

“Necessary Sentiment” and Moral Sensibility in Kant

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1. The problem and the approach

The *conception* of the relations between morals and human sensibility in Kant’s practical philosophy can be much influenced by, *e.g.*, a claim made in the foundational *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785):

But inclinations themselves, as sources of needs, are so far from having absolute value to make them desirable for their own sake, that it must rather be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free from them (4: 428)¹

What looms large in our thoughts is the idea that it must be a wish of every rational being *not* to have inclinations (*Neigungen*). What is troubling for our thinking is that, though it *might* seem an ideal even for our human rationality, it turns out to be wholly unfeasible. Inclinations are cases, in technical terms, of dependencies of our faculty of desire on *sensations* (of which the sense here is of being hedonically charged, being pleasures and pains), which indicates a need of beings that have inclinations (cf. 4: 413n). The ideal in question would, then, be – by get-

¹ The quotations of Kant’s work in the text will follow this principle: *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* = “4”: and page of the academy edition (“4” is the number of its volume in this edition); *The Critique of Practical Reason* = “5”: and page; *The Metaphysics of Morals* = “6”: and page.

ting rid of inclinations – to wish not having sensations of pleasure or pain at all. What an ideal, for beings like us, could that be?²

Many maintain that the late *Metaphysics of Morals*, this work of 1797, offers solace on this point to Kantians, what relieves even Neo-Aristotelians dedicated to reinstitute Virtue Ethics to the centre of ethical discussion.³ Allen Wood, a Kantian, is representative in his defense of the importance of this work. This influential interpreter of Kant claims that the *Metaphysics of Morals* is the final form of a changing conception of a moral theory which is an attempt to give an increasing role in the system of ethics to the empirical.⁴ Foundational works, like the *Groundwork* and the second *Critique*, would develop, according to Wood, a theory of the apriority of the supreme principle of morality and of the purity of the moral motive, in “sharp separation” of the *Metaphysics of Morals* from whatever *application* of it. The “major change” of the late work would be to conceive of duties under a wholly different orientation: that *pure* moral principles generate a system of duties “*in so far as they are applied to human nature*” (p. 3). Thus far, Kant’s metaphysics of morals “expands in the direction of the empirical” (p. 3), leading Kant to abandon the *Groundwork* thesis that “the metaphysics of morals has to examine the idea and the principles of a possible *pure* will, and not the acts and conditions of human volition generally, which are drawn largely from psychology” (4: 390-1). Consequently, this separation is no longer as *sharp*, and the use, already implicitly made in 1785, of, *e.g.*, “empirical information about the natural purpose of self-love” (p. 3) is in 1797 incorporated in a “system of duties that results when the pure principle is applied to the empirical nature of human beings in general” (p. 4).⁵

² It is worth noting that Kant’s claim is being made in the context of a discussion on what qualifies for *absolute value*, that is, a special philosophical context. This should obviously bear on the point being made with this particular remark.

³ Cf. Julia Annas (2006), “Virtue Ethics”, especially p. 529.

⁴ Cf. Allen Wood (2002), “The Final Form of Kant’s Practical Philosophy”, p. 2 (the next references in the text are to this paper). Cf. also Robinson dos Santos’ approach in “Sobre a Virtude como a Realização da Moral e do Dever de Amor aos Seres Humanos em Kant” (2010).

⁵ It is a forceful vision: “A metaphysics of morals is bounded, on the empirical end, only by the fact that it limits itself to duties that can be derived from pure principle as applied to *human nature in general*, leaving to a more broadly moral philosophy all duties that involve reference to particular conditions of people and special human relationships” (p. 3).

But is this “expan[sion] in the direction of the empirical” by the metaphysics of morals really needed?

It is true that in the Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue, Kant presents the concept of duty as a “*self-constraint*” that has application *only* to being like *us*, i.e., “to *human beings*, rational *natural* beings” (6: 379). However, this is not at all removed from claims to be found in the *Groundwork*. Is it, thus, plausible to credit Kant with a vision *at that time* to the effect that our rationality requires us incredibly to abandon our sensibility, creating as a consequence the need of a move of expansion in the direction of the empirical?⁶

My aim in this work is to focus the relations between morality and human sensibility motivated by the promised “solace” Kantians could get from the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Firstly, I will examine the problem of moral motivation and its Kantian solution in terms of what I will call a “necessary sentiment”. Secondly, I will pay attention, in an effort of accommodation, to Kant’s conception of what must “presupposed” by our *sensibility* in view of “the mind’s receptivity to the concepts of duty as such” (Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue, section XII). Before that though, I need to clarify what is the general line of approach I will be following. Two points seem crucial to me for the correct understanding of the relations in question. They may easily seem to be in contradiction with each other, and it is important for me to compatibilize them, at least in general terms as a way of preparation. Both points are found in the *general* Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

Especially in the work referred to, which aims to articulate a *system* of duties, the problem of the relationship between the *a priori* principles of a metaphysics and the behavior of beings like us – the problem of the *application* of that metaphysics to us – requires much care. Kant states that “a metaphysics of morals cannot dispense with principles of application” (6: 217). With this we get the conception of *principles* of application. Where do they come from? It seems we can countenance only two options: either these principles are derived from “the particular *nature* of human beings”, which can only be known by experience – which makes the *principles* of application turn out *empirical* –, or these

⁶ Cf. the following admittedly subdued negative remark in answer to my question: “For, being a creature [as we are] and thus always dependent with regard to what he requires for complete satisfaction with his condition, he can never be altogether free from desires and inclinations which, because they rest on physical causes, do not of themselves accord with the moral law, which has quite different sources (...)” (5: 84).

principles are derived from the *metaphysics* of morals itself. Kant seems to me to go for the second option. This becomes clear in his conception of the *peculiarity* of the nature of the relation which is our focus now.

Kant says that to get at the “principles of application”, “we shall often have to take as our object the particular *nature* of human beings, which is cognized only by experience, in order to *show* in it what can be inferred from universal moral principles” (6: 217). That is, to look at the nature of human beings is necessary so that we can “*show* in it” what we could get from another source, *i.e.*, “what can be inferred from universal moral principles”. This *showing*, as a consequence, does not in anyway “detract from the purity of these principles or cast doubt on their *a priori* source” (*loc. cit.*). The picture of these relations seems, therefore, to be the following: there are the *a priori* moral principles, then the principles of their application, derived from the former but illustrated in human nature, and at the far end the application proper of the moral principles. This way, “a metaphysics of morals cannot be based upon anthropology but can still be applied to it” (*loc. cit.*).

How effectively we proceed the derivation of the *principles* of application is a vexed problem.⁷ But only such a possibility as this – which is my only concern here – would allow Kant to claim, in the *Metaphysics of Morals* itself, in view of a *pure* doctrine of *virtue* (section XIII of the introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue) that:

Ethical duties must not be determined in accordance with the capacity to fulfill the law that is ascribed to human beings; on the contrary, their moral capacity must be estimated by the law, which commands categorically, and so in accordance with our rational knowledge of what they ought to be in keeping with the idea of humanity, not in accordance with the empirical knowledge we have of them as they are. (6:404-5)

The second point concerns the nature of the human faculty which is fundamental to morality: the *will*. This faculty is explored by Kant with the goal of establishing the possibility of a *pure* will, this is what he makes in his foundational works. What is important for my purposes now is to point out that the human will is, even in its exercise as a *pure* will, a *faculty of desire* (cf. 6: 213). Thus far, the will is necessarily re-

⁷ Cf. Herman (1993) “Leaving Deontology Behind”, and Klaudat (2010) “Os Princípios de Aplicação da Metafísica dos Costumes de Kant” on this.

lated to *pleasure* and *displeasure* (cf. 6: 211). Let us point out the main elements of Kant's conception.

In the first place, "the *faculty of desire* is the faculty to be, by means of one's representations, the cause of the objects of these representations" (6: 211). In other words, this faculty is a faculty of "acts of the will", that is, *volitions*, which are seen as causally efficient in relation to the production of its objects (obviously, in Kant this is an agent-causalism, not an event-causalism, but *causalism* none the less). Thus far, we are dealing with a causal faculty, an executive faculty.

In the second place, *feeling* for Kant is "the capacity for having pleasure or displeasure in a representation" (6: 211), it is a "susceptibility" to pleasure or displeasure (6: 211). But what are *pleasure* and *displeasure*? They are *relations*. Pleasure and displeasure in a representation involve "what is *merely subjective* in the relation of our representation and contain no relation at all to an object for possible cognition of it" (6: 211). More explicitly: "(...) pleasure or displeasure (in what is red or sweet) expresses nothing at all in the object but simple *a relation to the subject*" (6: 212, my emphasis). This construal of feelings allows Kant to avoid the reductionism of the classical empiricist definition of pleasure and displeasure in terms of the phenomenology of physical sensations. In a note to this text, Kant explains that the *effect* of a representation on a subject, be it a sensible or an *intellectual* representation, will be a "feeling", which is a "susceptibility to the representation" that "belongs to sensibility, even though the representation itself may belong to the understanding or to reason" (6: 212n).

In the third place, it is crucial to keep in mind the distinction between two types of effects a representation may have on a subject, two types of "feelings" which are the mentioned relation. In this regard, important will be, to start with, the relationship of the feeling to the faculty of desire. When there is no relationship of the "feeling" of pleasure or displeasure with the *desire* for an "object", then the pleasure or displeasure will be due exclusively to the transit of the representation in our mentality and will thus far "be called merely contemplative pleasure or *inactive delight*" (6: 212). This type of pleasure is, according to Kant, merely a "taste". Perhaps we could call it a *passive* intellectual pleasure because it is merely contemplative. Of this, Kant says, practical philosophy deals only *en passant*.

When there is a relationship of the "feeling" of pleasure or displeasure with the faculty of desire, because the relation of the representation, which affects us, with its "object" – even though not established by

the understanding for the sake of knowledge – is of importance for us, then this “feeling” is a “*practical pleasure*” (6: 212). Crucial for our purposes now is the internal division in this practical pleasure. There are two forms of it, depending on it being the *cause* or the *effect* of desire. When the faculty of desire is *determined* by a pleasure that *antecedes* the “desire”, which *causes* it, then, we are dealing with what Kant calls “*desire* in the narrow sense” (6: 212). Inclinations, the dependencies of “the faculty of desire on sensations” of the *Groundwork* (cf. 4: 413n), are in the *Metaphysics of Morals* “habitual desire[s]” in this narrow sense (6: 212). However, by parity of reasoning, it will be possible then – at least theoretically – to have practical pleasure which is the *effect* of a “determination”, a “formatting”, of the faculty of desire, a “desire” in the broad sense. This is precisely the case when this “determination” is effected by a “pure rational principle”, which will then produce an effect that Kant conceives of as “an intellectual pleasure” (6: 212). In view of what came before, we should keep in mind two of the features of this intellectual pleasure *consequent* upon the determination of the faculty of desire: in contrast to the *passive* intellectual pleasure (the contemplative pleasure), this one is *practical*, or *active*; but, similarly to the passive type, this pleasure is – because of Kant’s conception of pleasures and displeasures as relations between representations and their subject, including representations of the understanding and of reason – a *bona fide* “feeling”.

Therefore, the point we should keep in mind is that the will, because it is a faculty of desire, deals with “desires” which as such do have a necessary relationship with the “feelings” of pleasure or displeasure, even though they can be desires in the narrow sense *or* desires as determinations of the faculty of desire which have as *effects* intellectual practical pleasures.⁸

What we have with these two points concerning the right approach to our subject-matter is only a general conception. Paying attention to both of them, what should we say is Kant’s conception of the concrete relationship between morality and human sensibility?

⁸ For the importance Kant gives to these theoretical possibilities in relation to ethical investigation, cf. 5:9n: the *definitions* of theoretical psychology should *not* rule out the possibility of a pure practical reason through *stipulation*.

2. Moral motivation according to Kant

Kant's efforts to establish, in the first chapter of the *Groundwork*, the *moral worth* of actions done “*out of duty*”, with the aim of clarifying the type of “without qualification”-value pertaining to the good will, are well-known. His very sophisticated discussion of the three examples in which it may be difficult for some at first to distinguish, *conceptually*, the motive of duty from the direct inclination towards action offers him the means – as if through a “chemical precipitation” – to illuminate the worth of that motive.⁹ What we know is that Kant's conception of this worth is related to a motivation that is opposed to all forms of motivation that are *a posteriori*, that is, *material*. It must, therefore, concern an *a priori* form of motivation, a *formal* one. Kant in fact does not use the phrase “*a priori* motive”.¹⁰ More circumspective, Kant claims that the moral worth of an action done out of duty, or for the sake of duty, is to be found “*in the principle of the will*, irrespective of the ends that can be brought about by such action” (4: 400).

What I believe takes Kant's reader by surprise at this juncture of the argument is the introduction of the “third proposition” on this subject-matter, and which, he claims, follows from two preceding ones. It is clear that Kant previous discussion was *motivational*, but it seemed to concern a *pure* motive. How should we understand Kant's introduction in the third proposition of a *feeling*, and more, as a *consequence* of the analysis of the moral worth of action done out of duty? Why should we be in this way referred to an item which certainly pertains to human *sensibility*? The mentioned third proposition reads: “*Duty is the necessity of an action done out of respect for the law*” (4: 400).

Why is the feeling of respect introduced in the motivational argumentation developed by Kant to deal with the moral worth of the motive of duty?

⁹ Cf. 5: 92. Cf. also Herman (1981), “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty”, for a very influential discussion of these issues. For a typical interpretation which over-looks the mentioned elaborate treatment of the examples by Kant, cf. Thomas Nagel (1979), “Moral Luck”: “Kant was particularly insistent on the moral irrelevance of qualities of temperament and personality that are not under the control of the will. Such qualities as sympathy or coldness might provide the background against which obedience to moral requirements is more or less difficult, but they could not be objects of moral assessment themselves, and might well interfere with confident assessment of its proper object – the determination of the will by the motive of duty” (p. 181).

¹⁰ But Jerome Schneewind (1998) does: “the *a priori* motive of respect” (*The Invention of Autonomy*, p. 521).

The *Groundwork* gives short shrift to the issue. Two points deserve our attention. Firstly, Kant’s claim that the object of respect is related to my will only as a “ground” and never as a “consequence”, thus far as “something that does not serve my inclination, but overpowers it or at least excludes it entirely from my decision-making” (4: 400). Inevitably, then, the moral law *is*, against expectations, intimately related to our *sensibility*.

Secondly, Kant’s famous note in the *Groundwork* about respect (4: 401n) seeks to preempt the criticism that he is appealing to “an obscure feeling” by (1) the clarification that respect “is not a feeling that we are caused to *receive* by some (external) influence; rather, it is a feeling that is *self-generated* by a rational concept, and it is therefore different in kind from feeling of the first sort”; by (2) claiming that this feeling constitutes “the awareness of [the direct determination of the will by the law]”, it is the direct recognition of the law, of what “I recognize with respect”, being thus far the *effect* of the law on the person; and by (3) the claim that this feeling involves “the thought of something of such worth that it breaches my self-love”.

The chapter of the second *Critique* on the *incentives* (*Triebfedern*) of pure practical reason (*N.B.*) deals with the topic in a much more detailed manner, presenting a worked-out conception of what I shall call a “necessary sentiment”.

3. The “necessary sentiment” of respect

In the second *Critique*, Kant begins the chapter on the incentives of pure practical reason reminding us his point about the moral worth of actions done out of duty. “What is essential to any moral worth of actions is *that the moral law determine the will immediately*” (5: 71). What is noticeable is that the issue concerns the *determination of the will*, the issue is *motivational* again. But more is salient: that, as the determination in question is of a human will, we are in *need* of an *incentive* (a *Triebfeder*), a “subjective determining ground of the will” (*loc. cit.*). Only in this way shall we have morality Kant’s way, which does not foster mere legality and does not pay heed merely to the letter of the law, but rather contains its spirit (has the law present in the *disposition* [*Gesinnung*] to action) and thus far is properly morality, again, by having the moral law “quite alone be[ing] also the subjectively sufficient determining ground of action” (*idem*). However, how *can* the law be this, an *incentive*? It

appears that it, by its nature, should not be able to play this role¹¹ (rationalist interpretations of Kant hang on fiercely to this appearance).¹²

Kant is careful with this step of his argument. He takes great care not to go against any of the interdictions of his transcendental idealism. So, as we can *not* explain *how* a free will is possible (cf. 5: 72), we also can *not explain* how the law by itself can be immediately the “subjective determining ground of the will”. But something else can be done, surely something philosophically surprising. Kant claims that we can determine “carefully in what way the moral law becomes the incentive”, and thus far, as an incentive, “what happens to the human faculty of desire as an effect of that determining ground upon it” (5: 72).

What can be done is surprising for its clear commitment with *apriorism*:

What we shall have to show *a priori* is, therefore, not the ground from which the moral law in itself supplies an incentive but rather what is effects (or to put it better, *must effect*) in the mind insofar as it is an incentive (5: 72, my emphasis).

The problem is precisely the following. In so far as the solution to the difficulty with moral motivation uses the conception of the moral law as (*N.B.*) an *incentive* (a subjective determining ground of the will), we *already know* that the moral law *needs to affect us* (the general thesis) as beings with sensibility, motivating us by involving feelings. This by itself can make us doubt the austere vision of Kant as the sheer detractor of feelings *a propos* the determining ground of the *human rational* will.¹³

¹¹ Cf. Herman (2005) “Transforming Incentives”: “So, starting with the necessary independence of the moral law as a determining ground of the will, we get the seemingly contradictory claim that to be causally effective the moral law requires the empirical support of some feeling, a feeling that somehow arises from pain caused by the moral law itself” (p. 20). I would like to put on record that I owe much to this paper by Herman for the general direction of my argument in this work as well as for some of its concrete argumentative links. There is a second paper by her that is also of this importance to me: (2010) “Rethinking Kant’s Hedonism”.

¹² Cf. Longuenesse (2005) “Moral Judgement as a Judgment of Reason” for the conspicuous absence of the issue and the consequent insistence that Kant’s conception of morality is based on the “juridical model”. Cf. also: “The role of practical reason is not to generate a representation of good and evil by pure concepts, but to order our empirical/sensible ends under the discriminating principle of the categorical imperative” (p. 263). Such a principle can only put a grid on pre-existing and independently obtainable empirical ends.

¹³ Cf. Herman (2005): “We are supposed to know from the *Groundwork* and the main argument of the second *Critique* that the moral law is the objective determining ground

But now the problem shows itself in full: following the observations of the *Groundwork* about the law not serving my inclination at all, even overpowering it, we could quite naturally think that the moral law *has* negative effects on our sensibilities, however, what Kant claims is that the law *must have* this type of effect (the specific thesis). Why indeed?¹⁴

At this point, Kant’s metaphysical bent is fully exposed. We can know something about the necessary relation between the moral law as an incentive and our sensibility.

We can see *a priori* that the moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain; and here we have the first and perhaps the only case in which we can determine *a priori* from concepts the relation of a cognition (here the cognition of a pure practical reason) to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (5: 73).

How does Kant establish the necessary relation which is responsible for the “necessary feeling” that is respect?

To my mind, two are the “links” that allow Kant to articulate in an *a priori* fashion his conception of the *effect* of the moral law on human sensibility (cf. 5: 72 and ff.). The first is related to the conception of the human will as a faculty of desire, which has a necessary connection – in a philosophical neutral conception of it – with the “feelings” of pleasure and displeasure. The first “link” appears in the argument in one of its aspects at first.

As a faculty of desire, the will is susceptible of determinations in the form of “desires”. But, as we saw above, these, when taken in the narrow sense, are the determinations in question by being preceded by pleasure or displeasure, which can be felt presently (as in the discomfort

of the will: the law of a free will’s causality. We are reminded that for an action to have moral worth, the moral law must determine the will *immediately*: that is, no other principle or any feeling may come between the moral law and the agent’s willing, as a condition of the law’s effect. This is the austere doctrine. We are to act *from* the moral law – from duty – an ability we have because the will is free. But now we are told that this is not the end of the story: the moral law must also play the role of incentive, of a subjective determining ground of the will. Indeed, it seems that the moral law must affect us as sensible creatures motivating us in some non-austere way through the production of *feelings*, albeit feelings of a special sort. But why should Kant think this?” (p. 19).

¹⁴ Cf. Herman (2005) on the importance of the modality in question: “The negative effect at issue arises not because inclinations do oppose the law – as Kant says, they might cooperate – it is because they *could* oppose the law. So what is exactly thwarted?” (p. 20).

which is hunger taking me to desire something to eat) or they can be associated to the expectations about the existence of an object (as with the expectation of pleasure with the ingestion of a particular type of food). What is important about these desires is that they are “material desires” for Kant, the pleasure or displeasure associated to them is dependent on the relations of the desires’ objects to the subject, on how the objects affect the subject. They are, therefore, *sensible* inclinations. In this respect, we are beings about which it is the case not only that we have these inclinations (or desires), but also that we – as *rational* human beings – develop an idea of them all which is systematized in the form of an end we pursue: our happiness.

There is, however, *one* end that we may presuppose as actual in all rational beings (so far as they dependent beings to whom imperatives apply); and thus there is one aim which they not only *might* have, but which we can assume with certainty that they all *do* have by a necessity of nature and that aim is *perfect happiness* (*Glückseligkeit*) (4: 415).

This is the necessary desire for our happiness, be it what it will in our varied conceptions about its content. This is a *formal* point concerning the nature of a type of desires in us and of their systematization in a conception of the imagination, not of reason (otherwise it would be fully and perspicuously systematizable): we have material desires as the modes objects have to affect us with pleasure or displeasure and we unite them in an idea of a whole which will satisfy us as individuals, and this is then our *necessary* end¹⁵. The vision is this: “All the inclinations together (which can be brought into a tolerable system and the satisfaction of which is then called one’s own happiness) constitute regard for oneself (*solipsismus*)” (5: 73).

The second “link” in Kant’s articulation of the necessary connection between the moral law as an incentive and the pleasure and displeasure we humans feel concerns the conception of *value*, in fact, absolute value. Let’s follow suit.

Our regard for ourselves (solipsism) has two forms: one defensible, the other wholly unacceptable. It can be (1) *love* for oneself, a kind of prevailing benevolence toward oneself (*philautia*, self-love); or it can be (2) a *satisfaction with oneself* (*arrogantia*, self-conceit), a kind of

¹⁵ Cf. Herman (2005): “Whatever happiness is materially, in thinking of one’s life as happy, one thinks of something that, on the whole, will be agreeable all the way through (and, perhaps, agreeable as a whole). This is enough to make happiness an end” (p. 23).

complacency with oneself. The second link, which concerns Kant’s view of value, establishes two types of relationships the moral law has with the necessary material end of human beings. Self-love is something natural in us, and, Kant says, is active even before we ask ourselves about the action of the moral law in us.¹⁶ For this reason, pure practical reason through the means of the moral law “merely *infringes upon* self-love”, the law limits it “to the condition of agreement with this law, and then it is called *rational self-love*” (*idem*).

But with respect to the second form of regard for ourselves, the complacent self-conceit, Kant claims that the moral law does “*strike [it] down (...) altogether*” (*ibidem*). Why? Because it amounts to debunking what has value according to Kant. This complacent self-conceit is in fact an attempt to be estimated, of having worth, *as a subject of self-love*, which precedes what the moral law states concerning this issue of what has and is value, and precisely because of this is “null and quite unwarranted”. It is precisely *only* the moral law which functions as a norm about this.

The problem with complacent self-conceit – arrogance – is *not* that it is a propensity to self-esteem which rests on sensibility, because this propensity is “infringed upon” together with the inclinations to which the moral law “infringes upon”. The problem with arrogance lies in its being an attempt at a view of value which prescribes, legislates, independently of the moral law, thus far relying exclusively on the conception that we have value as subjects of sensibility.¹⁷ For this reason the moral law *necessarily* strikes down the complacent self-conceit.

(...) We find our nature as sensible beings so constituted that the matter of the faculty of desire (objects of inclination, whether of hope or fear) first forces itself upon us, and we find out pathologically determinable self, even though it is quite unfit to give universal law through its maxims, nevertheless striving antecedently to make its claims primary and originally valid, just as if it constituted our entire self. This propensity to make oneself as having subjective determining grounds of choice into the objective determining ground of the will in general can be called *self-love*; and if self-love makes itself lawgiving and the unconditional

¹⁶ This should help to convince one that Kant does *not* aim to suppress –as if it were possible – our sensibility.

¹⁷ Cf. Herman (2001) on who exactly is responsible for this “error”: “(...) Contrary to what one might have thought, the problem sensibility poses for morality is not that desires tempt us away from virtue. The problem arises from a feature of our *rational natures*, from self-conceit – a flawed rational principle of desire-satisfaction” (p. 183n12).

practical principle, it can be called *self-conceit*. Now the moral law, which alone is truly objective (namely objective in every respect), excludes altogether the influence of self-love on the supreme practical principle and infringes without end upon self-conceit, which prescribes as laws the subjective conditions of self-love. Now what in our judgment infringes upon our self-conceit humiliates. Hence the moral law unavoidably humiliates every human being when he compares with it the sensible propensity of his nature (5: 74).

None the less, how exactly do we move from the necessary desire for our happiness, from this necessary material end, to a form of self-evaluation in reason of being subjects of this happiness, in fact, to the presumptuous self-regard in worth because we are the subjects of such an end? Why does self-love lead inevitably to self-conceit? The text above states that, firstly, the “matter” of the faculty of desire imposes itself to us, that is, our sensible inclinations are enough for us to be interested in ourselves, and they are desires whose satisfaction is our interest. However, Kant also states that our self, as “pathologically determinable”, seeks to make this condition the *rationale* for a “primary and originally valid” form of value, of objective value. This means that as beings who seek happiness, we have as the source of our satisfaction our sensibility, but *this* does not show us any *source of value* except our sensibility itself as being worth of valorization, and this naturally leads to a presumption on its part to be the law for the will in general, that is, to a presumption to legislate the law, to arrogance.¹⁸

But if this is so, then, we can appeal to a second aspect of the first “link” presented previously. If the law *strikes down* a form of value which is the presentation as value of ourselves as subjects of happiness, of self-love, then this process occurring on our sensibility has necessarily the *sensible negative effect* which is by right a feeling. Kant says: “(…)

¹⁸ Cf. Herman (2005): “Our interest in our happiness, however we come to fill it out, supplies the condition for our other material interests. By contrast, our interest in happiness has no such condition. Further, our interest in happiness is itself an interest of sensibility – it arises from the capacity of feeling to respond to the idea of our life as a whole – and so its principle too belongs to self-love. As there can be no further principle of this kind that can limit it from the point of view of self-love, the principle of happiness is unconditional. That is, since nothing from the domain of sensibility can give us reason to abandon happiness as an end, self-love naturally commutes an interest in happiness into self-conceit – a natural tendency to regard our own happiness as a law. In this way, caring about something – its having a place in our conception of our life going well – becomes essential to what we can value” (p. 25).

the negative effect on feeling (by the infringement upon the inclinations that takes place) is itself a feeling” (5: 73).

For this reason, Kant maintains that “respect for the moral law is a feeling that is produced by an intellectual ground [it is not of empirical origin], and this feeling is the only one [it is a “singular feeling”, “of such a peculiar kind” being “at the disposal only of reason, and indeed of practical pure reason” (5: 76)] that we can cognize completely *a priori* and the necessity of which we can have insight into” (5: 73).

Respect is therefore the only “necessary feeling”. In two senses. It is necessarily produced by the moral law in beings like us.¹⁹ And in beings like us, it is necessary for our effective *rational* moral agency.²⁰

4. The case of the sensible predispositions to the concept of duty

My purpose now is to briefly examine the case of the four predispositions on the part of feeling to the concept of duty presented by Kant in introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue (section XII). They are *moral feeling*, *conscience*, *love of human beings* and *respect* (for oneself, self-esteem). This examination is clearly motivated by the parity of treatment Kant gives to these *predispositions* in relation to the “necessary feeling” of respect. They have the following in common.

1. We can *not* have the duty to have the predispositions. So, the “love of one’s neighbor” (of human beings) as a predisposition must be clearly distinguished from the “*duty* of love to other human beings” (section I; 6: 448), which does not deal in fact with a feeling (cf. 6: 449),

¹⁹ Cf. Kant describing, later on, the chapter on the incentives of pure practical reason: “(...) the chapter about the relation of pure practical reason to sensibility and about its necessary influence upon sensibility to be cognized *a priori*, that is, about *moral feeling*” (5: 90).

²⁰ Cf. Kant: “For human beings and all created rational beings moral necessity is necessitation, that is, obligation, and every action based on it is to be represented as duty, not as a kind of conduct which we already favor of our own accord or could come to favor – as if we could ever bring it about that without respect for the law, which is connected with fear or at least apprehension of transgressing it, we of ourselves, like the Deity raised beyond all dependence, could come into possession of *holiness* of will by an accord of will with pure moral law becoming, as it were, our nature” (5: 81-2). Cf. also: “Therefore respect for the moral law must be regarded as also a positive though indirect effect of the moral law on the feeling (...) and must therefore be regarded as (...) an incentive to compliance with the law – and as the ground of maxims of a course of life in conformity with it” (5: 79).

rather it deals with philanthropy, that is a “practical love” (6: 650). This duty requires an “active benevolence” (6: 650), that is, it requires “beneficence” (6: 452). In fact, this predisposition of love of human beings as such is said by Kant, as with the others, to pertain to everybody: “every human being has them” (6: 399), they are “natural predispositions of the mind (*praedispositio*)” (6: 399). Therefore, it can not be a duty to have them. But *how* do we have them exactly, when Kant claims we have them in us “originally” (6: 399)?

2. Our consciousness of the predispositions “is not of empirical origin”. As with respect, their consciousness by our part “can, instead, only follow from consciousness of a moral law, as the effect this has on the mind” (6: 399). But if not of empirical origin, then we can cognize them *a priori*, which means as the necessary effects of the moral law on our sensibility, as with respect. But *how*? What is the *rationale*, perhaps in each particular case, comparable to that revealed in the production of respect?

3. Kant claims that the predispositions “lie at the basis of morality, as *subjective* conditions of the receptiveness to the concept of duty” and that “it is by virtue of them that [the human being] can be put under obligation” (6: 399). But was this exactly the role played by respect? Here we seem to meet a difference between the “necessary feeling” and the predispositions.

The feeling of respect, previously analyzed, had a clear connection with the problem of *moral motivation*, with the conception of the *incentives* (*Triebfedern*) of pure practical reason, thus far, with the effectiveness of morality as a *disposition* (*Gesinnung*). In spite of the parity of claims regarding the production of respect and, say, the predisposition of the “moral feeling” in relation to the fact that a form of pleasure or displeasure follows the determination of choice through the representation of the law, and in spite of the reference in the latter case to “the constraint present in the thought of duty” which the moral feeling makes us aware of, Kant in no way links this feeling, with necessity, to pain or displeasure (*N.B.*: the negative effect only). So, even though Kant does present this moral feeling as “a *susceptibility* on the part of free choice to be moved by pure practical reason (and its law)” (6: 400), he does not link the moral feeling to *incentives* of pure practical reason, and certainly does not present a comparable elaborated account of the manner in which the consciousness of them – which in this case obviously amounts to the consciousness of their *actuality*, in the episodic sense of a capacity – is “produced”. Perhaps we should conclude tentatively that the men-

tioned predispositions are *not directly* involved in the effectiveness of the moral law in moral *actions*, as is respect in relation to action for the sake of duty. They would not address the motivational problem directly, but then *how indirectly*?

When Kant deals with the predisposition of love for human beings, it is important to note (1) that it is a sentiment, and (2) that it is geared towards human beings *simpliciter*. A feeling of this sort, of love for human beings *as such*, David Hume in a realistic mood claims not to exist.²¹ But Kant is different. What else does he claim about it?

Kant presents it, to begin with, as something pertaining to feeling, it is “a matter of *feeling*”, and not of willing. Therefore, it may not be commanded (“I cannot be constrained to love”), it can not be the object of a duty, as we already saw. So it is of a different category of love than that related to the will: “But *benevolence* (*amor benevolentiae*), as conduct, can be subject to a law of duty” (6: 401). Accordingly, Kant offers an important clarification: “What is done from constraint, however, is not done from love” (6: 401). Presumably, as a *bona fide* feeling. But then, as the case of the predisposition concerns an effect the moral law has on the sensibility of a human being, Kant maintains that that *feeling* can be produced by beneficent actions: “If someone practices it [beneficence, which is a duty] often and succeeds in realizing his beneficent intention, he eventually comes actually to love the person he has helped” (6: 402).

We should not miss a point Kant is making: this love, even though a feeling, is not exactly personal, it is not geared towards a “pleasure in the perfection of others”, it is not a “*delight* in them” (6: 449). It is a love of humanity in someone: “(...) your beneficence will produce love of them [your fellow human beings] in you (as an aptitude of inclination to beneficence in general)” (6: 402).

As to the *indirect* character of this love, Kant distinguishes it from love which is complacency towards others,²² which is somehow

²¹ Cf. *Treatise*: “In general in may be affirm’d, that there is no such passion in human minds, as love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself. ’Tis true, there is no human, and indeed no sensible, creature, whose happiness or misery does not, in some measure, affect us, when brought near to us, and represented in lively colours: But this proceeds merely from sympathy, and is no proof of such a universal affection to mankind, since this concern extends itself beyond our own species” (p. 481).

²² *Pace* Dieter Schönecker (2009) “O Amor ao Ser Humano como Disposição Moral do Ânimo no Pensamento de Kant”: “Não é o amor de benevolência, que Kant discute no contexto de capítulo sobre o amor ao ser humano, que constitui o amor ao ser humano

sensually based it seems: “(...) Only the love that is *delight* [*Liebe des Wohlgefallens*] (*amor complacentiae*) is direct” (6: 402). Therefore, love of humanity as such is *indirect*. But what is the relation of this feeling with the effectiveness of morality if it is not related to moral motivation directly?

The answer seems to me to be that with these “predispositions” Kant aims to make justice to the *phenomenology* of the moral experience of the Kantian moral agent as a whole human being, as an individual with a precise vision of what morality involves according to Kant. Perhaps it is the phenomenology in keeping with our “common rational knowledge” of it. In this respect, this issue of the *Metaphysics of Morals* certainly amounts to an *expansion* of Kant’s moral philosophy, but in the direction of a finer characterization of the *moral psychology* of the Kantian moral agent. But even there we do *not* use inputs of our empirical knowledge of human beings. The feelings in question can be known *a priori* and are all, as is respect, somewhat peculiar. They do not in any way represent the instrumentalization of our sensibility for the goal of warranting moral behavior, this would amount to sheer heteronomy. Somehow, they seem to be the expansion towards a finer moral psychology of the moral agent of that which Kant also claims about respect: that “it is morality itself subjectively considered as an incentive” (5: 76), but, in the present case, of morality itself subjectively considered as *sensibility**.

como disposição do ânimo que se busca, e tampouco a aptidão da inclinação para a prática do bem de modo geral. Esse amor é, antes, o da complacência (*amor complacentiae*)” (p. 54). O argumento de Schönecker opera por eliminação: o primeiro, por razões já vistas, foi excluído; o último é o que resta por que o segundo foi eliminado também. O argumento está na seguinte passagem: “Kant diz expressamente que essa ‘aptidão’ é um ‘efeito’ da prática do bem ordenada. Visto que a prática do bem é ordenada, sendo, portanto, um dever, que *já precisa tomar como fundamento* a disposição moral do ânimo do amor ao ser humano como fundamento subjetivo, essa disposição moral do ânimo do amor ao ser humano não pode ser primeiro ‘efetuada’ ou afetada pelo cumprimento da ordem de fazer o bem; pois para esse cumprimento já se *pressupõe* o estado do ânimo afetado do amor ao ser humano. Este é, em minha opinião, um argumento convincente de que a ‘aptidão da inclinação para a prática do bem de modo geral’ *não* pode ser a disposição moral do ânimo” (p. 60). The picture I work with is wholly different: the fact that the predispositions in question is a sort of subjective ground of moral action does not preclude it being “produced” originally by the moral law, as we saw happening with respect. As to the role of the predisposition in the production of action for the sake of duty, my position – as bellow – is that is not of the same sort as that of respect, it is rather an element pertaining to the sensibility of the moral agent of which she is conscious in the phenomenology of her experience of this action, as the results of the repeated practice of this type of action.

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Resumo: O objetivo desse trabalho é trazer para um foco mais preciso as relações da moralidade com a sensibilidade humana no pensamento de Kant. Visto que, por um lado, a vontade humana é uma “faculdade de desejar” que está necessariamente vinculada ao prazer e desprazer, e que, por outro lado, a tarefa filosófica em relação ao tema é concebida como “metafísica”, isto é, de abordagem *a priori*, tem-se que os dados do problema não sugerem uma solução fácil. A teoria kantiana do respeito – o “sentimento necessário” – como o móbil da razão pura prática é o *locus classicus* quando se busca essa solução. A lei moral tem um efeito necessário sobre a sensibilidade de agentes como nós. Nossa agência, inicialmente, se orienta naturalmente pelo amor-próprio, e inevitavelmente sucumbe à arrogância como concepção de valor quando erige aquele amor como fonte de valor absoluto. A lei moral causa dano irreparável à arrogância, produzindo assim *necessariamente* a dor presente no respeito a essa lei. Esse modelo de visão das relações que nos interessam parece estar presente também, em traços gerais, na teoria kantiana das “disposições morais”, sem que, nesse caso, Kant se enderece ao problema da motivação moral, mas, alternativamente, procure oferecer uma visão mais ampla da fenomenologia da experiência moral de agentes como nós.

Palavras-chave: Kant, respeito, sensibilidade moral

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to bring to a sharper focus the relation between morality and human sensibility in Kant’s thought. Given that, on the one hand, the human will is a “faculty of desire” which is necessarily linked to pleasure and displeasure, and that, on the other side, the philosophical task concerning the subject-matter is conceived as of *metaphysics*, that is, to be dealt with in *a priori* terms, we find therewith the makings of a difficult problem. Kant’s theory of respect – the “necessary” sentiment – as the incentive of pure practical reason is the *locus classicus* for the search of a solution. The moral law has a necessary effect on the sensibilities of beings like us. Our agency is, at first, naturally orientated by self-love, and, then, inevitably succumbs to arrogance as a conception of value when it harbours that love so as to become the source of absolute value. The moral law causes irretrievable loss to arrogance, thereby *necessarily* producing the pain present in the respect for this law. This model of the relation in question seems to be present as well in Kant’s theory of the “moral predispositions”, without in this case the central issue being moral motivation, but rather a broader vision concerning the phenomenology of the moral experience of agents like us.

Keywords: Kant, respect, moral sensibility