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Kant and Schiller on the Harmony between Reason and Sensibility

Abstract
The paper aims to partially bridge the gap that separates Kant and Schiller regarding the relationship between reason and sensibility. Contrary to Schiller's own claims, Kant's ethics seeks a harmonious integration of the rational and emotional dimensions of the moral agent. I support this thesis by focusing on Kant's concepts of the *highest good* and *moral character*. Finally, I highlight the difference between Kant and Schiller concerning the possibility of acting directly *out of* an emotion cultivated by practical reason. Nevertheless, I argue that even this difference can be reconciled, although doing so requires moving beyond a strictly faithful reading of Kant's texts.

Keywords
Kant, Schiller, Moral Psychology, Highest Good, Moral Character.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to clarify the interplay between reason and sensibility in Kantian agents' moral development by engaging with Schiller's criticisms of Kant's ethics. Schiller argues that the sensible nature of human beings should constitute a *collaborating party* in realizing moral perfection. The aesthetic-sensible element is crucial both not to exclude the emotional dimension of the agent, which is constitutive of human nature, and to make morality effective in motivating action. For Schiller, moral perfection entails that one has a character such that fulfills one's duty naturally and joyfully. Only in this way – through developing a harmonious relationship between one's sensible and rational natures – does the agent manifest the grace of a beautiful soul. The paper narrows the gap between Kant and Schiller by arguing that a *harmony model* of moral character is also present within Kant's ethics.

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I begin by reconstructing Schiller's critique of Kant's ethics to show how, according to Schiller, Kant develops a *suppression model* of the relationship between reason and sensibility – the agent must attain moral perfection through a process of mortifying the body that establishes a monarchy of reason (2.). Unlike Schiller, who emphasizes cultivating emotions, Kant seems to advocate for renouncing the demands of sensibility in favor of acting according to duty for duty's sake. This interpretation of the Kantian agent has also been echoed by recent scholars, such as Bernard Williams (1973) and Iris Murdoch (1999), who argue that Kant distances himself from concrete individuals and thereby alienates human beings from what constitutes their specific identities – namely, their interests, desires, and feelings.

Contrary to these critical readings, I argue that sensibility is an integral part of the Kantian agent's moral experience and that moral perfection does not require mortifying or excluding our sensible nature. Instead, it calls for developing a specific harmonious relationship with our sensible nature that is achieved through discipline and cultivation.

Consequently, I begin an inquiry into the relationship between reason and sensibility in Kant's ethics by summarizing Kant's take on sensibility (3.). Emotional life is an integral part of the process of the determination of one's will. The agent's will is good when the agent relates to their emotions in a specific way, that is, by allowing them to orient the agent without becoming the determining motive of the will. This mode of relation neither requires mortifying the body nor involves disregarding the claims of sensibility. Moreover, many non-moral feelings play a crucial role in the realization of morality by supporting and cooperating with reason such that Kant makes their cultivation a moral duty.

Once I have clarified the constitutive role of sensibility in the agent's moral experience, I argue that, for Kant as well, morality's ultimate end is developing in the agent a harmonious relationship between their sensible and rational natures (4.). We should not focus on Kant's conception of virtue, as some Kant scholars do, because for Kant virtue alone does not constitute the *highest good*. The highest good – the end that every moral agent ought to pursue – consists in the harmonious unity of virtue and happiness, in the concord between the resolve of practical reason and the agent's sensible nature. In this way, I argue that the gap between Kant's model of moral development and Schiller's can be significantly reduced (5.).

In the final part of the paper, I show that the main difference between the two models is that, in Schiller's model, fully developed moral agents can act based on a cultivated feeling that directly determines their will, while Kantian agents must always rely, albeit in a nearly automatic manner, on the scrutiny of practical reason (6.). However, I argue that acting with a cultivated feeling as the determining ground of the will can also be

morally acceptable within a Kantian framework, even if this position is no longer entirely faithful to a strict exegesis of Kant's texts.

2. Schiller's Critique of Kant's Ethics

Schiller's critique of Kant's ethics focuses on the relationship that the fully developed moral agent should establish between their sensible and rational natures. Schiller shares with Kant the ground of moral worth, which is the capacity of practical reason to determine the will: "The will should receive its directing principle from reason, and only make a decision according to what reason allows or prescribes" (GD, p. 372). The concept of duty necessarily follows from the fact that, for both authors, human beings possess two natures – a rational and a sensible one. Kant writes that "reason, in the practical, has to do with the subject, namely his faculty of desire, to whose special constitution the rule can variously conform" (KpV, 5: 20; p. 18). For one's rational nature, particularly one's practical reason, to serve as the determining ground [*Bestimmungsgrund*] of the will, the moral law must present itself as duty and in the form of the categorical imperative. Schiller, too, acknowledges that the determination of the will involves the interplay of the sensible and rational drives, which "exhaust our concept of humanity" (AE, p. 185). Consequently, as Jeremy Hovda argues, "any criticism [from Schiller] is internal and based on a more fundamental agreement" (Hovda 2022, p. 98), namely, that practical reason and duty constitute the ground for the determination of a good will and, therefore, represent the necessary starting point in the moral experience of the agent.

The point of divergence between the two philosophers lies in their accounts of moral motivation: how should the rational and sensible motives relate to one another, particularly in the process of moral formation and development? According to Anne Margaret Baxley (2010), Kant presents a *suppression model*, whereas Schiller advocates a *harmony model*. Schiller explains that human beings can develop three types of relationships between their sensible and rational natures:

> Either the person represses the demands of his sensuous nature to conduct himself in concord with the higher demands of his reasonable nature; or he reverses the relationship, and subordinates the reasonable part of his being to the sensuous part […] or is the impulses of natural necessity place themselves in harmony with the laws of reason, and the person is at one with himself. (GD, p. 361)

Both Schiller and Kant seek to avoid the *indulgence model* (Baxley 2010, p. 89), in which the human being subordinates their rational nature

to their sensible one and thereby relinquishes any possibility of autonomy and independence in determining their will. According to Schiller, however, Kant avoids this outcome by suppressing the sensible nature and imposing a kind of "monarchy" (GD, p. 363), in which reason acts as a ruler. In contrast, Schiller argues for the need to find a middle ground between Kant's monarchy of reason and a "wild ochlocracy" (*ibid.*), in which the citizens are subjected to the brutal despotism of the "lowest classes" (*ibid.*), the sensible impulses.

To reach a middle ground, one ought to reject an entirely negative view of sensibility, one that sees sensibility as a threat to the agent's autonomy and thus as being perpetually at war with the laws of pure practical reason (cf. GD, p. 364). Instead, sensibility must be treated as a "collaborating party" (GD, p. 367), which should be acknowledged and cultivated to realize moral goodness fully. Baxley writes that, according to Schiller, "the moral good for us ought not to involve the denigration or sacrifice of one part in favor of the other. […] We have an obligation not to separate that which nature has joined and should never consider the oppression of one aspect of the self by the other to constitute a victory" (Baxley 2010, p. 91). The human being possesses both a sensible and a rational nature. To exhibit "the beauty of man" (GD, p. 347), possessing practical reason alone is not sufficient; one also requires a certain *grace*, which arises from a specific way of sensing – from a connection between the "willful or deliberate" movements of practical reason and the "sympathetic movements" of the sensible nature (GD, p. 351). The human being can "change himself" (GD, p. 348) and thereby achieve this inner harmony. Schiller thus offers a *transformative account* (Noller 2021), in which one's sensible nature is integrated into the development of moral agency and must therefore be cultivated and unified with reason.

Schiller believes this dimension is absent from Kant's ethics: "in Kantian moral philosophy, the idea of duty is presented with a severity which frightens all the Graces away, and a weak reason might easily attempt to seek moral perfection on the path of a gloomy and monkish ascetism" (GD, p. 365). Schiller maintains that achieving moral freedom requires a path in which the agent's two natures do not have any internal conflict. By contrast, Kant conceives of freedom precisely as the victory of reason over sensibility, through the imposition of reason in the form of duty and the exclusion of sensibility from the determination of the will.

One can indeed extrapolate in Kant a conflictual view of the relationship between the sensible and rational natures, as well as a corresponding exclusion of emotional life from the Kantian agent's moral experience, not only from his definition of virtue as the "constraint of free choice" (MS, 6: 379; p. 155) but also from his negative characterization of sensibility as an obstacle to be overcome in moral action (cf. MS, 6: 397, 405;

p. 170, 176). Virtue always requires "strength" (MS, 6: 394; p. 167) to overpower and control natural inclinations, which at any moment can "come into conflict with the human being's moral resolution" (*ibid.*). This view is further supported by Kant's conviction that, even in the absence of a sensible component, agents could still generate moral value by relying solely on their practical reason. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant appears to suggest that an agent who, lacking the capacity for sympathetic participation in the misfortunes of others, acts only from duty is nonetheless capable of performing an action with full moral worth (cf. GMS, 4: 398; p. 14). However, as Katerina Deligiorgi writes, "by excluding emotions, Kant's austere view of morality blocks one of the paths for securing this inner harmony" (Deligiorgi 2011, p. 495).

According to Schiller, virtue must not exclude sensibility. On the contrary, the contribution of emotional life must be preserved, "because there must be no loss of reality" (AE, p. 141), and cultivated to achieve moral perfection. Virtue requires the agent to bring "desire and duty into connection […] he should obey his reason with joy" (GD, p. 365). The agent does not feel the constraint of duty because their inclinations, desires, and feelings have been cultivated in harmony with practical reason to create a "united effort" (*ibid.*) in realizing moral goodness. The agent obeys duty joyfully, naturally, and without any internal conflict. Schiller thus believes he departs significantly from Kant over "the desirability of emotive engagement in moral motivation" (Deligiorgi 2011, p. 497).

This critical point about moral motivation is also found in contemporary authors who, drawing in part on Schiller's arguments, claim that Kant's model is both psychologically unfeasible and undesirable, particularly in regard to the role of the agent's emotional life. The latter is an essential part of the agent's moral experience, as shown by various empirical studies[1]. Emotions, at the very least, contribute to moral judgments and exert a significant influence on the determination of moral action[2]. Jesse Prinz argues that Kant's aim is to free "moral rules from the passions" (Prinz 2007, p. 134). However, two major issues arise from this project. On the one hand, Kant loses sight of the concrete individual – for whom emotions, desires, and particular interests are essential elements of their specific identity – by portraying sterile agents who are expected to act solely through pure practical reason[3]. By assigning an important role to an individual's sensible nature, Schiller offers "a different and definitively richer conception of the human being" (Falduto 2021, p. 799) than does

[1] See Damasio 1994, Greene *et al.* 2001, Haidt 2001, Nichols 2004.
[2] See Prinz 2006.
[3] On this critique of the impersonality of the Kantian agent, see Dancy 1993; Galvin 1991; Murdoch 1999; Williams 1973.

Kant. On the other hand, Kant's account faces a motivational problem: a moral perspective based entirely on reason and duty "would leave us cold […] if we could be emotionally indifferent to morality, we might fail to act morally" (Prinz 2007, p. 134).

Prinz appears to overlook Kant's notion of respect, which is described as a "feeling" [*Gefühl*] (GMS, 4: 402n; p. 17) and is "the sole and also the undoubted moral incentive" (KpV, 5: 78; p. 65). The Kantian agent is not without moral emotions. However, Schiller highlights the unique nature of this *rational* feeling, which differs from all feelings in that reason is its object. In addition, Schiller says that respect imposes itself on our sensible nature by "surmounting our physical capacities" (GD, p. 381), and risks becoming a form of "fear" (GD, p. 383). Thus, even the feeling of respect reflects an agonistic view of the relationship between one's emotional life and reason. By contrast, feelings such as love, which Schiller classifies as *free emotions* (cf. GD, p. 381), seem to be excluded from the moral action of the Kantian agent.

Kant's suppression model is thus grounded in an irreconcilable dualism between one's sensible and rational natures, with the latter imposing itself on the former by suppressing and excluding it from moral experience. In this way, Kant's ethics faces serious motivational problems and fails to fully account for the human being as such. By contrast, Schiller's harmonic and transformative model does not condemn sensibility to the role of an enemy to be suppressed. Instead, through education and cultivation, Schiller's model makes it a constitutive and collaborative part of moral goodness.

3. Kant's Take on Sensibility

Many Kant scholars have criticized this negative view of the Kantian agent's emotional life by emphasizing that the Kantian agent is a *finite rational being* – that is, it is not merely a rational being but also a desiring and emotional one[4]. The emotional is an *integral and essential* part of the Kantian moral agent's experience. Indeed, in moral action, the agent's sensible and rational natures interact: the determination to act occurs within the *faculty of desire* [*Begehrungsvermögen*].

Generally, the Kantian agent's emotional life is directed to the pursuit of their *happiness*, understood as "the entire well-being and contentment with one's condition" (GMS, 4: 393; p. 9). Judging the objects with which they engage, feelings of pleasure and displeasure guide the agent in the

[4] See, for instance, Bagnoli 2016; Baron 1995; Borges 2019; Cohen 2014; Failla, Sánchez Madrid 2021; Herman 1993; Louden 2000.

pursuit of this happiness. This *feeling* [*Gefühl*] consists in the "representation of the agreement [or disagreement] of an object or of an action with the subjective conditions of life" (KpV, 5: 9n; p. 7), where the "subjective conditions of life" refer to the faculty of desire and the agent's happiness. For this reason, Kant considers the feeling of pleasure to be a "very special power of discriminating and judging" (KU, 5: 204; p. 44), specifically for evaluating the goodness of a given object in relation to the agent's happiness. The feeling judges the relation between the object and the faculty of desire and then creates an interest in the object and a specific *desire* [*Begierde*] that motivates the agent toward a course of action. Consequently, the emotional life of the agent – desires, feelings, and all their subsets[5] – is an integral part of their determination to act.

Kant is clear about the role of the agent's emotional life when he states that "the involvement of the desires is to determine activity" (Fried, 25: 577; p. 131) and when he defines the *good will* as a *higher faculty of desire* (cf. KpV, 5: 22; p. 20). The will is nothing other than the faculty of desire ultimately determined by practical reason[6]. Indeed, to achieve moral worth, the determination of the will must involve practical reason. At the same time, desire and feeling are not excluded from this process insofar as happiness is "an unavoidable determining ground of the faculty of desire" (KpV, 5: 25; p. 23). The will is therefore affected "through moving-causes of sensibility" (KrV, A 534/B 562; p. 533), and practical reason determines the *maxim*, that is, the subjective principle of the will, starting from the guidance of feelings and desires[7]. The agent's sensible and emotional nature thus provides the content of the maxim and a motive for action.

Now, regarding the *relationship* between the sensible and rational components, Kant, as does Schiller, wants to avoid an indulgent attitude through which the agent subordinates their reason to the claims of sensibility. Kant distinguishes between *self-love*, in which the agent has a natural interest in one's own happiness and in considering one's feelings (cf. KpV, 5: 73; p. 61), and *self-conceit*, in which the agent takes desire and feeling, rather than reason and moral law, as the determining motive of their will (cf. MS, 6: 446-448; pp. 211-212). Kant has no problem with the agent having a natural interest in their happiness. What matters is the relationship the agent develops between their two natures. Schiller's critique focuses on this relationship and accuses Kant

[5] For a taxonomy of the Kantian agent's emotional life, see Pinzan 2025a and Sorensen 2002.
[6] "The faculty of desire whose inner determining ground […] lies within the subject's reason is called the *will* [*Wille*]" (MS, 6: 213; p. 16).
[7] The maxim is "the practical rule that reason determines *in conformity with the conditions of the subject*" (GMS, 4: 421n.; pp. 33-34 My italics).

of imposing a path of renunciation and asceticism on the agent that establishes a monarchy of reason. However, we should question Schiller's reconstruction for several reasons.

Kant does not fear *self-love* but *self-conceit*. That is, Kant fears that the agent might subordinate the legislation of reason to that of sensibility. He does not fear sensibility as such. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, referring to cognition, Kant offers an apology for sensibility, affirming its essential role in the process of cognition because without sensibility "there would be no material that could be processed" (A, 7: 144; p. 35). Moreover, he defends it from some common accusations (e.g., that sensibility is confusing, commanding, and deceptive). According to Kant, responsibility falls on the subject and on how their understanding relates and processes the material of the sensible. The same reading is present on the side of moral experience. Kant argues that "natural inclinations, *considered in themselves*, are *good*, i.e., irreprehensible; and not only is it futile, but it would also be harmful and censurable, to want to eradicate them" (Rel, 6: 58; p. 63). Contrary to Prinz's and other authors' claims, Kant's ethics does not aim at excluding emotions from the moral experience of the agent. Emotions are a constitutive part of that experience, and Kant does not consider them directly linked to moral evil, which is rooted in the possibility of free choice on the part of the agent, in how they choose, from moment to moment, to relate to their own sensibility[8].

Consequently, it is not true that agents should disregard their own interests and feelings in the moment of moral choice. On the contrary, if an agent disregards their desires, they would fail in a kind of duty toward themselves: "depriving oneself (slavishly) of what is essential to the cheerful enjoyment of life, by avarice, or depriving oneself (fanatically) of enjoyment of the pleasures of life by exaggerated discipline of one's natural inclinations" is against "a human being's duty to himself" (MS, 6: 452; p. 216). Whether from avarice or an excess of moral discipline, depriving oneself of the pleasures of life and the pursuit of happiness is contrary to the duty to oneself. In multiple textual occurrences, Kant reminds us that one should not renounce their own happiness to behave morally and even treats the pursuit of happiness as a duty – albeit an indirect one (cf. GMS, 4: 399; p. 14). Indeed, in clear contrast to Schiller's accusation of a "gloomy and monkish ascetism" (GD, p. 365), Kant explicitly speaks out

[8] In the *Religion*, Kant says that the human being "is also attached to the incentives of sensibility and admits them (in accordance with the subjective principle of self-love) also into his maxim. But if he admitted them into his maxim *as by themselves sufficient* for determining the power of choice, without being concerned about the moral law […], then he would be morally evil" (Rel, 6: 36; p. 40).

against monkish ascetics, "which from superstitious fear or hypocritical loathing of oneself goes to work with self-torture and mortification of the flesh, is not directed to virtue but rather to fantastically purging oneself of sin by imposing punishments on oneself" (MS, 6: 485; p. 245). Morality is not achieved through mortifying the body or renouncing happiness. Kant is looking for a "frame of mind that is both *valiant* and *cheerful* in fulfilling its duties (*animus strenuus et hilaris*)" (MS, 6: 484; p. 245). This *cheerful frame of mind* is not merely an emotional state that helps keep the agent "healthy" (*ibid.*) but requires something more, "something which […] affords an agreeable enjoyment of life" (*ibid.*).

The emotional element connected to the satisfaction of one's own happiness should not be regarded as something to be eliminated. However, Kant goes even further and argues that many *non-moral feelings* – feelings not directly tied to the moral law (not moral feelings such as the feeling of respect) – have a role in fulfilling certain moral duties. In particular, Kant proposes two roles for these feelings: an auxiliary role when reason is not strong enough and a collaborating one, this time in synergy with reason, to fulfill some duties.

First, Kant maintains, for instance, that actively sympathizing with the fate of others is a duty and, consequently, that cultivating natural sympathetic feelings is an indirect duty. Sympathy can, in fact, "do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish" (MS, 6: 457; p. 221) and offer motivational support to a moral agent who is not yet fully aware of the authority of practical reason. When practical reason has not yet "achieved the necessary strength" (A, 7: 253; p.), sympathy works as a kind of *auxiliary* and *provisional* moral feeling that motivates the agent to critically reflect on any situation sympathy judges to be morally salient. Thus, cultivating these sympathetic feelings is crucial for the agent's moral development. As Nancy Sherman explains, the necessity of cultivating and expressing such feelings amounts to a "*faute de mieux* claim" (Sherman 2014, p. 20) and non-moral feelings have a provisional role as moral feelings "until reason has achieved the necessary strength" (A, 7: 253; p. 152). Therefore, the non-moral feeling is not necessarily in opposition to reason's orientation but rather naturally tends toward morality, albeit in a passive manner that does not allow the agent to be fully aware of it. Only in this way should we understand Kant's claim that natural predispositions, including those related to the desire for happiness (and thus to feeling), "are not only (negatively) *good* (they do not conflict with the moral law) but are also predispositions *to the good* (they further compliance with that law)" (Rel, 6: 28; p. 30). It is thus essential that agents work on non-moral feelings and cultivate them so that they can support the agent in the realization of duty.

Second, non-moral feelings should not be cultivated and expressed only as temporary substitutes for the feeling of respect and the awareness of duty. Even in the fully developed agent, who is conscious of duty and the authority of practical reason, Kant affirms the necessity of a *collaboration*, a term I borrow from Schiller, between non-moral feelings and moral duty. A clear example of this collaboration comes from the emotional dispositions Kant associates with certain duties of love: *benevolence* with the duty of beneficence, or *appreciativeness* and *love of human beings* with the duty of gratitude (cf. MS, 6: 450-457; pp. 214-220). According to Melissa Seymour Fahmy, when Kant describes practical love as "the maxim of benevolence" or "active benevolence" (MS, 6: 450; pp. 214-215), he is asking the agent to "observe this duty by cultivating a benevolent disposition and practical, beneficent desires" (Fahmy 2010, p. 315). This realization of duty through the cultivation of a specific emotional disposition that is in harmony with practical reason is even clearer in friendship, which Kant considers a duty: friendship is "the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect. […] this is an ideal of each participating and sharing sympathetically in the other's well-being through the morally good will that unites them" (MS, 6: 469; p. 232). Thus, Kant brings together the moral feeling of respect and non-moral feelings, such as love and sympathy. The feeling of love works harmoniously with the feeling of respect in the development of the emotional attitude characteristic of friendship. They act as two physical forces: the former attracts and "bid[s] friends to draw closer", while the latter pushes away and thereby requires "them to stay at a proper distance from each other" (MS, 6: 470; p. 232).

Sensibility thus becomes a fundamental element in fulfilling duty and, when properly cultivated, collaborates with practical reason both from an evaluative and motivational standpoint. In light of this, I argue that Kant's model of the relationship between sensibility and rationality closely resembles Schiller's harmony model. To support this claim, I will offer in the next section a teleological interpretation of Kant's ethics, one oriented toward the agent's realizing the highest good and developing a specific moral character.

4. What is Kant's Morality about?

Focusing on Kant's ethics primarily as a *duty-centered* framework might be counterproductive if our goal were to bring it closer to Schiller's position, particularly that of the harmonious relationship between sensibility and rationality. Barbara Herman (1993) emphasizes that Kant's ethics develops from a notion of value that it seeks to deepen and toward

which the agent's moral experience is directed (a *telos*). She argues that the first two sections of the *Groundwork* can be fruitfully read in parallel with the opening of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Both philosophers hold that the object of ethics is the *good* and that, while some things are conditionally good, something must be *unconditionally good* –a *final good*. According to Herman, the *Groundwork* is an "inquiry into the nature of the good" (Herman 1993, p. 209), and at the center of this inquiry stands the will: "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be taken to be good without limitation, except a good will" (GMS, 4: 393; p. 9). If we connect the centrality of the will to the fact that, in the will, the agent's emotional and desiderative capacity interacts with their rational capacity, then moral goodness involves one's developing a specific kind of relationship between emotion and reason. The key point, also to address Schiller's criticism, is the kind of relationship at stake.

In his various responses to Schiller, Kant focuses on the relationship that must hold between the sensible and rational natures by starting from the concept of *virtue*. As already noted, Kant emphasizes the necessity of establishing a firm hierarchy in which sensibility is subordinated to the authority of reason. In the unpublished notes to the *Religion*, Kant argues, apparently in contrast to Schiller, that "sensibility must not work as an ally, but rather must be restrained under the despotism of the categorical imperative, which fights against the obstacle of the anarchy of natural inclinations" (VR, 23: 100). Virtue itself, Kant explains, requires *autocracy*, that is, "the consciousness of the capacity to master one's inclinations when they rebel against the law" (MS, 6: 383; p. 158). Kant disagrees with Schiller about involving the aesthetic dimension – the sensible nature – in the definition of duty and virtue. Virtue remains "the strength of the human being's maxims in fulfilling his duties" (MS, 6: 394; p. 167), and it demands a specific *way of thinking* [*Denkungsart*] in which reason asserts itself over sensibility and ultimately determines the agent's will. For this reason, Kant responds to Schiller that "with the *concept of duty* […] I cannot associate *gracefulness*" (Rel, 6: 23n; p. 24). Kant employs the notions of duty and virtue to restrain the potentially anarchic tendencies of sensibility. Given Kant's and Schiller's conceptions of virtue, Baxley argues that "the moral psychologies to which the two are committed differ in some important respects" (Baxley 2010, p. 98). Thus, Baxley marks a fundamental divergence between the two philosophers, although she maintains that Kant's ethics does not prescribe a form of asceticism or renunciation of happiness and indeed assigns a significant role to the agent's feelings. Nevertheless, the underlying moral psychologies differ, as clearly illustrated by their respective conceptions of virtue, with Baxley maintaining that only Schiller invokes a harmonious unity between emotion and reason.

Contrary to Baxley, I argue that to adequately understand the relationship the agent must develop between emotion and reason, one cannot limit the analysis to the concepts of virtue and duty. Returning to the debates on value and, consequently, on the good, Kant maintains that virtue alone does not exhaust the concept of the final and highest good: "That *virtue* […] is the *supreme condition* of whatever can even seem to us desirable […] and that it is therefore the *supreme* good has been proved in the Analytic. But it is not yet, on that account, the whole and complete good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings" (KpV, 5: 110; p. 89). Kant's emphasis on virtue as the supreme condition of the highest good should not lead us to think that he is endorsing a form of "moralism which places all human worth in the performance of moral duties alone" (Beiser 2005, p. 188). Happiness is a necessary condition for the complete and highest good. Yet, while happiness is necessarily pursued by human beings, virtue is not, and it is therefore crucial to show that the moral agent must actively strive for it. Considering the moral agent for what they are – a finite rational being – the highest good must thus also encompass their striving for happiness. This pursuit, however, must be guided and oriented by practical reason and the moral law. Indeed, as Alexander Englert and Andrew Chignell maintain, "there is an intrinsically valuable connection between happiness and virtue such that, when the two do not align, there is a deficiency in the world that a 'perfect volition' would have reason to resolve" (Englert, Chignell 2024, p. 6). One must harmonize the pursuit of happiness with virtue such that "happiness must be included in the complete and final end – the Highest Good" (Englert, Chignell 2024, p. 7)[9].

A thorough analysis of both Kant's moral psychology and his theory of value inevitably leads to the recognition that Kant, like Schiller, thinks that moral agents should seek a harmonious union between the rational and the sensible dimensions of human nature. Kant defines the highest good as "a happiness of rational beings harmoniously coinciding with conformity to the moral law" (KU, 5: 451; p. 340). The moral agent should adopt as the ultimate end of their action the *harmony* between their pursuit of happiness and a way of thinking determined by practical reason. The result aims at a *mixtum compositum* (Chignell 2023) between happiness and virtue – that is, it aims at a *self-aware pursuit of happiness* constrained by what practical reason endorses: "Thus happiness in exact proportion with the morality of rational beings, through which they are worthy of it, alone constitutes the highest good" (KrV, A814/B842; pp. 681-682). In defining virtue and happiness, Kant describes the former (often used interchangeably with "morality") as "worthiness to be

[9] For a similar line of argument, see Engstrom 1992.

happy" (KpV, 5: 110; p. 89). Being worthy of happiness does not require an ascetic path that renounces happiness or excludes the feelings and desires from one's will. Rather, it demands a process of *cultivation* of the agent's agency, an agency that is constituted by both a *way of thinking* [*Denkungsart*] and a *way of sensing* [*Sinnesart*].

The necessity of a harmony between reason and sensibility is already evident when Kant discusses a *higher faculty of desire* (cf. KpV, 5: 22; p. 20), but it becomes even clearer in his analysis of *moral character* – a topic increasingly central to contemporary debates among Kant scholars. In fact, some scholars now characterize his ethics as an *ethics of character* (Mordacci 2021). Kant defines moral character as "the absolute unity of the inner principle of conduct" (A, 7: 295; p. 194). This inner unity requires a specific *Denkungsart* through which the agent can bind "himself to definite practical principles that he has prescribed to himself irrevocably by his own reason" (A, 7: 292; p. 192). Such a way of thinking ensures that practical reason consistently serves as the determining ground of the will when it critically evaluates the moral correctness of maxims. Moreover, when it does so, practical reason enables the realization of morally worthy actions. For Kant, the formation of this character necessitates *discipline* [*Disciplin*], or "the constraint of inclination in accordance with rules" (Fried, 25: 651; p. 194). Discipline facilitates the agent's development of a proper hierarchical relationship between reason and sensibility.

Kant argues explicitly that the development of this *Denkungsart*, and thus of moral character, also requires a "gradual reform of the way of sensing [*Sinnesart*]" (Rel, 6: 47; p. 54). Moral character is constituted not only by a specific *way of thinking* but also by a specific *way of sensing*. To shape the latter, a process of *cultivation* [*Kultur*] is necessary for its gradual reformation and transformation: the determination of the agent's moral character "depends not on his drives and desires, but rather solely on the manner *in which he modifies these*" (Fried, 25: 438; p. 35). The cultivation of sympathy and all other non-moral feelings is necessary to develop a sensibility that cooperates with practical reason in the realization of morality[10] and because the *telos* of Kant's ethics is the harmonious union of the sensible and rational natures, which, in the moral agent, are concretely expressed in the pursuit of happiness and moral virtue.

This reconstruction of virtue and happiness's relationship reveals a moral psychology oriented toward harmony that brings Kant's theory closer to Schiller's. Moreover, the notions of *Denkungsart* and *Sinnesart*,

[10] Kant believes that natural perfection consists in the "*cultivation* of any *capacities* whatever [therefore, also the capacity for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure] for furthering ends set forth by reason" (MS, 6: 391; p. 165). For a more extensive analysis of the role of cultivation in the development of moral character, see Pinzan 2025b.

which are central to the concept of moral character, can be fruitfully brought into dialogue with Schiller's notions of grace and dignity. This is the goal of the following section.

5. A New Look at Kant and Schiller's Relationship

As I stated in 2., any potential disagreement between Schiller and Kant develops from a shared premise: the fundamental role of practical reason and duty in determining moral action. Schiller agrees with Kant that grace, understood as the aesthetic and sensible condition of the agent, "is at least no guarantee of a dutiful disposition" and "will never provide sufficient and valid testimony of the morality of the act with which it is met" (GD, p. 364). The possibility of such moral determination of action requires a "noble disposition of the mind" (GD, p. 370), which Schiller calls *dignity*.

Schiller explains that the concept of dignity involves the agent's capacity to control instincts through a *moral force* (GD, p. 372), which refers precisely to the prescriptive authority of reason. In this way, "the mind conducts itself in the body as the master" (GD, p. 376). Schiller is therefore fully aware that, at times, sensibility and reason may pull the agent in different directions; in such cases, it is essential that reason exercises control and asserts itself to guide the agent in the appropriate direction. However, Schiller maintains that dignity alone cannot exhaust the concept of virtue. It must be accompanied by grace, which allows the mind to govern *liberally*, reducing the resistance of sensibility as much as possible so that the realization of duty becomes effortless. The two concepts "complement each other" (Klemme 2023, p. 191), and through their harmonious union, the agent can obey reason with joy.

Attaining virtue or character (in the Schillerian sense) is very similar to attaining the highest good and moral character (in the Kantian sense). Kant places greater emphasis on happiness and on how the agent might continue to pursue it in proportion to virtue. Schiller, by contrast, seeks to make the realization of duty as pleasant and effortless as possible. In other words, the two authors appear to pursue the same goal: the development of a moral character that harmonizes the claims of sensibility and the claims of rationality. On one side, Schiller insists on the necessity of dignity, claiming that character "presupposes the mastery of the person over his impulses" (GD, p. 377); similarly, Kant holds that a good character – and, consequently, a good will – requires a stable mode of thinking shaped by practical reason, one that disciplines sensibility. On the other side, Schiller emphasizes the importance of grace in ensuring that the entire character, rather than just individual

deeds, is genuinely moral (cf. GD, p. 368); likewise, Kant argues for the necessity of a reform of the way of sensing [*Sinnesart*] so that it may be brought into harmony with practical reason. Consequently, for both authors, the highest good consists of a moral character that requires *dignity* (a specific *Denkungsart*) and *grace* (a specific *Sinnesart*). Dignity calls for disciplining sensations and involuntary impulses, while grace requires cultivating these so that sensibility can collaborate with reason. Baxley writes that "we ought to cultivate feelings and inclinations to work to bring about our moral ends, so that feelings and inclinations no longer provide resistance to the will, but actively participate in moral action" (Baxley 2010, p. 91). Baxley refers exclusively to Schiller's theory. However, as I have shown in 4., this role for cultivation is also found in Kant. Baxley acknowledges the continuity between Schiller's notion of dignity and Kant's concept of virtue and moral disposition, though she argues that, in Schiller, "Kantian dignity is complemented and perfected by grace" (Baxley 2010, p. 89). Contrary to her idea, if we focus on the *highest good*, then Kant, too, judges it necessary to include a specific *way of sensing* within the notion of moral character.

Moreover, for both philosophers, agents cannot fully attain the *highest good*, but rather this ideal guides them toward moral maturity and orients their individual actions. Kant, in fact, maintains that the very possibility of conceiving the highest good as realizable requires postulating the immortality of the soul – since its fulfillment demands "an endless progress" (KpV, 5: 122; p. 99) – as well as the existence of God. As a result, human beings, at least not during their earthly existence, cannot fully realize the harmony between their sensible and rational natures. Similarly, Schiller maintains that the "beauty of character […] is merely an idea, to be in accord with which, he [the agent] must strive with persistent vigilance, but which, for all of his effort, he can never entirely achieve" (GD, p. 370). Practical reason must therefore remain constantly vigilant, ready to intervene whenever necessary, whenever inclinations contrary to duty attempt to "circumvent the will entirely" (GD, p. 373).

Regarding the ease and spontaneity of fulfilling one's duty, Schiller argues that a Kantian agent can never fully achieve this state, as reason is always in constant conflict with sensibility. However, as shown in 3., the Kantian agent must strive to perform their duty with a cheerful state of mind. Moreover, while Kant criticizes the idea of *habit* [*Angewohnheit – assuetudo*], defined as "a uniformity in action that has become a *necessity* through frequent repetition" (MS, 6: 407; p. 177), he positively evaluates the concept of *aptitude* [*habitus – Fertigkeit*]. The latter is described as "a facility in acting and a subjective perfection of choice" (*ibid.*), which allows for the recognition that, even within Kant's framework, performing one's duty can be easy and effortless. In this way, Kant aligns with Schiller

in seeking to carry out one's duty effortlessly, with sensibility harmoniously aligning with the commands of practical reason.

6. Acting Out of (Cultivated) Feelings

One final element seems to mark a significant distance between the two philosophers, despite the interpretation of Kant's ethics that I have provided in the preceding sections. Schiller maintains that the beautiful soul, one who has achieved harmony between the sensible and rational natures, can also be described as "*a child of the house*" (GD, p. 366). The defining characteristic of this child of the house is that they may "abandon the guidance of the will to emotions" (GD, p. 368). Indeed, children usually follow their emotions, as they have not yet encountered the education and discipline of the moral law. According to Schiller, the fully mature moral agent should aim to act like a child, but on the basis of emotions they have cultivated through moral education. Such an agent may act by allowing cultivated emotions to serve as determining grounds of their will. They can trust these emotions and not rely exclusively on practical reason for every moral decision.

Of course, if we recall Schiller's reflections about the beauty of character being merely an idea, one that can never be fully attained, then the possibility of acting solely through cultivated emotions, while disregarding duty and imperatives, remains just that: a possibility. There will always be inclinations contrary to duty that influence our will; consequently, practical reason should remain constantly vigilant.

However, Kant does not seem to allow for the possibility that practical reason could ever renounce its role as the determining ground of the will, even in the case of a sensibility cultivated under its guidance. At most, Kant allows that duty may become easy to fulfil and even pleasant, but he does not let a feeling, even a cultivated one, wholly determine the will. He accepts the notion of *aptitude* because it "involves a choice on the part of the agent" (Hildebrand 2017, p. 28). Emotions, by contrast, bypass choice, since choice is a rational operation. This point becomes clearer in the *Critique of Practical Reason*: if "the determination of the will takes place *conformably* with the moral law but only by means of a feeling […] the action contains *legality* indeed but not *morality*" (KpV, 5: 71; p. 60). Thus, one can attain a state of character in which one's feeling is aligned with the moral law and with practical reason and in this sense, the feeling can – and in some cases must – participate in the determination of the will. However, reason must always remain present as the ultimate authority, and the feeling, even when cultivated, can never be the sole determining ground of the will.

On whether a cultivated emotion can entirely determine the agent's will, Kant and Schiller appear to part ways. However, I would argue that it is possible to remain within a broadly Kantian framework, though one that is no longer faithful to the letter of the text, and maintain that a feeling cultivated under the guidance of practical reason can determine the agent's will. Kant does not allow that a feeling could determine the will because, even if the agent were to do the right thing, it would be merely accidental. Feeling is not inherently contrary to morality. As I have noted, natural predispositions, including those associated with animality, are predispositions *to the good*, and they do in fact orient us toward the good. The problem is that feelings do so only accidentally, which prevents the agent from being certain that they are acting rightly. As Sherman explains, for Kant, "emotions connect only accidentally with moral interest" (Sherman 1997, p. 28).

However, if we focus on feelings cultivated by practical reason, the charge of accidentality no longer applies. A cultivated feeling results from practical reason's efforts to strengthen the connection between the feeling and moral salience. Cultivation differs from discipline in Kant's ethics in that it does not merely aim at controlling the feeling but rather aims at its internal modification and transformation. A cultivated feeling is activated in morally significant situations and motivates the agent toward morally valid actions. The agent's animal nature is thereby increasingly elevated toward humanity (cf. MS, 6: 387; p. 161). In this sense, if a cultivated feeling were to directly determine the agent's will, the agent would be acting *emotionally* but not merely *in conformity with duty* – rather, they would be acting *from duty*. Duty is still present because it shaped the feeling such that it no longer accidentally conforms to morality. Kant does not seem to consider this possibility likely because doing so would require him to relinquish a strong conception of the role of reason in the moral experience of the mature agent.

Therefore, although such a possibility cannot be explicitly found in Kant's texts, it is nonetheless possible to bring Schiller's position closer to a Kantian framework, even on the issue of action determined by feeling. The Kantian agent, too, can act like a *child of the house* directly out of feelings that practical reason has cultivated.

7. Conclusions

This paper highlights elements of continuity between Schiller's and Kant's positions on the relationship the moral agent develops with their sensibility. For both authors, the agent should prevent sensibility from imposing itself on the will as a result of an overly indulgent attitude. Practical reason must guide the agent in determining their will.

Contrary to many critical interpretations and to Schiller himself, the continuity between Kant and Schiller does not stop at the importance of practical reason. Both identify the harmony between sensibility and rationality as the *telos* of moral experience and moral development. Schiller does so through his notion of beauty, which encompasses dignity and grace; Kant through his idea of the highest good, which unites virtue and happiness. I have argued that the two philosophers converge in their conception of moral character, which entails a specific *Denkungsart* and a specific *Sinnesart*.

Differences between Kant and Schiller, however, remain, even if one can work, sometimes going beyond the letter of the text, to bridge them. One of these differences concerns, for example, how exactly the moral formation of the agent should be understood – specifically, how and through which tools and methods the agent should work toward that inner harmony between sensibility and rationality. Moreover, Kant and Schiller offer different answers to a series of "practical questions" regarding the agent's *Bildung*, such as "What projects in particular do I want to pursue? What subjects should I devote my time to? […] How do I balance career training with disinterested inquiry?" (Hovda 2022, p. 100).

Finally, I have shown how the two philosophers diverge on whether cultivated feelings can directly determine the will. Yet I have argued that it is possible to go beyond Kant while remaining Kantian – namely, by holding that an agent acts emotionally but also from duty when acting out of a cultivated feeling.

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