

# Kant on emotions and Williams' criticism

## Kant sobre as emoções e a crítica de Williams

\*Maria de Lourdes Borges

---

**Abstract:** Bernard Williams blames Kant's morality for a crucial flaw in contemporary ethics. In *Problems of the Self*, he claims that British philosophers limit themselves to acknowledging emotions as a potentially destructive component for morality and consistency.<sup>1</sup> In opposition to it, he struggles to dismiss several Kantian views about emotions, such as the one according to which emotions are supposed to be only a product of natural causation, as well as too capricious and passively experienced. I shall show that Kant has a place for emotions in his moral theory. However, he asserts that we can act morally without any sensible incentive. I show that Williams and Kant have different models concerning moral motivation and that Kant does not agree with Williams' claim that "Only motivations motivate", since moral law could trigger a moral action without any sensible motive.

**Keywords:** Kant, Williams, emotion, morality, motivation.

**Resumo:** Bernard Williams critica a moral kantiana como responsável por uma falha crucial da ética contemporânea. Em *Problemas do Eu*, ele afirma que os filósofos ingleses limitam-se a reconhecer as emoções como um componente potencialmente destrutivo da moralidade. Opondo-se a isto, ele tenta refutar várias visões de Kant sobre emoções, de acordo com as quais as emoções seriam apenas um produto de uma causa natural, além de volúveis e experimentadas de forma passiva. Mostrarei que Kant tem um lugar para as emoções na sua teoria moral; entretanto, ele defende que podemos agir moralmente sem nenhum móbil sensível. Pretendo provar que Bernard Williams e Kant possuem diferentes modelos de motivação moral e que Kant não concorda com a expressão de Williams "apenas motivações motivam", visto que a lei moral poderia levar a uma ação, sem a necessidade de um motivo sensível.

**Palavras-chave:** Kant, Williams, emoção, moralidade, motivação.

---

\* Professora do PPG-Filosofia da UFSC, Florianópolis, Brasil. Centro de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) – Campus Universitário Trindade – Caixa Postal 476, Florianópolis, SC – CEP 88.040-970. <mariaborges@yahoo.com>.

<sup>1</sup> WILLIAMS, B. *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 207.

## 1 Can we act without any sensible incentive?

In the 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 sensibility”.<sup>2</sup> Commentators have been tempted to follow this Humean trend and find out sensible incentives in Kant. 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 “yes”. Kant is explicitly about this possibility in:

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/ B562A)<sup>3</sup>

In the *Groundwork*, the answer seems to be also positive. Not only one *can*, but one *should* act without any moral feeling. Sympathy<sup>4</sup> 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 that possess a close pleasure in spreading joy to his fellow humans 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,

<sup>2</sup> Ameriks, K. “Kant and motivational externalism”. In: Klemme. *Moralische motivation*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> I will use the following abbreviations: **KrV** for *Critique of Pure Reason*, **G** for *Groundwork*, **DV** for *Doctrine of Virtue*, **Ant** for *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, **MS** for *The Metaphysics of Morals*, **KpV** for the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The numbers refer to volume and page (AA volume: page) of the Academy Edition (Kant's *gesammelte Schriften*, 27 volumes. Königlich Preußischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1900-). The *Critique of Pure Reason* refers to A or B edition. I will be using the translations of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (editors).

<sup>4</sup> I take sympathy as translation for *Teilnehmung*, instead of compassion. *Affekt* will be translated by affect, while *Leidenschaft* by passion. I will reserve emotions for a generic term that denotes moral feelings, affection and passions.

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,AA 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, and 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: AA 4: 399).

We can clearly distinguish in the example of the two philanthropists an action done according to duty from an action done from duty: the first one is carried out of compassion and the second one is performed even if the philanthropist does not care about other peoples' misery. The difference between one and another is that the incentive of the first one is sympathy, which is a sensible inclination, while the action of second philanthropist is performed by the respect to the moral law. Kant considers that, if compassion for the 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 the Philosophy, we see that it is clearly provocative. To affirm that the benevolent action of a man who is not touched by the 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.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the example of philanthropist in the *Groundwork*, which clearly indicates that the mere presence of moral feelings makes an action without moral value, the mere presence of some feelings, such as sympathy, does not make an action morally unworthy, had he respect for moral law been 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 that 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

<sup>5</sup> Hume also doubts the existence of a creature, in which, sympathy was completely absent, which he calls a "monster of fancy". "It can be said that it does not have such a human creature, for whom the happiness of the others did not provoke pleasure (where it did not have place for envy or revenge), and the appearance of suffering, pain". Hume, D. *An essay concerning the principles of morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983, p. 52.

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, AA 4:443)

But from the fact that Kant prefers moral feeling to utility as a reason for moral action 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 non-material 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 can be capable to drive 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 was always dependant on empirical conditions. If the will was 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 to obtain, 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 is critical to ascribe the role of a moral 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, AA 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 feeling can be pathological or moral: pathological if it "precedes the representation of the law", moral if it "can only follow upon it." (MS, AA 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”. Here it seems that the answer to our question 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 *stimulus*, the second per *motive*. 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. (AA 15: 456)

The pleasure in the concept of moral law is necessary for human beings to be affected by the concept of a good will; however, it is not an incentive for moral actions

## 2 Sympathy, benevolence and the duty to love

The same affection that does not have any intrinsic moral value in the *Groundwork*, come out in the *Doctrine of the 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 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, AA 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 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 the Virtue* (1797)? A provisory answer can be found on 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 by reason" (MS, AA 6: 457). Kant admits that a *Doctrine of the Virtue*, as part of a *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, AA 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*, it should be possible that the *Doctrine of the Virtue* gives us a system of rational pure concepts. 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 as a first chapter (*Of the duty to love other men*) of the first section, of the second part (*Of the duties of virtue in relation to other men*) of the *Doctrine of the Virtue*.

A *Metaphysics of Morals* 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 priori construction that leads to a theory of virtue, since virtue is usually defined as habits that belongs 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 the 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. Is that really the case?

To answer to 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, AA 6:217). The other side of the *Metaphysics of Morals* is a practical Anthropology, which gives the conditions to the acceptance or rejection of the moral law by human beings. This does not mean, Kant claims, "that a *Metaphysics of Morals* must be based on an anthropology", but "that it must be applied to this." (MS, 6:217). In the *Groundwork*, Kant clearly distinguishes between a *Metaphysics of Morals*, that presents "the laws in accordance to which everything

must happen” and a practical anthropology, which exhibits “the laws in accordance to which everything happens.” (G, 4:388). 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 Metaphysics of Morals that occurs between 1785 and 1797, regarding the separation between the empirical and pure part of the ethics.<sup>6</sup>

According to him, 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 its basic thesis, that the basic principle of morality is total 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 at the same time, 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 types 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. (DV, AA 6:449)

By the duty to love, Kant means, not the love of delight (*love complacentiae*), but the love of benevolence (*Wohllwollen, love benevolentiae*), 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, admits something near an Aristotelian cultivation, disposition that can be awakened by habit. Kant writes:

<sup>6</sup> Wood, A. *Kant's Ethical thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 196.

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 to do good to him. It means, rather, to 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. (DV, AA 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 was understood as a feeling or pleasure, because a duty cannot constraint someone to neither have pathological feelings, nor can moral law induces someone to love somebody.

The duty to love must be understood as a principle of benevolence, which consists, not in wanting the good of the others without practically contributing for this, but in a practical benevolence, or beneficence, that consists in consider the good of the others as end in it. *The benevolence principle* will produce, in turn, the *duties of beneficence* (to help the needed ones to find their 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 the 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 the 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 the practical love), this does not mean that all the sharing of feelings are positive. We can see it in the division of the 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.” (DV, AA 6:456). The first one is desirable, but not the second, because the first one is free and depends on the will, while the second is spread among people “as the susceptibility to heat or the contagious diseases.” (DV, AA 6:457).

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

Kant indubitably recognizes that feelings of sympathy may play the role of moral incentive, when the representation of the duty by itself will not be 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.” (DV, AA 6:458). The feeling of sympathy is added to a moral incentive (respect) to accomplish the moral action. 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 moral action that is carried through by the motive of duty. In this case, this duty must be understood in two levels: first, one to carry out moral actions; second, a derived duty to use natural feelings when the 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 enough developed. As Nancy Sherman analyzes, this is a morality *faute de mieux*, that is, a type of provisory morality: it is a morality of inferior type, 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”.<sup>7</sup>

Sherman seems to be correct and faithful to the texts when she examines the provisory role of feelings such as compassion, love, affection, since Kant really admits a function for these in the accomplishment of the moral actions, when the mere respect for the law will not be 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 the Kantian work, without variations from the *Groundwork* to the *Doctrine of the Virtue*. The critique of sympathy as a possible incentive for a moral action was based, in the case of the philanthropist, not in the absence of contempt for sympathy in itself, but in the idea that sympathy, for itself, could not show us which course of action is the moral one. A good example given in the contemporary literature is supplied by Barbara Herman: we hear somebody crying out for aid to load something heavy,

<sup>7</sup> Sherman, N. “The place of emotions in Kantian morality”. In: Flanagan, & the Rorty. *Identity, character and morality*, Essays in Moral Psychology. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990, p. 149-170, p. 159.

we help this person, and later we come to know that a sculpture of an art museum was stolen by a thief. In this example, one ended helping a thief to carry on his misdemeanor. And this was done out of sympathy.

In the *Doctrine of Virtue*, sympathy can play a role of a moral incentive, if it is trained and controlled by the will, which will also inform when this feeling must be activated. This is the reason why humanity is divided in free and non-free humanity. The 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 these feeling. A stoic that 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 consequence a real beneficent action. Consequently, in this new vision of sympathy presented in the *Doctrine of the Virtue*, this feeling is of possible controlling by reason, what disagrees with the negative approach of sympathy presented in the *Groundwork*, that is confirmed by the of Mrongovius notes on Anthropology (84/85) According to such notes, one of the reasons that sympathy, are 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." (AntMrongovius, AA 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 the suffering other people's; 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." (DV, AA 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.

### **3 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, either to the faculty to desire. To the faculty to desire belong the instincts, propensities, inclinations and passions (Ant, AA 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, second division of the faculty to 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." (MS, AA 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 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 their sexual capacities, and they also have the exclusive right to use them. This is not the case, for instance, in prostitution. That is the one of the reasons why Kant condemns it. The only possibility of making sexual relation a relationship according to the principle of right is the warranty of the exclusive use of mutual sexual capacities.

After this first instinctive and natural level of love, one has a second one, which belongs to the category of affects, stormy and temporary feelings, which make difficult the reflection and deliberation on action. 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." (Ant, AA 7:252). Kant metaphorically explains the differences between affect and passion:

Affect works upon the 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, AA 7:252)

It can be seen here that love-affect differs from the love-passion regarding to the intensity, duration and degree of danger of each emotion. The first one is more intense, however it lasts less and he is less dangerous than passion. For this reason, Kant affirms that, where there is much affect, there is little passion, since stormy emotions are depleted quickly, and does not allow to the cold evaluation of the lived situation and the deliberation on reaching an end: "Affects are honorable and unconcealed, while passions are deceitful and hidden." (Ant,

AA 7:253). The innocence of the love-affect and its incapacity of controlling its manifestations can be evidenced in the following situation:

A serious lover is often restrained, awkward, and uncaptivating 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, AA 6:264)

The love-affect resembles the feeling of falling in love for 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, AA 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 possess the object of desire. Therefore, Kant affirms that passions are not like affects; affects, at least, may coexist with a 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 a 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 the reason because they possess a permanent character, since, according to Kant, "they are never satisfied." (Ant, AA 7:266). The passion of love, in contrast, 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 "got crazy because of love" contains something of implausible, therefore 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 of superior social level: "to get passionate themselves for a person of a higher social class and to wait of this the madness of a marriage it is not the cause, but the consequence of a previous disturbance." (Ant, AA 7:217). This seems to have happened to Kant himself, when, in the years of 62/63 he falls in love with a student, who would marry someone richer and of a better social level than Kant's.

Love, in the form of affect or passion, even in its most violent manifestation, is not as harmful as passions of ambition, vanity and greed.

However, it is not 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 what 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, AA 15:649).

Apparently, this claim denounces a prejudice of the time regarding the feminine inferiority. However, in another *Reflexion*, Kant would affirm that "Men and women possess a reciprocal superiority one in relation to the other." (R 1100, AA 15:490). Despite the fact that this superiority of each one is relative to different aspects, the reciprocal inequality is what stimulates and promotes the love as affect or passion. The fact that these feelings need a reciprocal moral inequality indicates that their *loci* are strange to morality, which consists of considering the other as equal and promoting its happiness.

The figures of love assume different positions in Kant's philosophy, some have moral value, and others do not. The love as benevolence can be considered a practical principle; one to do good and to help people, from whom the love for the others can, also, be awakened. This was clear in the analysis of the Kantian text, where it is said that it is not necessary to love and due to this, to do good to human beings, but to act morally, and through this habit, to awake feelings of affect 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 fact the respect for the law is the incentive for the action. To use the feeling of sympathy is only a provisional morality that, empirically, can and must use these feelings of pleasure and displeasure for the other people's luck to encourage good actions, until our respect for the law is sufficient strong to be a possible incentive.

Relatively to affects and passions, even if both were criticized as illnesses of the reason, the negative effect of the love-affect was 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. However, 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 affects and passions in the *Doctrine of the 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 the respect for the law, what does not hinder us to use our sensible feelings, such as sympathy, for the purposes of reason.

#### 4 Could a mere thought move us to act?

In the book *Kant and the historical turn*, Karl Ameriks argues that Kantians should prove that 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.<sup>8</sup>

If we take for granted that only desires and inclinations could move us to action, Kantians should explain themselves 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.<sup>9</sup> However, if we do not take for granted that one should act out of 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 will only make the heart weaker and will not develop any virtue. Since virtue for Kant is *fortitude*, that is, strength, teaching tender feelings to young people will only build a weak character that cannot meet the demands 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, AA 5: 157)

The method mentioned here is the moral education of young man. In order to really develop moral character in children, it is not useful to tell histories about magnanimous and noble actions. Is it worthwhile to call the 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

---

<sup>8</sup> Ameriks. “Kant and motivation externalism”. In: Klemme. *Moralische motivation*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2006b, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup> Ameriks, K. *Kant and the fate of autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 310.

they calm down; otherwise they accomplish nothing because the heart naturally returns to its natural moderate vital motion and accordingly falls back into the languor that was proper to it before, since something was applied that indeed stimulated it, but nothing that strengthened it. (KpV, AA 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 more intense incentive to the moral action. Kant would not disagree with that, he would even give us an example of someone who tries with 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.” (KpV, AA 5:158). However, the incentive presented in the pure law of duty is the more elevated of all. Not only it is possible to act from the motive of duty alone, but it is as well desirable.

## 5 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 to do the right thing. But is it always true? First, is it a good picture of human nature? Does Kant really say that?

Here we have two different situations. First, we can act out of emotions that are commonly taken as anti-moral emotions, such as rage, envy, ambition, jealousy or greed. People taken by the strong emotion of rage not only have the tendency to fight against 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 his 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*.<sup>10</sup> Suppose

<sup>10</sup> Baron, M. *Kantian Ethics almost without apology*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1995.

that someone goes to the hospital to visit a friend and, when asked by his friend why he is visiting him, he answers that he is visiting his friend out of duty. This example is supposed to be a critique towards 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 the right thing to do is and what should be a right motive. 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 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 to enter a hospital, perhaps in the most of the cases, the feeling of sympathy for a friend will not be enough to contrabalance the feeling of avoiding 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 of moral agency on Kantian view is a function of acting from reason rather than from feeling, it is said to reflect features more of male than of female identity."<sup>11</sup> 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.

## 6 Only motivations motivate

Paul Guyer in a recent work offers a challenging version of Kant Philosophy.<sup>12</sup> He acknowledges that Hume and Kant are two opposed view on moral matter. While for Hume reason cannot give a motive or end for action, only 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

---

<sup>11</sup> Schott, M. R. *Feminist interpretations of Immanuel Kant*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Guyer, P. *Knowledge, reason and taste: Kant's response to Hume*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

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.<sup>13</sup>

According to Guyer, the internalism in Kant is given 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 motivate 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.<sup>14</sup>

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 will operate as a motivation in Hume's sense.

I will challenge this view in two aspects. First concerning the idea that Kant is an internalist; second, concerning Guyer position that moral feelings are the real motives for Kant.

## 7 Reasons and motives

The vocabulary of internal and external reasons was not used by Kant. Bernard Williams was the one, who brought these expressions to the philosophical vocabulary,

According to Williams, the internalist view states that a reason is a motive, in the following sense: "A has a reason to  $\phi$  only if he could reach the conclusion to  $\phi$  by a sound deliberative route from the motivations he already has". For the externalist, on the contrary, it can be true that A has a reason to  $\phi$  even though A has no motivation in his motivational set that could lead him to  $\phi$ :

<sup>13</sup> Guyer. *Knowledge, reason and taste: Kant's response to Hume*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008, p. 164-165.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.

The externalist view is that this is not a necessary condition, and that it can be true of A that he has a reason to  $\phi$  even though A has no motivation in his motivational set that could, either directly or by some extension through deliberation, lead him to  $\phi$ .<sup>15</sup>

The internalist presents the relation between explanatory and normative reasons. If it is true that A has a reason to  $\phi$ , then it must be possible that he should  $\phi$  for that reason-if he does act for that reason, then that reason will be the explanation of his acting. For the internalist, an explanatory reason (A has a reason to  $\phi$ ) is also a normative reason (It must be possible that A should  $\phi$  for that reason). If he does act for that reason, then that reason will be the explanation of his acting.

Williams cannot understand how an internalist can say someone has a reason that is not previously in his motivation set. He gives the following example. Someone tells his friend he has to be nicer to his wife and the friend asks him why. Then follows the dialogue:

1. You have a reason to be nicer to her
2. What reason?
3. Because she is your wife
4. I don't care. Don't you understand? I really do not care.<sup>16</sup>

With this example, Williams shows that there is no sense in presenting a reason to someone who does not have that reason previously in her motivational set and that there is no sense in stating that the man should be nicer to her, if this was not in his motivational set:

There are many things I can say about or to this man: that he is ungrateful, inconsiderate, hard, sexist, nasty, selfish, brutal, and many other disadvantageous things. I shall presumably say, whatever else I say, that it would be better if he were nicer to her. There is one specific thing the external reasons theorists want me to say, that the man has a reason to be nicer.<sup>17</sup>

Although internalism was proposed to explain the human view of reasons as motivations, some Kantian scholars, such as Guyer, have tried to approximate Kantianism and internalism.

However, the internalism theory, at least as Williams has presented it, is the opposite of Kantian idea of motivation, because man should already had in his motivational set the motive (or in Kant's vocabulary, the incentive) to perform an action. Although Williams did not want to make such strong assumption, he recognizes that for many philosophers

<sup>15</sup> Williams, B. *Making sense of humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

the question of external reasons comes much closer to the question of categorical imperative.<sup>18</sup>

In order to understand this claim, it is worth to translate the Kantian vocabulary into Williams one. What we translate by motive (*Bewegungsgrund*) is, in fact, what Williams calls reason, and what we translate by incentive (*Triebfeder*) is what he calls motive. If we translate the internalist principle in Kantian terms, it will be: someone only has a motive if he already has an incentive. And this is exactly the opposite of what Kant wanted to say. For, an incentive can never be what pulls the action, unless it is a motive.

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 pulls the moral action. However, in Kant we do not need a motivation to motivate. The mere thought that something is right is sufficient to trigger the right action. A mere thought, or belief, is not a motivation in Williams's sense. Williams claims that "Only motivations motivate" (which is considered the Hume's axiom) is explained as following: if someone acts to further some desirable end, then his doing so must be explained by some disposition or desire that he already had; his so acting cannot be explained merely by the fact that it furthers that outcome or merely by his knowing that it does. It follows from this that if one wants people to pursue such outcomes, one will have to see that appropriate motivations do actually exist to produce that result.

## 8 When Williams's criticism is right and when it is wrong

In his criticism against Kant, Williams 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 the 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: that Kant could have been a strong influence on moral philosophers to despise emotions. Kant

<sup>18</sup> Williams, Bernard. *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 106.

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 humour, 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 that the Kantian doctrine aims at proving that an action can be done without any empirical motivation. Williams, on the contrary, claims that a desire or a disposition should be present as an antecedent of any action. As a strong supporter of internalism, he holds that intentional action, even those which accomplishes moral ends, should be motivated by something else than mere beliefs, since beliefs alone do not motivate. This is surely a criticism against Kant, who supports the view that pure reason – without any help from emotions or desires – can be immediately practical.

## References

- AMERIKS, Karl. *Kant and the fate of autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Kant and motivation externalism". In: KLEMME. *Moralische motivation*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2006a.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kant and the historical turn: philosophy as critical interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006b.
- BARON, Marcia. *Kantian Ethics almost without apology*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- GUYER, Paul. *Knowledge, reason and taste: Kant's response to Hume*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- HUME, David. *An essay concerning the principles of morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.
- KANT. *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, 27 volumes. Königlichen Preußischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1900.
- SCHOTT, May Robin. *Feminist interpretations of Immanuel Kant*. Pennsylvania, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- SHERMAN, Nancy. "The place of emotions in Kantian morality". In: FLANAGAN, & the RORTY. *Identity, character and morality*. Essays in Moral Psychology. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990, p. 149-170.
- WILLIAMS, Bernard. *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Making sense of humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Problems of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.
- WOOD, Allan. *Kant's Ethical thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Recebido em 30 de dezembro de 2012.

Aprovado para publicação em 20 de março de 2013.