lead us to moral actions. To maintain that Kant endorses the view that emotions are an important part of our moral life is tempting, since it presupposes the possibility of our taking responsibility for having power of the will over emotions, which would certainly facilitate the task of practical reason. We cannot deny, however, that the physiological development of affects and the evil effects of passions really installs a gap between practical reason and the emotions, a gap that is difficult to overcome. Although it is true that the critique of formalism does not take into account important parts of Kant's theory, as both Baron and Sherman point out, it is misleading to try and bridge the gap between the Kantian project of practical reason and inclinations by an overall cultivation of emotions.

I am not claiming that affects cannot be controlled at all. Kant, it is true, gives examples of moderating one's shyness and to use one's sympathy in the right contexts to help people. In some texts, he even gives examples of feelings that can be aroused by reason. The best-known feeling that is aroused by reason is the respect for the moral law, but Kant also gives the examples of moral courage (Ant, 7: 257). These feelings can be called moral or virtuous—feelings—and belong only partially to sensuality. The courage that can be aroused by reason is called virtuous strength and is different from bravery in a battlefield or in a duel.

Kant's account of apathy should not be interpreted as an endorsement of the idea that all feelings are bad, since he accepts that some moral feelings can be produced by reason. In this sense, Kant distinguishes himself from the stoic hostility to all inclinations. However, to be subject to affects and passions

is “always an illness of mind” because both affect and passion exclude the sovereignty of reason (Ant, 7: 251).

Apathy and temperaments

I would like to address a possible criticism concerning my viewpoint about the difficulty of cultivation and the impossibility of apathy in the stoic sense, or rather, the impossibility of getting rid of affects and passion: namely, that the temperament/character distinction is an early distinction in Kant, and was gradually replaced by a notion of character like Aristotle's. It is true that Kant in the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* tends to analyze the concept of character in terms of four temperaments (phlegmatic, melancholic, choleric, and sanguine), while in later texts, such as the *Doctrine of Virtue*, he offers an idea of moral character that is related to virtue as *fortitudo*. However, the Kantian notion of virtue is different from the Aristotelian one. The first is the strength to fight against inclinations that oppose the accomplishment of moral law; the latter is the capacity of controlling emotions by habituation. Kant strongly denies that virtue can be attained through habituation.

Is Kant's account of temperament replaced by character in later texts, in the sense of the capacity of choice-making? Kant did not deny the existence of a natural character in his later anthropological works. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, the doctrine of the four temperaments is still present.⁴⁹ Although Kant, while examining certain effects, refers to the possibility of cultivation of temperament, it is still the case, for instance, that the anger of someone who has a choleric temperament is very difficult to control.

The idea of having a cultivation of affects, in the Aristotelian way of having the correct feeling in the correct situation, seems to be unattainable

for Kant, at least as regards strong affects like anger. We cannot cultivate the appropriate affects through habit; the best we can do is to have palliatives to reduce their inadequate outcomes whenever they come about. By contrast, the stoics held that we are able to cure emotions (affects in Kant's vocabulary) because emotions are mainly constituted by judgments. As Sorabji explains in *Emotions and Peace of Mind*,

It was the Stoic Chrysippus (c.280–c.206 BC) who developed the standard Stoic view on what emotion is. . . . It is important that emotion is not a felt inner contraction or expansion, as Zeno had supposed. Nor it is any kind of physical reaction. Such contractions and bodily changes may follow emotion. Later, Seneca pointed out they may also precede it, and they are then called “first movements.” But emotions itself consists of judgements.⁵⁰

Emotions are not due to nature, at least in Seneca's view, but to our own judgments, which involves voluntary assent. In this way, emotions for the Stoics will contrast with the sensation of pain, which cannot be avoided. We can be held responsible for emotions because we can avoid and heal them by changing our judgments. And the stoic therapy is mostly a therapy for changing beliefs. The idea of changing an emotion by changing beliefs is also the strategy of Aristotle, although he has a different aim, which is moderation, instead of the stoic extirpation. It does not seem that a change in beliefs will work out in Kant's example of anger, at least not after the agent is overtaken by this affect.

Contrasting with this voluntaristic approach found in Aristotle and in the Stoics, there is the physiological one, which goes back to Gallen, who was an opponent of the stoic voluntary approach of emotions. Galen has an interesting example (in fact it was borrowed from Chrysippus): emotions are like a downhill runner carried away by his own momentum and unable to stop at will. Once he begins moving he cannot control himself or stop voluntarily. A similar approach can be found in Descartes and in Kant, mainly in connection

with anger and fear. Once anger is activated, we cannot stop it by a change of judgment about the situation. This is precisely what the stoic claims to be his strategy. However, such a change in my beliefs about the situation cannot persuade me that I haven't suffered a real harm or that anger is not useful to my purposes. Kant's strategy for anger is not a changing of beliefs, since this would be ineffective, but a modification of the physiological state. In Kant's example about anger, something should be noticed: it is not the agent who calms himself, but another person who calms the agent, exactly because the agent is not in possession of his capacity of determining his behavior. It is not the agent who says, "If I am angered, then I have to sit and calm my nerves," but it is the other person who calms down the angered one. This distinction makes an important difference, because it is evident that the one who is possessed by a strong emotion is not in a sound mind.

After analyzing Kant's theory of emotions and the ways to control it, we may ask: "Where is Kant in the map of contemporary positions regarding emotions?" The contemporary debate is in a broad way a dispute between cognitivists and noncognitivists. According to cognitivists, emotions are or express beliefs. Examples of this position could be found in Solomon and Martha Nussbaum. For Solomon, emotions are judgments about us and our place in the world,⁵¹ while Nussbaum regards her own theory as a neo-stoicism.⁵²

On the other side, we have non-cognitivists, according to whom emotions are expressions of bodily movements or states. They are not judgments, consequently they cannot be controlled by the discipline of the mind. This position is well expressed in the William James famous claim "we don't cry because we are sad, but we are sad because we cry."⁵³

I think Kant would agree with some aspects of the propositional attitude theory, which is at the cognitivist side. One of first philosophers to express this position was Anthony Kenny,⁵⁴ for whom emotions are propositional attitudes that have intentional objects. This is also true for Kant, in the sense that

emotions are about something. There is no sense to say we are angry, without saying that we are angry with something or at someone. However, Kant would not to reduce emotions to judgments, because they are all related to the faculty of feeling, and as feelings they have physiological components, that are even difficult to control. Since emotions have cognitive as well as physiological elements, Kant is in the middle between cognitivists and non-cognitivists.