

Prudence, Happiness and Wisdom in Kant's Moral Philosophy: the case in the Groundwork

[Prudência, Felicidade e Sabedoria na Filosofia Moral de Kant: o caso da *Fundamentação*]

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Kant's practical philosophy gives an answer to the fundamental question of the relation of happiness and prudence to morality. As an issue pertaining to the "foundation" of morality, Kant holds, as a central tenet, that morality does depend on the determination of the will, through its maxims, by the categorical imperative, so that it does not amount to a "system of hypothetical imperatives" at the service of well-being or good living. Morality, for Kant, does not concern our happiness, but it concerns our being good. His is not a eudemonistic theory.

However, as this is a claim that bears on what interests us all most dearly, our happiness, Kant seems to qualify his position and, to start with, also asserts an order of priority *apropos* a distinction between two types of prudence in the *Groundwork*. We can be *wordly* prudent and we can be *privately* prudent, and if we are only the former, we are certainly "clever and cunning but, on the whole, nevertheless imprudent" (*GMS*, AA 04: 416n)^{1,2}. This ordering suggests that prudence is worth having, and that it is not sheer cleverness and cunning, more social relational accomplishments with no sure place in the private domain. But why should we be prudent on top of being good? Would not goodness be all that matters morally? Isn't it the case that prudence is important only *privately*, as it were, in a domain carved out of the strictures of morality so that *there* at least we are allowed to care exclusively about our own lives?

The worthiness of prudence seems to point to something more important though. That the world of morality envisaged by Kant's moral theory is *not*, in a very perspicuous phrase, "a wasteland" (Herman, 2005, p. 36). So prudence does and should concern us, but why exactly? And *morally*? Or only in our search for happiness? What is the nature of prudence for Kant? Why is it worth the effort?

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¹ The *Groundwork* will be quoted with its number in the Academy Edition (4), followed by page in that edition, as usually given on the side of the pages of its publications.

² How many people we know who show wordly dexterity but are mainly ruinous in leading their own lives? Is this a problem merely of ordering pleasures correctly?

Kant's famous views on the claims of prudence on our practical rationality, on how we should make decisions, is that it issues, at most, *counsels*, and that is due to the fact that prudence serves a goal – it is not itself a goal we try to achieve, we do not aim at prudence as such. Rather, we seek to be prudent in our attempts to be *happy*. Happiness is the goal prudence serves. Thus far, it is eminently a form of practical rationality, but of what nature? Kant's discussion of the *assertoric* hypothetical imperative in the *Groundwork* starts giving an answer.

Firstly, happiness is an end we all have “according to a natural necessity” (*GMS*, AA 04: 415), *not* out of natural necessity (there are no ends we have *as ends* sought for by rational agents that we have out of a necessity due to the laws of nature, of what happens), if the latter were the case this “end” would have to be hardwired in our constitution and would not properly be an *end*, a goal freely chosen, as Kant speculates would happen were we instinctually arranged to get happy. Happiness is rather an end we can “with necessity” *ascribe* to rational *natural* beings like ourselves. Kant offers, in the context of his particular discussion concerning the forms of necessitation (*not* cases of natural necessities) available to the determination of the will, a working definition of happiness: it is what is captured by the idea of an “absolute whole” which is “a maximum of well-being in my present and in every future state”. The problem, though, with this “necessary end” of ours is that, in Kant's technical terms, it is an “ideal” of “the imagination” and not an “ideal of *reason*”, its concept is an “undetermined” one. Thus far, it is ineluctably ill-defined. At this juncture, there is a wavering in Kant's discussion however. Because of the assertoric force of the attribution of the goal of happiness to all of us, it is not the case that we could only worry instrumentally about the means concerning a contingent goal of ours, as an *ad lib* goal. The rationality practically required is not mere instrumental rationality concerned with the choice of actions as means to ends if we happen to have the end in question, which involves a total contingency (or a conditional exercise of rationality) in willing (in the type of determination of the will). We do not flout instrumental rationality if we just give up the end we have because of great troubles with the means to it. Now, as we all have the end of happiness for sure, it is not a question merely of getting in control of means to whatever possible ends we might chose. As we cannot give this end up, the question of which means are suitable to reach it gets in importance, it becomes earnest. Kant even talks in this connection of “imperatives of prudence” (cf. *GMS*, AA 04: 416-9 for all these points and following). We cannot simply consider the costs related to means to happiness with the possibility of giving it up if they are too high. This seems to require that the rationality practically required for happiness be of a different kind from that of instrumental reason after all, in which the practical rationality requirements only

come into the picture after the end is chosen *at our discretion*³. With happiness, it is as if we never actually chose desiring, wishing to be happy, we are instead always already trying to be so. But why should this be the case?

The position of happiness *vis-à-vis* morality is a subtle one in Kant's story. If, on the one side, it is a "necessary end" requiring us to comport towards it with an almost *sui generis* rationality; on the other side, it is a type of end that we have only in so far as we care about an *object* of our faculty of desire. Thus far, it must be based – because it concerns an "empirical object" of the will – on a *material* practical principle determining our will to choice. This fact leads Kant to *approximate* the type of rational determination of the will in our pursuit of happiness to the rationality of instrumental reason: of which the fundamental principle is "whoever wills the end necessarily wills the means to reach the end in so far as it is to be brought about by her actions". And Kant claims this would squarely be the case if only we had a determined concept of happiness. If it were a concept of pure reason (one of its "ideas" or even an "ideal" of hers), instead of an "ideal of the imagination", then we would be able to know what to do and what to look for to get happy, and our practical rationality would issue precise technical rules of ability to bring us happiness. But due to the indefiniteness/indetermination in our concept of it, we must make do only with *consilia* about how to reach it. However, counsels are pretty close to rules of a technique to achieve something, they instruct about what we have to do in order to reach our goal. Thus far, counsels seem to pertain mainly to the domain of private prudence, and this then allows us to put a question that has occupied the interpreters of Kant: is this knowledge of *consilia* giving content to prudence sheer *theoretical* knowledge? Given that it is not moral knowledge, that is, not practical knowledge as such, *i.e.* knowledge of the good, is there a type of knowledge that goes in-between? A *pragmatic* knowledge perhaps? Or, alternatively, could it not be some sort of knowledge of the good, at least for each of us to use privately? Is there such a type of practical knowledge?

Apropos pragmatics: as we dealing with the realm of morals *strictu sensu*, with the pure theory about these matters, and pragmatics seems to concern the public sphere typically, the administration of measures to get people to a better state in a way that matters to civility and politics mainly (cf. *GMS*, AA 04: 417n), then it will be difficult to sustain that there is a specific type of pragmatic *a priori* knowledge, given that in this we are always dealing with pragmatic measures, expedients, which are to be assessed by their results. (However, Kantian pragmatics can be related to prudence: history can be written "pragmatically, when it teaches *prudence*", but then it aims at instructing the world about how to provide

³ Cf. Hills (2009, pp.42-4) for an useful exploration of the point.

for its interests “better than, or at least as well as, the world of other times have done” (*GMS*, AA 04: 417n).

Now, Kant also claims that there is a distinction to be made between someone versed in practical knowledge (knows its “content” perhaps) and someone who ability in putting this knowledge to use. In what concerns her actions (moral), the latter is a *practical philosopher*, someone to whom we may ascribe the possession in action of the “principles of wisdom”⁴. Thus far, prudence seems to be different from wisdom. But, then, would it not be, after all, an *acceptable* cleverness and cunning – even if only directed to what concerns us *in private*? Could it not be that in relation to our private pursuit of happiness? An ability, exercised privately, “to combine all of [one’s ends] to the [one’s] own lasting advantage” (*GMS* AA 04: 416n)? This, nonetheless, looks demeaning to prudence; it would seem to involve us managing ourselves so as to get as a result our happiness, all done in private dealings with ourselves. This looks like we tricking ourselves into happiness. On the other hand, is wisdom truly *knowledge* of some sort, or true *practical* knowledge? Or is it closer to a moral *savoir faire*, or, at the end, a *savoir vivre* morally informed? A “knowing how” with life with morality on board?⁵

In what follows I am going to claim that for Kant wisdom is part to the solution of the problem of natural happiness, in spite of its relation to morality, or better put, precisely in view of this relation. In connection with this, I will also claim that prudence leads to wisdom, thus bringing out its worth as it bears on our search for happiness. If this can be maintained, then Kantian happiness receives not only a moral inflection, but it would have to have its “setting” in a particular type of dexterity concerning actions.

But, first, why would prudence only be *theoretical* knowledge at the service of the pursuit of happiness? Here would be why, mainly in Engstrom’s terms⁶.

Prudence should be kept analytically separated from morality because it serves our goal of happiness, which is an end we have because we are natural, finite, rational beings, that is, beings with a sensibility connected to the power of life which expresses itself firstly through a faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*). Thus far, prudence is geared towards an *empirical* outcome: serving the promotion of a sensibility-based overall satisfaction which is happiness.

Before presenting his teleological argument (1) against reason’s fundamental practical employment being making us happy, and (2) in favour of its purpose

⁴ Cf. *MS*, AA 06: 375n, p. 509 Cambridge Edition.

⁵ Cf. Herman’s remark (2008, p.199) on the wise *not* being “an expert, [who] could report to the rest of humankind on the truth about the good life”.

⁶ Cf. Engstrom, 2009, pp.33-44; 81-6; 141-5.

being “to produce a *will* which is *good in itself*”, of “it’s highest practical vocation [being] the establishment of a good will” (*GMS*, AA 04: 396), Kant refers to the satisfaction of “the sum total of all inclinations” (*GMS*, AA 04: 394) as what makes out our happiness. Even if so put, this is an end which cashes out *not* as a crude satisfaction of a heap of inclinations that happen to show up, discretely, in our “faculty of desire”. It rather involves “a plan for happiness and for the means to attaining it”, it concerns “the enjoyment of life” *as a whole* with what is a “true contentment” (*GMS*, AA 04: 395).

The negative conclusion from this conceptualization is put technically and is used as premise for the positive claim already mentioned: “For since reason is not sufficiently competent to guide the will safely with regard to its objects [among which happiness] and the satisfaction of our needs (which it in part even multiplies) – a goal to which an implanted natural instinct would have led us much more certainly – (...)”, reason has a wholly different purpose, as we have seen.

This makes it very clear that happiness as an end which consists in the satisfaction of *inclinations* (their “sum total”) is at bottom a goal that counts for our wills as an *object* after all. This comes to happiness as its nature comprises precisely this satisfaction of what are sensible desires (*Neigungen*) upheld by the faculty of desires because we are *empirically* affected with pleasure or displeasure by objects.

This conceptualization of inclination is definite for the nature of happiness. The note on page *GMS* 413 brings home the empirical, sense-based, nature of inclinations, and, consequently, of happiness. “The dependence of the faculty of desire on sensations is called an inclination, and thus an inclination always indicates a *need* (...). The dependence of the will on the principles of reason (...) at the service of inclination – that is to say, where reason merely supplies a practical rule for meeting the needs of inclination (...) [is a case where] what interests me in the object of the action (so far as this object is pleasant to me)”. This, however, presents conditions for success.

The first emerges with the affection of the agent’s sensibility by an existing object producing in the agent (the subject) the entertaining of the representation of the object’s existence with its features as pleasure (or pain). Thus far the object must exist to affect the person: “To judge an object to be agreeable is to characterize it in respect of the pleasure one feels in one’s representation of its existence, a pleasure that lies in sensible (receptive) awareness of the object’s affecting one’s faculty of desire in affecting one’s senses” (Engstrom, 2009, p. 70). Now, this naturally leads to the possible development of a sensible *desire* for the pleasure thus entertained to continue or to be repeated in the contact with the object which caused it through the representation of its existence.

By its nature as sensible, then, sensible desire arises from a pleasing representation of the *existence* of some object. And by its nature as an expression of lifepower in the

operation of the faculty of desire, sensible desire reflects the self-productive character of that power in that it is essentially reproductive (and therefore habitual), having as its object the very thing that brought it about (Engstrom, 2009, p. 37).

This desire is *efficacious* in so far as it works, through being felt, on the *subject*, this is the “subjective” efficacy of a sensible desire, occurring in, being felt by the subject.

As a modification of the receptivity of the practical subject’s faculty of desire, sensible desire arouses the capacity for practical thought stimulating (but not necessarily determining) it to activity as the practical subject frames a problematically practical representation of itself as producing the object of sensible desire. (Engstrom, 2009, p.38).

But it is precisely this “producing” of the object of sensible desire which involves the satisfaction of conditions, in second place, appreciable only through the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. This producing of the object is the causing of or the keeping in existence of the object through the agent’s *actions*. This prospect of engaging in action requires from the subject a theoretical knowledge about the circumstances in which she is to act and about its own “powers of production”. Thus being rationally practical in relation to the engagement with actions to “produce” the object of desires requires, to start with, *knowledge* that the action as a means to production is not impossible for the agent. But more is needed: that that action is also sufficient to such production.

Here is Engstrom’s longish but penetrating *résumé* of why prudence, by having happiness as its object, is theoretically bound and must be seen, therefore, as concerning a wholly different domain from the moral, which is the practically known domain, known by pure reason:

According to its very concept, happiness lies in a certain relation between individual human persons and the conditions in which they exist. (...) The enjoyment constituting the material of happiness lies in the feeling, or inward sensible manifestation, of a self-sustaining relation between the subject and the object, in which the inclinations expressing the subject’s lifepower stand to representations of their object’s *existence* in a relation of mutual furtherance. Thus the very feeling in terms of which happiness is conceived lies in a consciousness of a harmony between the subject’s sensible desires and its experience. But this experience is empirical theoretical knowledge, which, as knowledge, of “what is”, depends for its actuality on the actuality of its objects, objects that can be cognized only through being “given from elsewhere” by affecting the senses; it thus depends on the actual external conditions of the subject’s existence. To suppose that prudence is a principle of absolute self-agreement in willing would thus be to overlook the “hap” in “happiness”, the “*Glück*” in “*Glückseligkeit*”, the essential element of contingency that belongs to happiness on account of its being a matter of how individual human persons are consciously related to the external conditions in which they exist. (Engstrom, 2009, pp.142-3).

Thus far it is inevitable that prudence concerns the conformity of the will of the subject to her *theoretical* knowledge of what lies – existing – outside the will, of what is in relation to the will of human beings, as it were, “outer nature”. And morality is a wholly different thing, according to Kant. As he points out in this presentation of the approach to the duty of not making false promises by means of prudential considerations (*GMS*, AA 04: 402ff).

On the question *why* not to make a false promise, Kant considers “whether it is prudent to make a false promise or whether it is in accord with duty”. Then, clarifying the prudential take on it, makes the questioner ponder: “(...) For all my supposed *cunning*, it is not so easy to foresee all the consequences, e.g. the loss of trust may cost me more than all the misfortune I am now trying to avoid. I must consider therefore whether it might be *more* prudent for me to act on a general maxim and make it a habit to issue a promise only when I intend to keep it” (is Kant here only considering “wordly prudence”?). But then Kant helps this reasoned out making him realize: “But it is soon clear to me that such a maxim is always based solely on fear of consequences”. And Kant brings the point concerning the separation of spheres home:

To tell the truth out of duty is something entirely different from telling the truth out of fear of troublesome consequences, for in the first case the concept of the action itself already contains a law for me, while in the second case I must first look around to see how I am likely to be affected by the action. (*GMS*, AA 04: 402-3)

Kant ends this clarification making the *universalizability* requirement, given previously in the identification of the law that is the principle of a good will, to point out that such an action is “to be considered bad in itself” (*GMS*, AA 04: 419): because “(...) my maxim, as soon as it became a universal law, would necessarily [destroy = *zerstöhren*] itself” (*GMS*, AA 04: 403).

However, where does this leave us? With a sort of “two natures” problem?⁷ As beings seeking to be happy, we are looking for the good life, and maybe keeping apart, as a separate sphere as it were, our “moral life”? Given the commitment of the theory to the different domains of morality and happiness – Kant seems to imply the point in speaking of “the will [standing], so to speak, at the crossroads between it’s a *priori* principle, which is formal, and it’s a *posteriori* motivation, which is material” (*GMS*, AA 04: 400) – we should *not* rule out the following outcome:

If, analytically, there are separate principles that regulate the volitional activity of human beings, we should not be surprised if what is analytically the case is empirically realized. That is, we may in fact live our lives divided, responsive to the strictures of morality, but for the rest, under the sway of an at best sensible hedonism. (Herman, 2008, p. 197)

⁷ Cf. Herman, 2008, p.197.

But, even if separate, that is, *distinct*, can morality and happiness be “correctly aligned” (Herman, 2008, p. 196)? *Which* would be better served by such an alignment? Could it be both? And which kind of questions are these? For theory mainly?

Hasn't Kant's moral theory the resources for a rapprochement between the parties? Here is Herman's way with the problem (cf. Herman, 2008, p. 191-202). First of all, it cannot be a question of moralizing all possible choice in life; this would amount to an intolerable fetishism of morality, at bottom at the service of our wish for happiness. Hume's *dictum*, nature is too strong for principle, seems to capture this situation. The way forward must be the take the moral law should have on *nonmoral* action and options, and what it should be able to do is to avoid our viewing all nonmoral ends (non-obligatory ends) as at bottom only hedonically fungible (cf. Herman, 2008, p. 192), as posing a question only of which is more intense, more variegated and more durable.

We may start with the lesson of the *moral* demand to develop our talents. Given that the demands of instrumental rationality, as we have seen, are at bottom wholly contingent, this moral demand on acquiring “means” to the end of being up to the moral task, however it may present itself, can put these “means” in a different light. As moral action is not typically a one shot matter, morality ends up requiring also, beyond a certain maxim for an action, preparations and follow-ups, in maxims of course. In this connection, Herman speaks of “a kind of transitivity of moral requiredness that makes the means-to-end relation a moral one when the end is either obligatory or an end of obligation” (Herman, 2009, p. 101). This explains why we shouldn't aim at a life of peace and quiet hoping that a moral quietist stance would be enough to see us through with obligations and obligatory ends. Our talents are our practical abilities, and we are required to have at least a *modicum* of them for efficacy's sake in proper fashion. But to get them, we must do things that typically allow their development/acquisition. Thus, Herman concludes: “(...) There are, odd as this may seem, moral reasons to live a life of greater rather than lesser complexity” (Herman, 2008, p. 192).

But is this enough for the moral law to get a grip on our conception of happiness? It seems that, after all, we could just be prudent and modest in relation to how we conceive and pursue our happiness, even if – or perhaps precisely because of that – we are in the midst of a life of great practical complexity. It seems to be, at bottom, a matter of idiosyncrasy after all.

Herman's general argument is that a particular *moral* notion of *dignity* can be put to service here, it can be the theoretical link needed to connect morality to happiness. The kernel of moral dignity in Kant's conception of it is its source of value, which is the moral law. A typical presentation by Kant can be found when he talks of “the highest and unconditional good” (*GMS*, AA 04: 401ff.) to be had only with “the will of a rational being”, only *in* the will can this good be found.

This good *in the action* by such a will is to be accounted for thus: “That pre-eminent good which we call ‘moral’ consists therefore in nothing but *the idea of the law itself* (...) so far as that idea, and not an expected result, is the determining ground of the will”. However, this good in the action so determined registers such a good *in the agent*, the person, because of her specific causality in bringing off that action: “And this pre-eminent good is already present in the person who acts in accordance with this idea [in view of it]; we need not await the result of the action in order to find it”.

But being effective like this, being *in effect*, in point of goodness, requires the *capacity* to act for its sake: it is precisely in the capacity *for such actions* that Kant locates *moral dignity*.

(...) Although the concept of duty includes the idea of a person's subjection to the law [it is the necessitation of the will in action], we nevertheless attribute a certain sublimity and *dignity* to the person who fulfills all his duties. (...) There is sublimity to him in his being at the same time [in which “he is *subject* to the law”] its *author* and being subordinated only for this reason to this very law. (...) Our own will, provided it would act only under the condition of being able to give universal law by means of its maxims – this ideal will, which is possible for us, is the proper object of respect. The dignity of humanity consists precisely in this power of giving universal law, though only on condition of also being the subject to this same lawgiving (*GMS*, AA 04: 439-40).

According to this passage, dignity is clearly a status notion: the capacity to be good, the “power of giving universal law” to us in actions, pertains to all human beings (to humanity). *Dignity* is not something we lose when we act badly; we are then in fact misusing that capacity. How does this bear on happiness? For Kant, this “source” of dignity affects our conceptions and pursuits of happiness through the recognition of what we ought to value because of its value, not because it is somehow of value for us, or relative to us. And this can have a bearing on our happiness. About that “power”, Kant says that it requires that our maxim should “become a universal law”, that it be “fit as a principle into a possible universal legislation” (*GMS*, AA 04:403). Now, about this “possible universal legislation” Kant claims *reason* does the following with us:

(...) Reason forces me to offer my immediate respect to such legislation. As yet I have no *insight* into the grounds of that respect (...). But I do at least understand this much: it is the appreciation of something whose worth far exceeds all the worth of anything favoured by inclination (*GMS*, AA 04: 403).

It is the recognition of a value which extracts respect from us and *thus qualifies* all our evaluations concerning the satisfaction of our inclinations. It does not suppress the value of that satisfaction, but it gives it a determined place in the life of a recognizer of a value which is connected with her dignity meriting respect, it puts other values in its perspective. Herman puts the point as follows:

Dignity can affect the content of happiness first and most directly through the effect of the recognition of the authority of the moral law on feelings. To a happiness-pursuer, the encounter with the moral law involves a shock of self-recognition. We see that what we had taken to be first in the order of value – our satisfaction – is not. We are also revealed to ourselves to be persons of moral standing or dignity: our rational nature as a source of value that has authority over all action and choice. (...) Not because of its strength, but because of its source, this feeling [a ‘positive feeling – a kind of self-approbation, whose source is not in desire, or our passive receptivity, but in the moral law itself’] in turn affects the structure of material incentives: by altering our sense of who we are, it changes what we count as our well-being (Herman, 2008, p. 196).

Thus far, we can see how the content of happiness can be *transformed* by the moral law⁸. It seems able to qualify pleasures which we could count as determinative of our happiness. Simply put, some pleasures will then be seen as beyond the pale in our conception of happiness because of the empirical recognition that that “shock of self-recognition” provides. Herman claims this is the “Kantian version of John Stuart Mill’s doctrine of the ‘quality of pleasures’” (Herman, 2008, p. 193). Or Kant’s solution to the problem hedonism inevitably presents to a conception of happiness respectful of our humanity. Hume gives *his empiricist* answer to the “sensible knave” by pointing out what he loses out in terms of “true satisfaction” when playing around with toys and in distractions⁹.

However, that recognition can do more. And this concerns the general place of happiness in the lives of rational natural beings like us. Given that dignity is a status notion, the value it bestows on human beings is not scalar; there is no having more dignity as a particular human being than another. Therefore, having dignity is a question – *not* of competing with others to have more in comparison – of living up to it: recognizing having it brings with it willing to make justice to that status, to put it “in practice” through actions which spring from such recognition. There is no recognizing that we have this value and not trying to live up to it in one’s actions. Thus Herman: “Given an idea of happiness that now includes the moral powers as defining who I am, how could that not matter to the way I live?” (Herman, 2008, p. 196). But, then, if I want to express this dignity, I surely want others to act towards

⁸ Cf. Herman, 2005, *passim*.

⁹ Cf. Hume (1998, pp. 155-6): “If his heart rebel not against such pernicious maxims, if he feel no reluctance to the thoughts of villany or baseness, he has indeed lost a considerable motive to virtue (...). Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct; these are circumstances very requisite to happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man, who feels the importance of them. (...) But were they ever so secret and successful [the knaves], the honest man (...) will discover that they themselves are, in the end, the greatest dupes, and have sacrificed the invaluable enjoyment of a character, with themselves at least, for the acquisition of worthless toys and gewgaws. (...) And in view to *pleasure*, what a comparison between (...) above all the peaceful reflection on one’s own conduct. What comparison, I say, between [it], and the feverish, empty amusements of luxury and expense? These natural pleasures [also with conversation, society, study, health and common beauties of nature], indeed, are really without price; both because they are below all price in their attainment, and above it in their enjoyment”

me in ways which also make it justice. Only being related to with respect I see myself as entitled to can satisfy the value dignity bestows on my humanity. An attitude we must then dispense equally to human beings around us, which is the attitude that locates morally how happiness can be dealt with in the inter-relations of happiness-pursuers. There is a contour to our search and there is a way we have to observe with others: with respect for their dignity.

These two points concerning the content and place of happiness, *vis-à-vis* morality, in human being's lives do not solve once and for all the problem our non-extinguishable search for *natural* happiness poses for each of us: what, at the end of the day, will make me happy in accordance with the dignity of my rational nature? But here, not surprisingly, we face the limits regarding what moral theory can achieve concerning such a problem. According to Herman, it cannot be the "ambition of Kant's argument (...) to show that dignity *necessarily* solves the problem of natural happiness [there is nothing that is 'knowable *a priori*' about such an end or state], but that it *can*" (Herman, 2008, p. 197-8). Such a solution must, therefore, be a "developmental achievement", which clearly involves a question of success, in regard to happiness, with my life. The question in answering which we may be successful, or not, is simply how we should live our lives so as to be or become happy. However, the *theory* can align them correctly: there is no deep-seated incompatibility between morality and happiness if we understand well the role that morality can play in regard to happiness. Even if distinct, they do not need to be kept apart – without morality "touching" happiness, as it were–, according to Kant's theory, "we gain a decisive interest from the side of happiness in keeping them correctly aligned" (Herman, 2008, p. 196)¹⁰.

¹⁰ See Kant on a possible "interest" from the side of *reason* in we bringing reason to the concern we have with our happiness:

Certainly, our well-being and woe count for a *very great deal* in the appraisal of our practical reason and, as far as our nature as sensible beings is concerned, *all* that counts is our *happiness* if this is appraised, as reason especially requires, not in terms of transitory feeling but of the influence this contingency has on our whole existence and our satisfaction with it; but happiness is not *the only thing* that counts. The human being is a being with needs, insofar as he belongs to the sensible world, and to this extent his reason certainly has a commission from the side of his sensibility which it cannot refuse, to attend to its interest and to form practical maxims with a view to happiness in this life and, where possible, in a future life as well. But he is nevertheless not so completely an animal as to be indifferent to all that reason says on its own and to use reason merely as a tool for the satisfaction of his needs as a sensible being (*KpV*, AA 05: 61)

It seems that this "commission" reason must address with what it "says on its own" in view of what must then be an interest of itself in the case, reason does not in accepting the commission devalue itself as a mere tool to our animality. Herman comments:

If reason had such a commission, it would have to have it without regard to the specifics of this or that person's idea of happiness, that is, the commission could not depend on content. So if reason makes happiness its end, it must do so formally – in virtue of what we are all like as natural beings: as finite rational beings with desires. But why should reason accept this commission and care about our happiness? Either the concerns of happiness have a claim on

Herman pushes the “developmental achievement” in the direction of its dependence on conditions, crucially important as they, pertaining to the “right kind of exterior, social support” (Herman, 2008, p. 198). In particular, the role moral education plays and how, moving “beyond the individual” – that is, “outward to social institutions” – “public institutions” are decisive for we reaching happiness (Herman, 2008, p. 200). On moral education, Kant, in a famous note on Sulzer’s query about how such education could be successful (cf. *GMS*, AA 04: 411n), conceives of it, not as a sensitization that looks “for all sorts of inducements to moral goodness” in an attempt to make the need for moral compliance “really powerful”, but rather as the development of a consciousness of why certain acts are simply to be done with a view to “uplift[ing] the soul and arouse the wish that we too could act in that way”. This attempting to the develop a sense of the *value* of persons in interrelations because of their *dignity*. “Even children of moderate age feel this impression”. This all seems correct and decisive. I am not going to follow this path though. I would like rather to bring this line of argument to a close by focusing briefly instead on the *individual*. Perhaps we could think that two ways of morality relating to happiness, and the developmental achievement recognized as externally conditioned would cover all that is on offer by Kant’s thought on these issues. But I think it is worth considering what I will bring up next, which surely does not concern us in isolation from others.

As a parting shot, this bit of the general argument could be put as follows. Being prudent privately is not only a matter of bringing to bear on the devising of means a theoretical knowledge instrumental to whatever ends we might include in our overall end of happiness. As the content and status of happiness is affected by the recognition of the superior value of the power in ourselves to act in view of the moral law, this also bears on how we face our circumstances and what we want to make part of our empirical identities as happiness-pursuers. But this is an impregnation of that search by the recognition of that value which takes places in a rather longish span of time. One can come to be truly appeased with not having a Ferrari in loving to be a teacher of math in secondary school: if it once was, it is not on the cards anymore *as we now play our hand*. It is not a question as if it were

their own terms – but why would they? – or being concerned with happiness is something essential to reason’s own tasks (Herman, 2005, pp. 25-6).

Pace the following, which does not sit well with the above:

Prudential reasons do not generate categorical imperatives, because the requirement to set happiness as your end is only conditional, specifically, it is conditional on whether you set the objects of your desires as your ends. You are not required by reason to do that [particular ones, or just objects in general?], though you are by no means forbidden from doing so either (Hills, 2009, p. 42).

an act to be done for the first time with moral worth, it not even has that in view, as with the three cases analyzed by Kant in Section I of the *Groundwork*.

We saw earlier on that Kant ascribes *wisdom* to the “practical philosopher”, not because of a kind of *theoretical* knowledge of what practical knowledge amounts to in general or even in practice (about others, or even about ourselves, as it were, “in principle”, again as in our agreement with Kant’s attribution of a particular moral judgement done by the three subjects in their actions with “moral content” in *Groundwork* I). That philosopher is wise because she is able to mobilize this knowledge in her own *actions*. This *is* to possess “principles of wisdom” *in action*. In speaking, in that section, positively of what “common human reason” can achieve, a “moral knowledge” concerning particular actions’ morality, Kant also praises the “power of judgment” of the “ordinary mind” which can become “even subtle” when “trying to determine honestly for its own instruction the worth of various actions”. It is very well able of just “hitting the mark as any philosopher” (*GMS*, AA 04: 404). But that seems to be only the morality *versed* philosopher, not one of the *practical* type. But why must the latter one be a *philosopher* at all?

Because *wisdom* is conceived by Kant as mainly an *active* ability, “more a matter of acting [of *Thun und Lassen*] than knowing” (*GMS*, AA 04: 405), and because it can show “innocence” making it difficult for it to defend itself fully successfully from attackers, he claims that it “needs science”. This presumably is what can provide wisdom, as actions well done, with *principles*. This is the task of moral theory, a subject-matter the knowing of which can only be truly possessed by it being efficacious through the moral judgements it instructs. This is why Kant says that wisdom does not need this science “in order to learn from it, but in order to gain access and durability for what it [that science] prescribes”. So, in the “field of *practical philosophy*” it can secure itself by “seek[ing] instruction and precise direction as to the source of its own principle and about the correct function of this principle” (*GMS*, AA 04: 405). That is why, after all, according to Kant, along the line at the end of which we look out for our happiness, we find, one step back, wisdom, and still further back we encounter a *philosopher* buttressing wisdom. In the individual we have to have *wisdom*, a dexterity *cum* expediency in action morally informed¹¹, as a conditioning constituent of a happiness worth having.

¹¹ As Hume wrote: “Who did ever say, except by way of irony, that such a one was a man of great virtue, but an egregious blockhead” (Hume, 1998, p. 177). But then he also endorsed: “Men will praise thee, says David [Psalm 49:18], when thou dost well unto thyself. I hate a wise man, says the Greek poet [Euripedes, *Fragments*], who is not wise to himself” (Hume, 1998, p.181).

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Abstract: Happiness, for Kant, is an “ideal” of the *imagination*, it is not an object of reason. It is rather the satisfaction of the “absolute whole” of our *inclinations* in accordance with the plans for happiness we have to develop. Thus far it is tied to our empirical nature as beings with *sensibility*. Even though confined this way, it is a “necessary end” in so far as it can be universally ascribed to us “according to a natural necessity”. Prudence in Kant is geared towards this goal all of us have. Therefore, prudence seems to stand in-between in the classification of practical rationalities: neither simply instrumental, nor, in fact, moral. In this paper, I examine Kant’s “systematic” positioning of happiness in relation to morality as the offspring of pure practical reason in view of these claims. I argue that morality qualifies the *development* of our plans for happiness through the value-notion of *dignity*, and I also, briefly, examine how this bears on our *private* conceptions and pursuits of it through the requirements of a wisdom morally oriented, and at the same time buttressed by moral theory. I analyze Kant’s case for his view in the *Groundwork*.

Key-words: Happiness, Prudence, Wisdom, Kant’s Moral Philosophy

Resumo: A felicidade, para Kant, é um “ideal” da *imaginação*, não é um objeto da razão. É, ao invés, a satisfação de um “todo absoluto” das nossas *inclinações* de acordo com os planos de felicidade que desenvolvemos. Nessa medida, ela está vinculada à nossa natureza empírica como seres com *sensibilidade*. Mesmo que confinada desse modo, ela é um “fim necessário” por que pode ser atribuída universalmente a nós “de acordo com uma necessidade natural”. A prudência em Kant está voltada para esse fim de todos nós. Portanto, ela parece ocupar uma posição intermediária na tipificação das racionalidades práticas: não é simplesmente instrumental, nem, de fato, moral. Neste texto, examino o “lugar sistemático” da felicidade em relação à moralidade como fruto da razão pura prática em face dessas posições. Eu argumento que a moralidade qualifica o *desenvolvimento* dos nossos planos para a felicidade através da noção de valor que é a *dignidade*, e também examino como isso repercute nas nossas concepções e buscas *privadas* pela felicidade através da exigência de uma sabedoria moralmente orientada que é ao mesmo tempo reforçada pela teoria moral. Eu analiso o argumento de Kant para tal posição oferecido principalmente na *Fundamentação*.

Palavras-chave: Felicidade, Prudência, Sabedoria, Filosofia Moral de Kant

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