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Conclusion:

An emotional Kant?

Kant has been criticized by many philosophers for not allowing any role at all for emotions in moral life. Bernard Williams even blames Kant's morality for this flaw in contemporary ethics. In a celebrated chapter of *Problems of the Self*, entitled "Morality and Emotions," he regrets that recent moral philosophy in Britain has not paid enough attention to the problem of emotions. According to him, British philosophers limit themselves to acknowledging emotions in "one of their traditional roles as possible motives for backsliding, and thus as a potentially destructive of moral rationality and consistency."¹ Williams blames Kant's account of morality for that. In opposition to this, he struggles to dismiss several Kantian views about emotions, like the one according to which emotions are supposed to be too capricious and passively experienced, and only a product of natural causation.

What Williams does not take into consideration is the fact that in Kant's morality there is a place for emotions, in the sense that it is not composed solely of *a priori* principles and that it should be completed by an account of emotions. In order to be in keeping with Kant's philosophy, one has to acknowledge that his moral anthropology deals with emotions in great length by analyzing the entire spectrum of human affects and passions.

I have shown so far that Kant's ethics accounts not only for *a priori* principles, but also for some empirical facts about human beings. One of these facts is that we have passions and affects that are difficult to control. Kant also shows that the construction of moral character, in the Aristotelian sense of choice-making, is limited by the temperament of each individual. Among the four

temperaments listed in the *Anthropology* (phlegmatic, melancholic, choleric, and sanguine), the first one is the most likely to attain freedom of affects.

It is also not the case that Kant fails to account for individual character, as Bernard Williams argues. The idea that Kant's ethics does not leave room for the significance of the personal in moral theory is misleading. Kant has a place for moral character. He only points out that moral character can be influenced by natural characters, called temperaments.

Temperament is related to physiological components, which make some temperaments too difficult to tame. Sometimes Kant states that we can diminish the disposition of a bad temper: "A hot temper can be controlled gradually by inner discipline of the mind" (Ant, 7: 260). However, while Kant allows for a possible reform of sensibility (Rel, 6: 47–48), he also seems to accept that specific instances of affects are beyond the rational agent's control. Even if, through the inner discipline of the mind, someone can indeed decrease the number of specific instances of affects, some specific outbursts of emotions will still be beyond our control.

Williams is also mistaken when he criticizes Kant for lacking a theory of virtue. Although such a theory is not construed in the Aristotelian sense of virtue, it has an important role in bridging the gap between what is under our voluntary control and what is not. Apathy is an important component of virtue, although sometimes it consists in what is difficult to control. In this sense, Kantian virtue is primarily self-knowledge and self-control.

I have argued that effective control of the discrete manifestations of stronger affects like anger or fear is not based on changing one's beliefs, like in the ancient tradition of the Aristotelian cultivation or stoic extirpation. Rather, the attempt to control affects should encompass physiological strategies like relaxation and even the use of "medication, which will work directly on the mind, cheering it up or alleviating worries by suppressing or even stimulating affects."

Kant presents some indirect, or even medical, ways to manage what is not under our control. Apathy is essential for Kant's notion of virtue, not in

the stoic sense of hostility toward all inclinations, but at least in the sense of controlling strong affects. Then, for those who are not by nature endowed with a phlegmatic temperament, and are sometimes dominated by particular instances of outbursts of strong affects, Kant advises us to consume “large doses of hellebore rather than to rely on the healing power of sound reason” (Rek, 15: 946).²

Kantian practical philosophy does have a place for emotions; however, these emotions are not a unique kind of phenomenon, and Kant’s theories about them are multifaceted and complex. As I explored in this book, Kant does not have a single theory for emotions, not even a single word for them. While sympathy can help the accomplishment of good actions, passions can lead to evil.

After the publication of the *Vorlesungen uber Anthropologie* in 1997, many Kant scholars have also found that Kant has thought about emotions, and that his theory as a whole has a place for them. Some US Kant scholars such as Paul Guyer, Barbara Herman, Nancy Sherman, and Marcia Baron, have shown that Kant was not that cold philosopher who denied any role to emotion in practical life. After them, a new generation of philosophers has gone further in this task, and among them are Ian Morrison, Alix Cohen, Patrick Frierson, Michel Rohlf, and others.

All these scholars have helped us to understand Kant more broadly. Some of them, however, have gone too far in seeing emotions as having an intrinsic moral value. For the opposite reason to Williams, they are also wrong. Affects and passions are often sources of evil, not of the good. Even if few moral feelings can help in the accomplishment of good actions, they will never have the firmness of the moral law.