Spring 5-7-2016

Why Does Kant Think That Moral Requirements Are Categorical Imperatives'?

Maria Mejia

WHY DOES KANT THINK THAT MORAL REQUIREMENTS ARE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES?

by

MARIA MEJIA

Under the Direction of Eric Entrican Wilson, PhD

ABSTRACT

In this paper I put forth three criticisms against McDowell account of the idea that moral requirements are categorical imperatives. I argue that McDowell's account fails as a defense of Kant's doctrine for at least three reasons. First, McDowell claims that agents can appeal to experience in order to formulate and recognize categorical imperatives. However, Kant strongly disagrees with this claim, explicitly claiming that moral requirements cannot be derived from experience. Second, McDowell argues that the virtuous agent will not experience inner conflict when motivating herself to act virtuously, but inner conflict plays a central role in Kant's picture of moral motivation and virtue. Third, McDowell does not account for how the moral law serves as a necessary incentive to moral action through the a priori feeling of respect. Finally, I suggest

that my criticisms cast doubt on the validity of McDowell's account, and provide insights into some criteria that an account must meet if it is to be a proper defense of Kant's doctrine of moral requirements as categorical imperatives.

INDEX WORDS: Kant, Moral Motivation, Moral Requirements, Categorical Imperatives

WHY DOES KANT THINK THAT MORAL REQUIREMENTS ARE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES?

by

MARIA MEJIA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015

WHY DOES KANT THINK THAT MORAL REQUIREMENTS ARE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES?

by

MARIA MEJIA

Committee Chair: Eric Wilson

Committee: Sebastian Rand

Timothy O'Keefe

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2016

DEDICATION

To my dad, Alvaro Hernan Mejia, for teaching me to think philosophically. Esta tesis es el fruto de las semillas que has sembrado en mi alma, a través de éste camino maravilloso que hacemos juntos al andar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Eric Wilson for his generosity, encouragement, guidance, patience and support. Thank you for caring about my interests and for helping me develop my ideas, while showing great concern for my personal wellbeing. I am also indebted to Dr. Sebastian Rand and Dr. Timothy O'Keefe for reading my thesis and providing me with detailed and helpful feedback. This thesis would not have been possible without the generosity of numerous friends who listened to my ideas and offered me invaluable intellectual and emotional support throughout my time at GSU. I am specially obliged to Daniel Mendez for being an infinite source of support, encouragement, and wisdom; and to my sister Alejandra Mejia and my mom Marcela Melendez for being exemplary role models and loving me unconditionally.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

In his well known paper "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" John McDowell attempts to vindicate Kant's doctrine that moral requirements are categorical imperatives. By appealing to a quasi-perceptual capacity that the virtuous agent acquires through experience, McDowell argues that the facts of an agent's situation can yield moral imperatives that are non-hypothetical. In this paper, I put forth three objections against McDowell's defense of Kant's doctrine, arguing that it is not compatible with important ideas put forth by Kant in his moral theory. First, I argue that McDowell's account flies in the face of Kant's claim that moral requirements cannot be grounded in experience and cannot be recognized and complied with by appealing to experience, or to principles derived therefrom (Section IV). Second, I argue that McDowell misrepresents Kant's theory when he claims that moral requirements are categorical in the sense that they *silence* non-moral desires and concerns. This idea is at odds with Kant's account, according to which conflict between moral concerns and non-moral concerns that arise from self-love plays a central and necessary role in human moral motivation (Section V). Third, I argue that Kant's claim that all sensible beings need incentives in order to be motivated to act tells against McDowell's idea that people can be motivated to act virtuously solely by recognizing facts as reasons for acting. Furthermore, by appealing to the facts of the situation alone in order to explain how moral requirements can motivate agents, McDowell ignores the role that Kant attributes to respect in motivating virtuous actions (Section VI).

Through my criticisms of McDowell's defense, I hope to show that an adequate defense of Kant's doctrine that moral requirements are categorical imperatives must do at least three things. First, it must represent the moral law as the preeminent source of moral requirements, over and above the empirical facts of a situation. Second, it must be compatible with Kant's

conception of virtue as strength in the struggle against inclinations and non-moral concerns. Third, it must include a discussion of the a priori feeling of respect for the moral law, and the role it plays in moral motivation by making the moral law the incentive to moral action. Before putting forth my objections, I begin by reconstructing Kant's doctrine of moral requirements, and recounting McDowell's defense of this doctrine.

2 KANT'S ACCOUNT OF MORAL REQUIREMENTS AS CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES

According to Kant, moral requirements command categorically, or unconditionally, which means that moral requirements command rational agents to carry out actions regardless of whether they want to carry these actions out or not. Rational agents are required to comply with moral requirements regardless of whether they can fulfill their sense-based desires[1] by carrying out the actions that these imperatives command. In other words, moral requirements command that an agent carry out some action even if she does not want to do so, and even if she cannot bring about any result from which she expects to derive pleasure by following the command. Moral requirements command agents by appealing to the agent's reason, and her ability to recognize the standards and norms, set forth by the moral law, for the proper exercise of her rational capacities. That is, moral requirements place agents under commands in virtue of the fact

[1] In the *Groundwork* Kant says that sense-based desires indicate "dependence upon principles of reason for the sake of inclination, namely where reason supplies only the practical rule as to how to remedy the need of inclination"(*GMS* 4:414) Kant seems to mean that sense-based desires are those that motivate the agent to satisfy her desires for pleasure, using reason only to discern how she should obtain the pleasant end she desires, rather than using reason to discern which end is rational and good, i.e. which end she ought to promote. He uses the word pathological to indicate a dependence on sensibility rather than rationality. Throughout this paper I will use the term "sense-based desires" to refer to desires that are based on what Kant calls pathological feelings or conditions. Kant explains that pathological conditions, such as pathological interests and feelings, are only contingently related to the will. This means that they are not features of the will that are shared by all rational agents, and thus cannot ground moral requirements or motivate morally valuable actions (*KpV* 5:21). The term sense-based is meant to describe the etiology of such desires. Sense-based desires are generated when an agent experiences a certain object or material condition as pleasant and a natural disposition to act so as to obtain the pleasant object or state of affairs.

that these agents are rational, and the proper use of their rational powers requires that they will and act according to the practical principles they prescribe. Moral requirements as categorical imperatives command agents to carry out actions for the sake of fulfilling the duties[2] set forth by the moral law, not for the sake of promoting a further end, or for the sake of some prospective outcome of the action commanded.

For example, a categorical imperative might command that an agent tell the truth even if telling the truth is incompatible with satisfying some or all of her desires, e.g., to avoid punishment, to keep someone else's deposit, etc. Because moral requirements do not appeal to an agent's sense-based desires, i.e. desires for whatever happens to please her particular sensibilities, they do not derive their rational influence or authority over agents from their sense-based desires or discretionary ends. Another, and perhaps more intuitive, way of explaining this idea is to say that moral requirements state that something ought to be done, and the justification for why it ought to be done is not that doing it will help the agent achieve something she desires, or promote some discretionary end of hers. Rather, the commands issued by categorical imperatives are valid and justifiable because the proper exercise of reason demands adherence to the principles they command agents to adopt. Thus, moral requirements have authority over all rational human beings, even though all humans have widely different desires that would, if they did not have the ability to act in accordance with moral requirements, motivate them to act in diverse ways, and promote diverse ends.

Kant explains that categorical imperatives command agents to act in accordance with practical laws, which "refer solely to the will, without regard to what is accomplished through its causality," (*KpV* 5:20-21). He argues that practical laws differ from practical rules in that they determine how an agent should will without considering the effects that so willing can bring

[2] In the *Groundwork* Kant defines duty as, "the necessity of an action from respect for law" (*GMS* 4:400).

about. Since categorical imperatives tell us what ought to be done objectively, not what ought to be done if one has certain sense-based desires, they are objective and universal practical laws legislated by reason. Furthermore, these objective practical laws are imperatives for us because reason does not alone determine our wills. In other words, since we have desires that tempt us to deviate from the dictates of the law, the law commands us to act rather than merely describing how we naturally, or in fact, act.

Being universal and objective, moral requirements only presuppose one condition: the agent's possession of and ability to reason; they do not presuppose as a condition the existence of "contingent, subjective conditions, which distinguish one rational being from another" (*KpV* 5:21). We can better understand what it means for a requirement to presuppose some condition by looking at an example of the conditions that hypothetical imperatives presuppose. Take an agent who wants to get away with a crime. She might recognize a hypothetical imperative that applies to her that commands that she lie to the police. However, such an imperative presupposes at least two conditions: that the agent has a sense-based desire for getting away with the crime, and that the laws of nature are such that she can produce such a result by lying to the police. On the other hand, she could also recognize a categorical imperative that commands her not to lie, and such an imperative would not presuppose that any empirical conditions hold; it would only presuppose that she is a rational agent. Requirements of that sort are categorical imperatives in that they only appeal to a priori principles of the will of every rational being in order to yield commands. In other words, they do not depend on natural or empirical laws regarding which actions produce which effects, which objects will produce pleasure in the agent and others, or which objects and states of affairs are believed to be good prior to consulting the moral law (because these are not necessary but contingent matters) (cf. *KpV* 5:21-25). Furthermore, the fact

that the rational authority of practical laws is independent of all contingent and subjective conditions makes them the proper source of moral requirements. This is so because if a requirement is to be moral, it must represent some manner of willing and acting as objectively necessary, or as necessary for all rational beings. An imperative commands an action that is objectively necessary if it applies always and to all rational beings regardless of their sense-based desires. Furthermore, only imperatives that are grounded on objective laws describe (or command, for human beings) actions that contain the objective necessity had by true moral requirements.

In addition to being independent from all sense-based desires in the normative sense discussed above, moral requirements are also independent from all sense-based desires in a motivational sense. According to Kant, categorical imperatives motivate agents without appealing to the agent's subjective or sense-based desires for particular objects or states of affairs. Since the objects of sense-based desires are not "good absolutely but only in reference to [the agent's] sensibility with regard to its feeling of pleasure and displeasure,"(*KpV* 5:62) moral requirements would be mere hypothetical rather than categorical imperatives if they appealed to the agent's subjective desires in order to motivate themselves to act in accordance with such requirements. That is, if an agent is motivated by sense-based desires, she commands herself to act hypothetically, for the sake of some further end that she deems pleasant. Such an agent would act in accordance with a hypothetical imperative that expresses something like "If you want to produce a result that satisfies the desire that motivates you, do x;" she would not act in accordance with a categorical imperative that would express something like, "do x, because it is good to do x regardless of what comes about as a result." When an agent gets the motivation to follow an imperative from her subjective sense-based desires, she cannot help but be motivated

to carry out actions that are mere means to the end of satisfying the desires that are her incentives to action. This means that she cannot help but be motivated by hypothetical imperatives that tell her what is subjectively necessary as a means to desire satisfaction, not what is objectively necessary as an end in itself. Thus moral requirements must be capable of motivating agents without recruiting the agent's sense-based desires as sources of motivation, if they are to be categorical, rather than hypothetical, imperatives.

Since categorical imperatives command that agents carry out certain actions regardless of the results that so doing might bring about, an agent can be said to recognize a moral requirement only when she recognizes an action as in itself good and necessary to carry out, not just as a good or necessary means to some other end that she desires. When an agent recognizes an action as unconditionally good, she recognizes that she is categorically commanded to carry out the action regardless of whether it is a suitable means to satisfying her sense-based desires. Furthermore, rational agents can only recognize the unconditional goodness of an action, or its objective necessity, by comparing the maxim that underlies the proposed action to their representation of the moral law.[3] When an agent formulates a proposed maxim, she can find out whether the action that it underlies is categorically commanded, forbidden, or permissible by discerning whether the form of her maxim is in agreement with the universal form of the moral law. Thus, Kant explains that one can only know that the moral law commands or permits a proposed action "if when your reason subjects it [the underlying maxim] to the test of conceiving yourself as also giving universal law through it, it qualifies for such a giving of universal law" (*MM* 6:225).

By recognizing an agreement between the action's underlying maxim and the form of the moral law, reason identifies the action as good in itself, or as objectively necessary. Kant

[3] A maxim is a subjective practical principle that an agent formulates in order to guide her actions (*MM* 6:225). For example, the maxim that might underlie an agent's act of telling the truth could be "Never tell a lie even if doing so is beneficial."

explains that a maxim is in agreement with the moral law when it is fit for universal legislation. In other words, a maxim underlies an action that is morally required or permitted if every rational being could endorse a maxim with such a form as a universal practical law, according to which all rational beings would determine their behavior. For example, the maxim "Lie whenever it is useful to do so" would not be in agreement with the form of the moral law because not all rational agents would will that this become a universal practical law. For example, the rational agent to whom one intends to lie would not endorse this maxim. Furthermore, even the agent proposing this maxim would not endorse it as a universal practical law, for she does not will that others adopt this principle as a practical law and, consequently, lie to her when they stand to benefit from doing so.

It is important that agents recognize categorical imperatives through the rational activity of comparing their proposed maxims to the form of the moral law because only by doing so can they recognize actions that are commanded categorically, or commanded of all rational beings who posses certain rational abilities, like the ability for universal self-legislation, the ability to restrain their sense-based desires, etc. If an agent discovers an imperative by any means other than by comparing her maxim to the moral law, she will only discover hypothetical imperatives that command actions as means to some end set by her sense-based desires.

A further reason why agents must recognize categorical imperatives by comparing their maxims to the moral law is that the feeling that this rational activity produces in them, i.e. respect, is the only feeling that makes the moral law the sole incentive to action (*KpV* 5:72-73). The feeling of respect that is generated when agents compare their maxims to the law is the only feeling that excludes all sense-based desires from determining the agent's actions. When an agent compares her proposed maxim to the law and recognizes that it must be limited or

modified so that its form will be in agreement with the moral law, the agent's reason displays its ability to constrain her sense-based desires. Upon recognizing that she can make her maxims agree with the moral law by restraining her sense-based desires and inclinations, preventing them from determining her will, the agent feels respect for the law and for her rational ability to determine her will through the representation of it. Therefore, it is important that agents recognize moral requirements through the activity of comparing their maxims to the moral law because in doing so they discover their ability to restrain (to some extent) their sense-based desires and thus feel respect for pure practical reason and the moral law. Furthermore, only the restriction of all sense-based desires can give rise to respect, which is not pathological and thus is not destructive of moral motivation.

As was mentioned before, sense-based desires motivate agents to pursue pleasure in accordance with the principle of self-love, rather than in accordance with the principle of morality. Because all sense-based desires are inimical to moral motivation, agents must be motivated, not by sense-based desires, but by the a priori feeling of respect. Kant argues that respect differs from sense-based desires because it is "practically effected" not "pathologically effected" (*KpV* 5:77). Kant explains that respect, unlike sense-based desires, does not come about as a response to past experiences of pleasure and the expectation of future pleasure. Rather than arising from sensible desires, respect arises from the restriction of all sensible desires. Our sense-based desires persuade us to formulate maxims that will help us obtain pleasure, but when we compare these maxims to the moral law, we realize that the moral law demands that we restrain our sense-based desires and limit our maxims. When we restrain our desires in order to make our maxims cohere with the moral law, we are filled with respect, which does not motivate

us to pursue pleasure but motivates us to resist the sense-based desires that tempt us, and to instead determine our wills and actions through the moral law.[4]

The following example will shed light on how we gain insight into our ability to restrain our sense-based desires when we compare our maxims to the moral law. Imagine that an agent named Suzy has a desire for mangoes. She uses her instrumental reason to determine that, since she has no money, it is necessary for her to steal a mango from the market in order to satisfy her desire. When she reasons in this manner, Suzy only determines what is necessary for her to do *if* she wants to satisfy her desire for mangoes. Thus, she only identifies a subjectively necessary action commanded by a hypothetical imperative. However, she can also identify an action that is objectively necessary, not just as a means to pleasure, by restraining her desire for mangoes, and preventing it from influencing her judgments about what she ought to do. Suzy can recognize that the moral law commands her to disregard her desire for mangoes because this desire incentivizes her to carry out an action whose maxim that is not universalizable. Though her desire for mangoes induces her to adopt the maxim "Steal others' things if doing so is pleasant or beneficial," she can reject this maxim (and the conception of the good that is at its basis) by comparing it to the moral law.[5] Furthermore, when she recognizes that she is commanded to prevent her desire from determining her actions, she gains insight into her reason's ability to rule over her desires and to determine what she ought to do without instruction from her sense-based desires. Since respect is the only feeling that can make the moral law an incentive to action, since it must be achieved by restricting all sense-based desires, and since we can only do this when we

[4] Kant calls the rational ability to reject and infringe our desires so as to prevent them from determining our wills and actions negative freedom. He says that negative freedom is necessary for what he calls positive freedom, the ability to determine our will and actions through the exercise of pure practical reason and its apprehension of the moral law.

[5] Kant spells out what it means for agents to recognize that their maxims do not conform to the universal form of the moral law in several ways, e.g., by recognizing that they do not will their maxim to become a universal law, or by recognizing that acting in accordance with such a maxim would entail treating humanity as a mere means, or by recognizing that the proposed maxim does not result from an autonomous act of self-legislation (cf. *GMS* 4:434-7).

compare our maxims to the moral law, we must go through the rational process of comparing our maxims to the law in order to be properly motivated to act in accordance with categorical imperatives.

3 MCDOWELL'S ACCOUNT

In his paper, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" John McDowell extrapolates from Thomas Nagel's arguments for the possibility of altruism in an attempt to defend Kant's doctrine that moral requirements are categorical imperatives (McDowell 1978, 13). McDowell responds primarily to Philippa Foot's article "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" where she argues that the requirements of morality are not categorical imperatives because "it is possible, without irrationality, to question whether one has reason to conform to them" (McDowell 1978, 13).[6] Foot suggests that moral requirements are categorical only in the sense that we do not consider agents exempt from them just because they do not desire to comply with them. However, she argues that this does not make moral imperatives categorical in the sense that Kant and his followers urge. She points out that the requirements of etiquette share this characteristic with the requirements of morality, but they do not, in virtue of possessing that characteristic, command all rational agents to follow them, on pain of irrationality. She thus concludes that moral requirements are no more rationally binding, or categorical, than the requirements of etiquette.

Though McDowell agrees with Foot that a failure to see that one has reasons for acting in accordance with moral requirements, and to act accordingly, does not entail a manifestation of irrationality on one's part, he disagrees with the conclusion that Foot derives from this claim.

[6] In her book *Natural Goodness,* Foot retracts the arguments she puts forth in this article. Regardless, I think we can expand our understanding of Kant's doctrine by taking a close look at McDowell's arguments against Foot's, now withdrawn, argument and conclusion.

Namely, McDowell disagrees with the conclusion that moral requirements are hypothetical imperatives since they only have an influence on the wills of those who posses certain desires upon which the requirements' authority and influence are conditional. McDowell argues that even if failing to recognize the legitimacy of moral requirements and moral reasons for acting is not irrational, moral requirements can still be understood as categorical imperatives in a Kantian sense.

In order to understand McDowell's defense of Kant, one must first understand the change in terminology that McDowell suggests will help us gain a more intuitive understanding of the idea that moral requirements are categorical imperatives. McDowell proposes that we understand what it means to be commanded by an imperative as equivalent to recognizing that one has certain reasons for acting. He suggests that to be commanded by a hypothetical imperative is to recognize the legitimacy of prudential reasons for acting, and to be commanded by a categorical imperative is to recognize the legitimacy of moral reasons for acting. In other words, an agent is commanded to act by categorical imperatives when she recognizes that she has moral reasons for acting, and these reasons weigh with her.

Following Nagel, McDowell suggests that just as agents can recognize prudential reasons for acting by simply attending to the facts of their situation, it is also by attending to certain facts of their situation that agents recognize moral reasons for acting. According to McDowell, in the former case agents are commanded to act by hypothetical imperatives and in the latter case they are commanded to act by categorical imperatives. He argues that we can make sense of Kant's theory of moral requirements by appealing to the virtuous agent's perceptual capacity to form a construal of her situation in which she sees certain facts of her situation as reasons for acting. When the agent recognizes that these facts give her moral reasons for acting, she sees the actions

that such reasons support in a positive light. Thus, it is her cognitive and perceptual capacity to recognize facts as reasons for acting that explains the influence that these reasons have on her will. The influence that such reasons and requirements have on her will manifests itself as the recognition that she is required to will or act in a particular manner, which is not yet the motivational influence that actually can lead her to carry out the action commanded. In the case of moral requirements, the agent's possession of a desire for a subjective end that can be produced by carrying out the action commanded does not account for the influence that the requirements have on the agent's will (McDowell 1978, 20-21). According to McDowell, this shows that if an agent has developed said capacity and has learned to construe situations correctly, or virtuously, her construal of the situation will yield "non-hypothetical reasons for acting" (McDowell 1978, 23). Thus, he suggests, by appealing to the ordinary capacity possessed by rational agents to construe facts as reasons for acting, Kant's doctrine that moral requirements are categorical imperatives can be vindicated.

McDowell's proposal is that agents can perceive certain facts of their situation as providing reasons for acting and as yielding requirements without having to appeal to some preexisting desire of theirs in order for the requirement to get off the ground, or for it to have some rational influence on the agents. Hence, he claims, moral requirements are categorical imperatives because they are recognized as authoritative, and thus have some rational influence on rational agents, regardless of whether the actions they command are "ancillary to the agent's desires or interests" (McDowell 1978, 13). According to McDowell, his account shows that it is not necessary for an agent to possess a desire for the advantageous or pleasant consequences of an action in order for her to recognize that she is rationally required to carry out said action. The agent's conception of her situation suffices for her to recognize that she is required to act in a

certain manner. Thus, McDowell concludes that, to the contrary of Foot's arguments, moral requirements are categorical imperatives.

The following example should help clarify the sense in which McDowell thinks moral requirements command categorically. Imagine an agent, Amy, whose elderly neighbor is ill and needs to be taken to the hospital. Upon recognizing the fact that her neighbor is in need of help, Amy recognizes that she has a reason, and is thus required, to help. She recognizes this even though she does not have an antecedent desire to help her neighbor or to promote her neighbor's health, a desire that exists prior to, and thus grounds, her recognition of the requirement she is subject to. If Amy is virtuous, she will see the facts about her situation as reasons for helping her neighbor; she will recognize that she is obligated to help, not because some preexisting, sense-based desire of hers can be satisfied by helping.

McDowell suggests that when a reason for acting weighs with a particular agent, this might entail that the agent has a desire to act in accordance with that reason. However, though the agent acquires a desire to act in accordance with that reason upon recognizing it, this does not entail that a desire is prerequisite, or must be presupposed, as a precondition for the reason to be recognized by the agent, or for it to have some rational influence on the agent. McDowell maintains that the agent's desire to carry out a virtuous action, "need not function as an independent component in the explanation, needed in order to account for the capacity of the cited reason to influence the agent's will"(McDowell 1978, 16; cf. 13-16).[7] According to McDowell, if an agent's desire to act is not "independently intelligible" but follows as a consequence of her recognition that she has moral reasons for acting in a certain manner, she can be seen as recognizing a requirement that applies to her categorically rather than merely conditionally upon her possession of some desire.

[7] I take it that for a reason to influence an agent's will is not yet for it to motivate the agent to action but merely for it to exert some rational influence on the agent. That is, for the reason to be recognized as authoritative, as applicable to her.

Furthermore, McDowell adds that such an agent's action can be understood as motivated solely by her recognition that the facts of her situation provide reasons to act in a certain manner regardless of whether so acting will help her satisfy some desire. Therefore, on this picture, an agent's conception of her situation suffices to yield reasons for acting that weigh on her independently of any sense-based desires she might have, *and* such a conception also suffices to motivate the agent to carry out the action that is categorically commanded.

Since McDowell's account rests on an analogy between the recognition of prudential and moral reasons for acting, he must distinguish between the two types of reasons in order to argue that when agents recognize prudential reasons they are commanded by hypothetical imperatives, but when they recognize moral reasons they are commanded by categorical imperatives; and that the latter are importantly different from the former. He does this by arguing that prudential and moral reasons, respectively, exert a different rational influence on agents. According to McDowell, categorical imperatives exert a rational influence on the agent that silences the rational influence exerted by hypothetical imperatives. In other words, categorical imperatives differ from hypothetical imperatives in that the reasons yielded by the former are incommensurable with the reasons provided by the latter. Moral reasons do not outweigh non-moral reasons, but they rather undermine the authority and motivational influence of non-moral reasons. Thus, McDowell suggests that the agent who properly recognizes moral reasons for acting as categorical imperatives will not be swayed by non-moral concerns, and will not struggle against the motivational and psychological influence of her inclinations.[8] In order to illustrate his point, McDowell draws from Aristotle's distinction between the virtuous agent's motivation to carry out virtuous actions and

[8] Kant defines inclination as "The dependence of the faculty of desire upon feelings," which "always indicates a need"(*GMS* 4:414)

that of the continent agent. He suggests that the agent who is motivated by a categorical imperative will not struggle against her inclinations in the manner in which the merely continent agent does because the categorical imperative presents the truly virtuous agent with reasons that silence non-moral desires and concerns.

4 SENSIBLE EXPERIENCE VS. THE MORAL LAW

Throughout his practical works, Kant argues that categorical imperatives are practical principles that contain objective necessity. He also argues that principles that contain objective necessity cannot be derived from experience. In this section, I spell out Kant's arguments for the idea that principles that constitute categorical imperatives must have objective necessity, and explain Kant's reasons for believing that such principles, which he also calls practical laws, cannot be derived from, or grounded in, experience. I then argue that McDowell's account of how moral commands can be categorical imperative is at odds with the aforementioned claims, and is thus an inadequate defense of Kant's doctrine.

In the *Second Critique* Kant draws a distinction between principles that constitute hypothetical imperatives and principles that constitute categorical imperatives. He identifies the difference between the two kinds of imperatives as stemming from the kind of necessity that they contain, respectively. He argues that practical principles that contain mere subjective necessity are hypothetical imperatives and those that contain objective necessity are categorical imperatives. Practical principles that contain objective or "absolute necessity" (*MM* 6:389) are practical laws and, Kant explains, only practical laws can ground or constitute categorical imperatives. He argues that only practical principles that contain objective necessity command categorically because practical principles that lack objective necessity determine the will "only with respect to a desired effect," not "the will as will"(*KpV* 5:20).

When Kant says that certain principles only determine the will with respect to some desired effect, he means that practical principles that lack objective or absolute necessity only tell a rational agent what she should do *if* she desires some effect that can be produced by performing the action recommended by the principle in question. So, Kant explains, practical principles that lack objective necessity are not imperatives or commands in the strict sense of the word; they are more like counsels of reason, or rules of skill, than inexorable commands (*GMS* 4:416-417).[9] In the *Groundwork,* Kant explains,

"*Giving counsel* does involve necessity, which, however, can hold only under a subjective and contingent condition, whether this or that man counts this or that in his happiness;" (*GMS* 4:416)

Mere practical principles, unlike practical laws, only identify actions that are necessary to carry out *if* the agent has a particular goal or end that can satisfy her sense-based desires if promoted by means of implementing the principles in question. Furthermore, since the agent is under no obligation to promote ends that would satisfy her subjective desires, she merely wants to do so, the principle does not obligate her to perform a particular action *tout court*. Rather, the agent can permissibly reject the principle's command, or exempt herself from the obligation that the principle places over her, by simply giving up the relevant goals or desires upon which the imperative's rational authority is conditional (*GMS* 4:419-420).

Hypothetical imperatives express the rational principle that whoever wills, or desires, some end, also wills the means to this end. These imperatives presuppose that the agent wills some end and assert that she must also will the conduct that is a means to this end. They identify

[9] Kant draws a distinction between imperatives of skill and imperatives of prudence, saying that the latter are mere counsels because happiness as an end cannot be made determinate (*GMS* 4:419). However, both of these imperatives lack objective necessity, and the distinctions between the two are not important for the purposes of this paper.

some conduct as necessary only for those who have adopted a particular end, since the imperative can only deem an action necessary if it presupposes that some end seems good to, or is desired by, the agent. Thus, reason does not inexorably require all agents to act in accordance with principles that lack objective necessity, and this is why they only yield or constitute hypothetical imperatives, the authority of which is conditional on desires for discretionary ends that the agent can rationally and permissibly renounce. Through subjective practical principles, reason deems that an agent who is to remain rational and who truly wills some end, must also will, and endeavor to bring about, the means. However, by means of such principles reason does not deem that the action itself, or the end to which it is a means, is good. Therefore, an agent cannot recognize an action as itself necessary or genuinely obligatory by appealing to such principles.

After arguing that only principles that obtain objective necessity can command categorically, Kant argues that these kinds of principles cannot be derived from experience. According to Kant, principles that are grounded on empirical concepts of the good, or in experience, can only contain subjective necessity. This means that principles that are derived from experience can only be hypothetical imperatives. Since principles derived from experience lack objective necessity, they cannot ground or express the sort of obligation that genuine moral requirements express. Thus, Kant argues that the ground of obligation must be sought "a priori simply in concepts of pure reason" and not in "the circumstances of the world" (*GMS* 4:389). He concludes that moral laws and their principles must be free of anything empirical which would obliterate their objective necessity and their categorical nature.

Kant's reasoning for thinking that practical laws cannot be derived from experience can be found in the second *Critique,* where he argues that there are only two ways in which we can

determine what we ought to do, or two ways in which we can determine what ends we ought to promote. Kant says that we can determine what ends we ought to promote by either appealing to practical laws, or by appealing to concepts of the good derived from experience and formulating practical principles on the basis of such concepts (*KpV* 5:57-58). Kant argues that if we appeal to experience in order to identify which ends are good, or which practical principles we ought to adopt, our wills and actions will be determined by our desire for pleasure and not by our rational apprehension of what is truly good. That is, we will adopt principles based on what we desire to do, for the sake of pleasure, rather than adopting principles based on what reason tells us is good, or what we ought to do.

Moreover, according to Kant, only principles that contain subjective necessity can be derived from experience because principles derived from experience are based on a conception of the good as that which is associated with pleasure. He claims that when agents appeal to experience in order to formulate and adopt practical principles, they are restricted to using empirical concepts of the good as the basis of the principles they formulate and adopt. He argues that, on the other hand, when we appeal to practical laws, we can identify a concept of the good that is objective and accurately tracks objectively good ends and actions. However, when, instead of appealing to practical laws, we appeal to experience in order to acquire a concept of the good, we will only be able to identify a concept of the good that is subjectively valid. A concept of the good is merely subjectively valid when it tracks only those things that have pleased a particular agent in the past and, thus, are deemed likely to bring her pleasure in the future. In experience, only those things that are associated with pleasure (through a process of induction from past experiences) are represented as good, and those that are associated with pain are represented as bad. That is why, when we turn to experience in order to derive a concept of the good, we are

bound to identify as good only what is merely pleasant, or subjectively good, and not what is objectively good.

Furthermore, when we go about formulating and adopting practical principles by first deriving a concept of the good from experience, and basing the principles we formulate on such a concept, we can only come up with practical principles that tell us what to do *in order to satisfy our desire for pleasure and our aversion to pain*. Thus, Kant says,

"If the concept of good is not to be derived from an antecedent practical law but is rather to serve as its basis, then it can only be the concept of something whose existence promises pleasure and thus determines the causality of the subject to produce this something" (*KpV* 5:58).

The following example should help illustrate what Kant has in mind in this passage. Imagine an agent who turns to her experience in order to formulate a conception of the good. Since she appeals to experience, she does not make use of a previously formulated rational principle that sets out certain criteria for what counts as good. Therefore, she can only rely on her past experience of pleasure as an indicator that is meant to track goodness. By appealing to her past experience of pleasure, she might, for example, identify eating chocolate cake as good, or as something to be pursued and promoted. Once she has identified eating chocolate cake as good, she can use that concept in order to ground a practical principle that has that concept of the good at its basis. In other words, she can formulate and adopt a practical principle that follows from the presupposition that eating chocolate cake is good. The practical principle follows from the presupposition that eating chocolate cake is good in that it identifies an action that is a means to promoting that good, and asserts that if the agent wills the end, she must will the means

identified by the principle. If she proceeds in the manner described, she will come up with a principle that has mere subjective necessity because the principle is only thought to be valid for the agent under the assumption that some subjective condition holds, i.e. having a desire for chocolate cake, and that satisfying that desire is a good thing. For example, her empirical conception of the good might serve as the basis for the practical principle, "Do whatever is necessary in order to obtain and consume as much chocolate cake as possible." This practical principle is grounded in, and follows from, her assumption that eating chocolate cake is good, and that this activity, being good, should be promoted. However, the principle only has subjective validity because it only tells the agent what she should do in order to satisfy her particular desires. In other words, this is not a principle that is necessary for all rational beings to adopt, but only for those who will to increase their pleasure by eating chocolate cake, and can do so without violating the moral law.

Any agent, including the one in our example, can dismiss the principle's commands, since eating chocolate cake is not an objectively good activity that must be promoted on pain of irrationality, but is merely a pleasant activity that is promoted only for the sake of pleasure. When reasoning in the manner described above, from empirical concepts of the good to practical principles, agents formulate and adopt practical principles that do not determine what is objectively good for them to do, but rather instruct them as to how best to obtain something that is already assumed to be good because it is associated with pleasure. The example illustrates Kant's belief that, practical principles derived from experience cannot tell agents what they are under obligation to do as rational beings, in which case they would contain objective necessity. Thus, if an agent were to identify what she is required to do by appealing to the facts of her situation, in the manner suggested by McDowell, she would only be able to identify hypothetical,

not categorical, requirements. In other words, agents cannot discover moral requirements by appealing to experience.[10]

According to Kant, agents should only appeal to experience in order to identify specific actions and material principles that conform to the form of the moral law and the formal principles of the will that are grounded in it. Once an agent has recognized the objective goodness, and thus objective necessity, of limiting her maxims so that they conform to the moral law, she can, and should, look to empirical facts in order to determine the particular action through which she can fulfill her duty. Kant argues that we should derive moral requirements from pure practical reason and only appeal to experience in order to make these requirements "effective *in concreto* the conduct of [our] life" (*GMS* 4:389). In other words, agents must derive categorical imperatives from the moral law alone by recognizing the objective necessity of certain formal, a priori principles of the will. Once they recognize the objective necessity of such principles, they can appeal to experience in order to identify particular actions that are compatible with the formal principles of the will from which the agent derived the moral requirements proper.

For example, when an agent sees that her friend is hungry, she might recognize a moral requirement to share some food with her friend. However, she cannot look to the facts of her situation in order to identify this requirement if she is to recognize it as a categorical imperative. This is so because the facts of her situation, e.g. that her friend is hungry, that her friend will no longer be hungry if she feeds her, do not themselves yield principles that place her under a *moral* obligation to give her friend food. Her experience of these facts only yields a principle that is based on the presupposition that it is good to eliminate her friend's hunger, and that feeding her

[10] Though the question of how an agent is motivated to act in accordance with duty is different from the question of how an agent recognizes her duty, Kant suggests that in order to be motivated by duty, an agent must first be conscious that she has a duty to act.

friend is good and necessary because doing so is a means to promoting the end that is presumed to be good. Such a principle only contains subjective necessity because the action it commands is deemed good as a means to some other end that is presupposed to be good (because it has been associated with pleasure in past experience).

In order to recognize an action as objectively good and necessary, an agent must look to the principle from which the action follows, not to the effects that the action can produce. If an agent bases her practical principles on the presupposition that it would be good to bring some effect about, she will only recognize what she ought to do in order to satisfy her desire for that effect, not what she ought to do in order to comply with what morality requires. Thus, in recognizing the authority of principles grounded in experience, the agent will not recognize moral requirements that command categorically but mere requirements of skill or prudence that command hypothetically.

Now, in many cases where an agent recognizes that she must carry out some action for the sake of satisfying her desire for pleasure, it is clear that she does not recognize an imperative that is categorical. For example, it should now be obvious that the requirement "Do whatever is possible to eat more chocolate cake," when it is based on an agent's desire for chocolate cake and her belief that following this principle will bring her pleasure, is not a categorical imperative. However, it might not seem equally obvious that the requirement "feed your friend," when it is based on the agent's understanding that it would be good if her friend ceased to be hungry, and that she can bring this effect about by feeding her, is not a moral requirement that commands categorically. In other words, some might find it difficult to accept that an imperative that commands a seemingly virtuous and altruistic action could fail to be a moral requirement simply because it is based on material derived from experience. Someone who is swayed by this worry

might argue that Kant is not committed to the strong, and seemingly implausible, claim that all principles grounded on material drawn from experience fail to be categorical imperatives or moral requirements. This person might thus argue that Kant's claim that empirical material, i.e. material derived from experience, cannot serve as the basis of practical laws is much weaker than I have made it out to be. Accordingly, the objection would urge that Kant did not mean that *all* experience and empirical facts are unfit to ground practical laws or moral requirements. Rather, according to the objection, Kant only holds the weaker claim according to which empirical concepts that equate the good to the satisfaction of the agent's selfish desire for pleasure cannot serve as the basis of practical laws or categorical imperatives. In other words, not all empirical facts or concepts are barred from grounding moral requirements, but only those that represent as good only ends that are expected to produce the most pleasure for the agent while injuring or disadvantaging others.

If the objection holds, my arguments against McDowell could be seen as resulting from an uncharitable reading of his account. After all, McDowell does not suggest that the facts that yield moral requirements are facts about what will bring about the most pleasure for the agent. Instead, McDowell suggests that the relevant facts have nothing to do with what will help the agent satisfy her desire for pleasure. For example, McDowell might have in mind a situation in which an agent recognizes that her friend is hungry and see this fact as yielding a categorical imperative to help her friend by giving her food. In the example I put forth on behalf of McDowell, the fact that the agent's friend is hungry yields an imperative that does not, in any obvious way, depend on the thought that the agent can satisfy her desires by feeding her friend. Thus, the principle she derives from experience does not seem to be a recipe for bringing about some pleasant state of affairs and satisfying her desires. In other words, though the agent looks to

her experience in order to formulate and adopt this principle, it seems as though the principle does not tell the agent what to do *if* she desires to bring something pleasant about, but it rather tells her what she must do regardless of what she desires to do. It thus seems as though McDowell could be right in arguing that such principles, though derived from experience, qualify as a categorical imperatives.

However, I think the aforementioned objection can be dismissed if we better understand Kant's reasons for rejecting *all* empirical material from serving as the basis of practical laws, i.e. categorical imperatives. Once we do this, it will become clear that Kant holds the stronger claim according to which *no* empirical material is fit to ground categorical imperatives, not the weaker claim that the objection urges. In order to see why Kant holds the stronger claim, we must understand why he thinks that even seemingly moral principles fail to be categorical imperatives when they are grounded on material taken from experience.

Kant argues that whatever appears good to an agent in her experience of the sensible world does so in virtue of the fact that her particular experiences have generated certain sense-based desires in her. That is to say, agents experience objects or states of affairs as good because experience has shaped each agent's sensibilities in a way that certain objects and states of affairs are associated with pleasure in the agents mind, and are expected to produce pleasure in the agent if obtained. These sense-based desires make it so that the agent perceives certain ends and objects as good through her experience of the sensible world. This explains why different agents are pleased by different things, and are motivated to pursue different ends. Moreover, these objects and ends don't appear good because they are in fact good, but only because they satisfy the agent's sense-based desires. Accordingly, when we turn to experience in order to identify some good end which to pursue by means of rational principles, we cannot identify or track

objectively good ends. Rather, what we identify as good in experience is merely that which we desire because, since we have sense-based desires for things of its ilk, it pleases us and strikes our sensibilities as good.

Furthermore, when sensible beings like us appeal to experience in order to identify a concept of the good, we use this concept as a foundation, or basis, from which to derive practical principles. In doing so, we mistakenly presuppose that the end desired is good, and we formulate a practical principle that recommends an action as a means of bringing it about. We thus see this practical principle as valid and as having authority over us *because* it can help us bring about the end that we expect will satisfy our sense-based desires.

As we can see from the aforementioned observations, practical principles that are grounded on experience cannot constitute categorical imperatives for at least two reasons. First, these principles do not apply to all agents but only to those who have sense-based desires that can be satisfied by means of the action the principle commands. Second, agents who recognize that these principles apply to them see the principles as commanding an action as a means to some further end. This means that they do not see the action commanded as required by the moral law (as a duty), but they rather see it as a recommended means to satisfying their desires (*KpV* 5:26). These principles are counsels of prudence generated by reason following her sense-based desires' directions, not commands of pure practical reason.

Furthermore, even if everyone desired the ends that principles derived from experience promote, these principles would still fail to have the authority required in order to command categorically (*KpV* 5:26). This is so because principles grounded on experience are grounded on the natural principle of self-love, even if they have at their basis a universally shared empirical concept of the good. By means of the principle of self-love, nature urges us to satisfy our desires,

and to adopt principles that are conducive to pleasure. However, the principle of self-love is not a law of reason that we give ourselves. Therefore, when we act in accordance with the principle of self-love, or the practical principles grounded on the principle of self-love, we cannot command ourselves to act but are rather compelled to act by the laws of nature. When we act in accordance with the laws of nature, we do not determine our actions in accordance with what reason deems ought to be done. Rather, when guided by the laws of nature, we are compelled to act by forces external to our reason that cannot command us in a categorical fashion (cf. *KpV* 5:33 on autonomy of the will and heteronomy of choice).

Thus, Kant does not think that grounding one's practical principles in experience is objectionable because we thereby carry out actions that are stereotypically evil, or adopt ends that benefit us (the agents) at the expense of hurting others (as could be the case with the end "chocolate cake" and the corresponding principle "Do whatever it takes to eat chocolate cake"). Rather, Kant thinks that grounding practical principles on experience is objectionable even if the end we adopt *happens* to be genuinely good, and the principle we formulate on the basis of such an end accords with the moral law (as could be the case with the principle "Feed my friends when they are hungry"). Kant thinks that grounding practical principles in experience is objectionable because appealing to experience prevents us from formulating principles that are universal, and thus prevents us from recognizing that the principle's validity and authority over us stems from the fact that it is valid for all rational beings, regardless of which effects implementing it might bring about. If a principle is to command categorically, it must identify an action as necessary in itself (not just as a means), and the agent must recognize that the principle is valid in virtue of the fact that it has the form of the moral law, or that its form is universally valid because it is valid for all beings who have reason and a will (*KpV* 5:26). When we ground

principle on experience we recognize the principle that we thereby formulate as valid in virtue of the good effects it can bring about for us and for others, and this prevents us from recognizing these principles as valid in virtue of their universality. Furthermore, Kant also thinks that when we ground principles on experience, we are caused to act by forces external to our reason. Thus, when we ground practical principles in experience, our desire for pleasure compels us to act and this prevents us from commanding ourselves (categorically) to act in accordance with moral requirements.

We can now see why Kant would deny that the agent who grounds the principle "I should feed my friend" in her experience of the facts of her situation recognizes and acts in accordance with a categorical imperative. From the presupposition that eliminating her friend's hunger is good, the agent derives a principle that tells her how to bring about the state of affairs in which her friend is no longer hungry. She can thereby recognize a requirement to feed her friend. However, she will recognize the action of feeding her friend as a necessary means to bringing about a product that she presumed to be good. She will not recognize the action as necessary because it is what the principles of pure practical reason command. She will only see the action as necessary *if* she wants to bring about a certain product without having determined whether reason actually deems the principle good in itself, and whether it commands that all rational agents adopt it. Thus, contra the objection, Kant holds the stronger claim that no material derived from experience can serve as the basis of practical laws, regardless of whether the principles grounded on such material promote the happiness of others and command actions that accord with the moral law.

5 SILENCING NON-MORAL CONCERNS AND VIRTUE AS STRENGTH

In this section I turn to McDowell's suggestion that moral requirements are categorical imperatives in the sense that they give rise to reasons that silence all other non-moral reasons and concerns. I argue that the silencing metaphor McDowell employs is misleading and flies in the face of central aspects of Kant's moral theory, specially Kant's theory of virtue as the strength of an agent's maxim in fulfilling her duty against the resistance of inclinations. I argue that, contra McDowell, Kant does not think of virtue as a perceptual capacity that enables agents to identify moral requirements and abide by them without struggling against their non-moral desires. I conclude that this tension between McDowell's account an Kant's theory constitutes a further reason for rejecting McDowell's account as a proper defense of Kant's doctrine that moral requirements are categorical imperatives.

As we saw in previous sections, McDowell argues that just as an agent can construe the facts of her situation as constituting prudential reasons for acting, so can she construe the facts of her situation as constituting moral reasons for acting. Furthermore, McDowell argues, the mere recognition of either type of reasons is sufficient to motivate the agent to act. Following Nagel (Nagel, 1989), McDowell draws an analogy between moral and non-moral reasons in order to argue that the recognition of moral requirements like the recognition of prudential requirements, both expressed in reasons for acting, can sufficiently motivate agents. However, having drawn the analogy between prudential and moral reasons, McDowell must then distinguish between the two types of reasons in order to account for how moral reasons command categorically whereas prudential reasons command only hypothetically. That is, he must find a way to explain why moral reasons express categorical imperatives whereas prudential reasons, though they do not depend on subjective desires in order to motivate agents, express mere hypothetical imperatives.

In order to account for this vital difference, McDowell makes use of a metaphor according to which moral reasons have the ability to silence non-moral reasons, arguing that it is in this sense that moral reasons, as opposed to non-moral reasons, command categorically.

In order to spell out the silencing metaphor, McDowell appeals to Aristotle's distinction between the virtuous and the merely continent agents. Aristotle famously argues for the idea, taken up by many contemporary virtue ethicists, that the truly virtuous agent will have aligned his emotions and desires with his rational apprehension of the good (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1120b14-28). According to Aristotle, the virtuous agent differs from the merely continent agent in that the former's emotions and desires are in complete agreement with her practical reason. When the virtuous agent determines that some action is virtuous, through the exercise of practical reason, her emotions and desires will be in agreement with her reason's dictates, and they will thus prompt her to act virtuously. Therefore, if an agent is truly virtuous, her emotions and desires will not tempt her to act against what virtue requires, and she will perform virtuous actions without facing inner struggle or resistance.[11] Furthermore, if an agent's emotions and desires prompt her to act in a manner contrary to virtue, and she is able to perform virtuous actions only by exercising self-control and combating her non-moral desires, she is not virtuous but merely continent.

When applying the silencing metaphor to Kant's theory, McDowell argues that Kant, like Aristotle, thinks that an agent's action fails to be morally good if she must struggle against her inclinations, and other non-moral desires, in order to carry out the action that morality requires (McDowell, 27). According to McDowell, Kant maintains that if an agent should struggle against her inclinations in order to carry out an action required by the moral law, she is

[11] Margaret Baxley presents an excellent discussion of Aristotle's idea and Kant's disagreement with this idea in her book *Kant's Theory of Virtue* (Baxley 2010, 40-46).

not motivated by a categorical imperative and her motivation is not moral. McDowell suggests that the agent who is properly motivated by moral reasons, having recognized the authority of a categorical imperative, will not have to fight her inclinations, but will focus solely on the duty that arises from the moral requirement, disregarding all her other non-moral desires and concerns. Furthermore, he argues that the agent does this by exercising her virtue. By attributing this view to Kant, McDowell suggests that reasons that represent categorical imperatives eliminate any resistance against the agent's moral motivation to act, and it is this feature that makes the moral requirements they represent categorical rather than hypothetical. However, as we shall see below, Kant's conception of virtue is decidedly at odds with the views McDowell attributes to him.

In order to understand why McDowell is mistaken in suggesting that moral reasons for acting silence non-moral desires and concerns, it will be helpful to follow Margaret Baxley in drawing a distinction between the will's legislative and executive powers. In doing so, we shall see that whereas non-moral desires and concerns are silent when agents legislates practical laws, they are not silent, as McDowell suggests, when agents apply these laws in action. As Baxley points out in her book *Kant's Theory of Virtue*, since we are rational agents, our wills have a legislative power to formulate and establish practical principles that express the requirements set out by the moral law. In other words, as rational agents we can discover and command ourselves to follow practical principles that tell us what the moral law requires of us and all other rational agents. In formulating such principles, we look only to the moral law and the standards it sets out for universal validity. Therefore, according to Kant, non-moral desires and concerns, being empirical conditions (cf. *KpV* 5:41, 47; *GMS* 4:444), play no part in determining which practical principles morality requires us to legislate (*KpV* 5:30). For example, my desire for money and

the pleasure I derive from it has no bearing on whether a principle that commands me to steal my friend's money so that I can satisfy my desires is a practical law, or a practical principle that the moral law deems valid for all rational beings. Thus, if McDowell meant his metaphor to apply only with respect to the will's legislative function, he would be right to suggest that non-moral desires and concerns are silent when we determine which principles morality requires us to adopt (McDowell, 26-28). However, as we shall see, McDowell mistakenly applies his metaphor to the executive function of the will, and thereby gets Kant's theory wrong.

When McDowell claims that categorical imperatives *silence* sensible desires and non-moral concerns, he means to suggest that non-moral desires and concerns are motivationally silent when agents put into practice the practical principles they have previously legislated, i.e. when the will exercises its executive power. The will exercises its executive power when agents motivate themselves to act in accordance with practical laws and put these laws into practice. Thus, according to McDowell, the silencing metaphor applies when the will exercises its executive power. That is, according to McDowell, non-moral desires and concerns do not affect the virtuous agent when she puts practical laws into practice and motivates herself to act in accordance with moral requirements. McDowell argues that if an agent truly apprehends moral reasons for acting, and is properly motivated by these reasons, non-moral desires will not exert any motivational force on her when she chooses to apply a practical law by carrying out a particular morally worthy action. Accordingly, McDowell argues that Kant's virtuous agent complies with moral commands without struggling against her inclinations, if her motivation is moral (McDowell, 28). However, though non-moral desires and concerns are silent in regards to an agent's formulation and legislation of practical laws, they are not silent when the agent puts these laws into practice by choosing to carry out particular virtuous actions.

Kant disagree vehemently with the suggestion put forth by McDowell when he argues that, though the legislation of practical laws only entails autonomy of practical reason, the application of such laws in action also entails autocracy of practical reason (*MM* 6:383). Autocracy, for Kant, differs from mere autonomy because it not only requires that practical reason be free from the influence of sensible desires, but it also requires that practical reason *rule* over such desires when motivating the agent to act in accordance with practical laws. In other words, reason is autonomous because it does not depend on sensible desires in order to determine what ought to be done, but it is autocratic because it also overcomes the obstacles that the inclinations place in its path when they tempt the agent to violate its dictates. Autocracy entails an active constrain of sense-based desires that comes about through inner-struggle. In explaining why human beings need autocracy of practical reason, Kant argues that humans do not have a holy will but only a finite rational will (*RGV* 6:380). Thus, because finitely rational beings like us cannot rid ourselves of the sensible desires and inclinations that prompt us to deviate from the moral law, we need to actively restrict and rule our sense-based desires through the exercise of our practical reason. Therefore, in order for us to comply with the moral law, we must not only legislate practical principles through the free exercise of our reason, we must also exercise self-governance so as to rule over our sensible desires (that are constant sources of resistance and inner struggle) and subjugate them to our reason (*KpV* 5:83-4).

In spelling out what finite rational beings must do in order to act in accordance with the moral law, Kant ties the notion of autocracy to his conception of virtue (*MM* 6:383). Kant defines virtue as the "strength of a human being's maxim in fulfilling his duty" (*MM* 6:394), arguing that virtue is strength in overcoming the opposition of one's natural inclinations. According to Kant, holy beings whose wills naturally conform to the moral law do not need virtue in order to act or

will in accordance with the moral law. However, finite rational beings like us do need virtue in order to fight and dominate the sensible desires that compel us to violate the moral law. In other words, it is not sufficient for finite rational beings to recognize moral requirements or to legislate practical laws if we want to act in accordance with these requirements. In addition to recognizing moral requirements and legislating practical laws through the free exercise of our reason, we must also exercise strength of will, or virtue, so as to fight the desires that, even after acknowledging the legitimacy and validity of the moral law, still tempt us to violate it.

As we can now see, Kant's views on moral motivation and virtue stand in direct conflict with McDowell's argument that the virtuous person does not face resistance from her non-moral concerns and desires when she is motivated to act by her recognition of categorical imperatives. McDowell conceives of virtue as a capacity to identify and carry out virtuous actions without facing inner conflict or resistance. However, McDowell's conception of virtue is at odds with Kant's own, according to which inner-conflict is unavoidable when a finite rational being is motivated to act in accordance with and for the sake of the moral law.[12] Thus, according to Kant, virtue does not make agents impervious to their desires for pleasure and happiness when these run contrary to what the moral law commands, as they usually do. Virtue does not, as it were, replace

[12] In the *Metaphysics*, Kant explains that finite rational beings, unlike holy beings, must rely on virtue to act in accordance with the moral law because our sensible desires rebel against morality. He writes, "For finite holy beings (who could never be tempted to violate duty) there would be no doctrine of virtue but only a doctrine of morals, since the latter is autonomy of practical reason whereas the former is also autocracy of practical reason, that is, it involves consciousness of the capacity to master one's inclinations when they rebel against the law…" Furthermore, he concludes "Thus human morality in its highest stage can still be nothing more than virtue, even if it be entirely pure (quite free from the influence of any incentive other than that of duty). (*MM* 6:383)

an agent's non-moral desires with a desire, or unimpeded motivation, to act in accordance with the moral law.

There is further reason why Kant does not hold the view that McDowell attributes to him. Virtue, according to Kant, cannot replace non-moral desires with a desire to act in accordance with the moral law that eliminates all other desires to act otherwise. This is so because such a desire would prevent the agent from subjecting herself to the law and recognizing its commands as obligatory rather than as preferred. Thus, Kant writes,

"…all the moral perfection that a human being can attain is still only virtue, that is, a disposition conformed with law from respect for law, and thus consciousness of a continuing propensity to transgression or at least impurity, that is, an admixture of many spurious (not moral) motives to observe the law" (*KpV* 5:128).

In this and other passages, Kant explains that human beings cannot love the moral law and acquire a desire to act in accordance with its mandates. Rather, the greatest moral perfection that human beings can achieve is a disposition to act in accordance with the law *from respect*.

Kant explains that respect is an a priori feeling that involves the awareness that other motives threaten to tempt us into deviating from the law. That is, moral motivation, for human beings, depends on respect for the moral law "which is linked with fear or at least worry about transgressing it"(*KpV* 5:82). This suggests that in order for the moral law to serve as the incentive to action, the agent must be sharply aware that her inclinations pose a threat to the moral worth of her actions because they may lead her to act against the dictates of the moral law. As was discussed above, according to Kant, the representation of the moral law makes the virtuous agent keenly aware of her non-moral desires, so she recognizes that she must and can restrain these

desires, lest they lead her to transgress the law. The virtuous agent sees moral requirements as obligating her, and enabling her, to restrict her inclinations by limiting her maxims. According to the picture put forth by Kant, the agent's non-moral desires to indulge her inclinations are very much the object of the agent's attention when she motivates herself to act in accordance with the law.

Furthermore, it is important for Kant that virtue presents us with the dignified and respectable ability to rule over ourselves. The ability to rule over our self-wrought inclinations makes us aware of the dignity that we posses as beings endowed with reason. Our dignity presents us with a sense of inner worth that enables us to act virtuously from respect for the law and the worth it assigns to us rather than doing so from a sense-based desire for the pleasure that so acting can bring about. Thus, virtue is not incompatible with the struggle to rule one's inclinations. Rather, the virtuous person will constantly fight inclinations so that the maxims she puts into practice progressively approach the form of the moral law (*KpV* 5:33*)*. Furthermore, this struggle is crucial in the agent's moral development since she will be empowered by her reason's ability to rule over her sensible desires, and she will better appreciate the worth that she assigns herself when she acts in accordance with the moral law.

6 MORAL MOTIVATION: RESPECT FOR THE MORAL LAW

In the last section I argued that McDowell's account of moral motivation flies in the face of Kant's own, in which inner-struggle plays a central role. In this section, I highlight yet another way in which McDowell's account of moral motivation is at odds with Kant's own. I point out that when Kant turns to the question of how moral requirements motivate agents, he argues that moral requirements must motivate human beings by means of an incentive. In so arguing, Kant appeals to the moral feeling of respect, the feeling through which the law becomes the incentive for action

and the subjective determining grounds of the will. The role Kant attributes to the moral feeling of respect in moral motivation cuts against McDowell's idea that human beings are motivated to act virtuously by simply recognizing moral reasons for acting. Furthermore, by way of responding to a possible objection, I also argue that Kant disagrees with McDowell's claim that the recognition of moral requirements instills in agents a desire for the action that the requirements command them to perform.

In the second *Critique*, in the chapter entitled "On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason," Kant says that all sensible beings need incentives in order to be motivated to act (*KpV* 5:72). Therefore, human beings, having both a rational and a sensible nature, must make use of incentives even when they are motivated to act by moral requirements. However, sense-based desires cannot be the incentives that motivate agents to act in accordance with the moral law because these desires and inclinations aim towards our own happiness and are quintessentially self-interested or self-regarding, prompting us to act in accordance with the principle of self-love (*KpV* 5:73). Thus, when motivated by sense-based desires, we act for the sake of pleasure, we are driven by the principle of self-love, and our actions fail to have moral worth.

Kant argues that if morality is possible for human beings, it must be possible for a law to directly determine the will, without using a mere feeling as a means of determination. In other words, human beings must be able to determine themselves to act in accordance with practical laws without being motivated by the promise of pleasure or benefit that can be reaped by acting in accordance with such principles. This means that we must be able to make use of some incentive that, unlike sense-based desires, does not motivate through the expectation of future pleasure. Though, Kant argues, it is beyond human reason to discover how it is possible for a law to directly determine the will (*KpV* 5:72), he claims that we can gain insight into the will's capacity to be

determined by laws alone if we look to the effects that the moral law has on our faculty of desire. He argues that we gain insight into the moral law's ability to directly determine the will when we detect that our sensible desires and inclinations can be completely constrained by our rational representation of the moral law. That is, we know that the moral law can determine our will because we feel respect for the law when our reason represents it and this feeling is the effect produces when our reason inhibits our desires and inclinations from determining our will and our actions. Thus, the feeling of respect is the effect of the law on our faculty of desire and it enables the law to serves as the sole incentive to action and as the subjective determining ground of the will without using any sensible feeling as a means of determination.

Kant's discussion of incentives and the feeling of respect seems to suggest that, since we are sensible beings, we cannot be motivated to act virtuously by simply recognizing that we have a reason for acting, or by recognizing that the moral law places requirements on us. Rather, we need to use the moral law as an incentive through the a priori feeling of respect that gives the law influence on the will and enables us to adopt and act in accordance with practical laws (*KpV* 5:72). When agents recognize moral requirements, or moral reasons for acting, but do not carry out the actions required from respect for the law and the dignified status that it gives them as rational beings capable of ruling over their sensible desires and inclinations, they are not actually motivated by the law. Furthermore, since agents need incentives in order to be motivated to act, when they are not motivated by respect for the law, they must be motivated by other incentives that stem from self-love and their desires for advantage or pleasure of some sort. Thus, unless an agent is motivated by respect for the law, her actions will not be virtuous. An agent must feel respect for the law and thereby use the law as an incentive to action in order to ensure the morality of her actions.

If we recall, McDowell maintains that in order to be motivated by moral requirements in the proper manner, it is sufficient for agents to recognize certain facts of their situation as constituting reasons for acting. It should now be clear that the account put forth by McDowell is at odds with Kant's account of what moral motivation entails. McDowell maintains that agents can in fact motivate themselves to act by simply recognizing that certain reasons for acting apply to them. He has in mind a picture of the virtuous agent according to which she can recognize that her friend is hungry, and by simply recognizing this fact she can determine that morality gives her a reason to perform some action, e.g., feed her friend. Furthermore, according to McDowell, if this agent is truly virtuous, the recognition that morality gives her a reason to act is sufficient to motivate her to act. However, according to Kant, the agent's recognition that morality gives her a reason to act cannot by itself motivate the agent in the proper moral way. This recognition can objectively determine the agent's will, but it cannot subjectively determine her will if she does not use her respect for the law as the source of her motivation.

Kant shows a keen awareness that our sensible nature must play an important role in all human motivation when he argues that the moral law can motivate us to act. He does not suggest that the rational apprehension of moral laws can motivate us to act on its own. Rather, he tells a complex story, according to which our apprehension of moral requirements affects our sensible nature by invoking in us respect for the law. Thus, if we follow McDowell in arguing that the mere recognition of moral reasons for acting is sufficient to motivate us, we must give up Kant's notion of what it means to be a being with a sensible and rational nature, who depends on incentives to be motivated to act. Though Kant argues that our sense-based desires and feelings cannot be preconditions for apprehending and being motivated by the law, he does acknowledge that our sensible nature must play a role in moral motivation. By appealing to the feeling of

respect, Kant acknowledges that there is an important sensible aspect that plays a role in moral motivation, while at the same time maintaining that sense-based desires and self-love in no way motivate moral action. Thus, in order to defend Kant's doctrine that moral requirements are categorical imperatives it is important to discuss how the feeling of respect allows our sensible nature to play a role in moral motivation without undermining the categorical nature of moral requirements. McDowell's account fails to do this and it is thus an unsatisfactory defense of Kant's doctrine.

Someone might object to my criticism of McDowell by pointing out that he does not claim that the mere recognition of reasons for acting is, strictly speaking, sufficient to motivate agents. After all, McDowell argues that after recognizing a reason for acting, the agent develops a desire to carry out the action commanded. Furthermore, the desire for acting in accordance with the moral requirement is the sensible component that motivates the agent to act. Thus, according to the objection, McDowell's account does not fly in the face of Kant's conception of human beings as having a rational and sensible nature, and as beings who must be sensibly affected in order to be motivated to act.

However, this objection can be dismissed because even if McDowell acknowledges that the agent's sensible nature plays a role in moral motivation, his account of how the agent's sensible nature figures into this picture remains at odds with Kant's theory. McDowell argues that when a virtuous agent recognizes that she has certain moral reasons for acting, a desire for so acting will be instilled in her. However, this is not how Kant describes the affective component that incentivizes agents to act in accordance with moral requirements. Kant explains that when we recognize the moral law as an objective determining basis of the will, we are humiliated and our self-love is constrained. In other words, when we recognize the moral law as a practical law that

applies to us, we recognize that the practical principles that our inclinations compel us to adopt are not legitimately authoritative. The moral law then removes the obstacles that our inclinations set before us when they tempt us to adopt illegitimate principles. When we constrain our self-love and hinder our inclinations, the moral law produces a feeling in us that is importantly different from a desire to carry out some action that is recognized as required (*KpV* 5:72-3). Whereas the sense-based desire to carry out an action is essentially empirical, respect is an a priori feeling. The desire to carry out an action, being a sense-based desire, arises from our self-love and our desire for pleasure, but respect arises from the rational awareness that we are not slaves to these sensible desires. Therefore, respect is not a self-interested desire that drives us to pursue pleasure. This is a crucial point since a desire to carry out an action would obliterate an action's moral worth because it would imply that the agent finds pleasure in the action itself or the effects that the action could bring about and is motivated by the expectation of such pleasure, not by the moral law. Thus, even if McDowell recognizes that our sensible nature must play a role in moral motivation, the role he assigns to it is incompatible with Kant's theory of moral motivation.

As we saw above, McDowell's account omits any reference to the role that respect plays in making the moral law the sole incentive to action and thus fails as a defense of Kant's doctrine. Furthermore, by omitting any reference to the moral feeling of respect, McDowell also misses an important distinction between actions that are done in accordance with the letter of the law, and actions that are done in the spirit of the law. Once we understand this crucial distinction, it will become clear that Kant would object to McDowell's account because it does not show that agents can be motivated to act by moral requirements, but only that agents can be motivated to act in accordance with moral requirements. According to Kant, unless an agent makes the moral law his sole incentive through the feeling of respect, she will not be motivated by a moral requirement

proper. Thus, since he omits any reference to the feeling of respect, McDowell's account only shows that agents can be motivated to act in accordance with moral requirements but not for the sake of the moral law. Though McDowell's agent might guide her actions according to practical laws, and though she might carry out actions that are in accordance with the law, she will not be motivated by the law. Rather, she will be motivated by her sense-based desires or inclinations.

Throughout his works on practical philosophy, Kant draws a distinction between an action that is done in accordance with the letter of the law and an action that contains the spirit of the law (*KpV* 5:72). He explains that even when an agent carries out an action, having recognized that morality requires the action, she can still fail to act virtuously or in a morally worthy manner. In the *Religion,* Kant says that in order to carry out actions that contain the spirit of the law and are thus virtuous, or morally valuable, it is not sufficient to act in accordance with practical laws. In other words, just because someone is motivated to carry out some action after recognizing that she has a moral requirement to do so, it does not yet mean that she is motivated to act *by* the moral law, or by the categorical imperative. For example, Kant says that those who have good mores will recognize that certain actions are required or forbidden by the moral law, or, in McDowell's terms, they will recognize that the moral law gives them a reason to omit or to carry out certain actions. Furthermore, these agents are often motivated to act in accordance with the moral requirements they recognize. However, the moral law does not necessarily motivate those who have good mores (*RGV* 6:30-1).

The reason why the actions of agents that have good mores are not necessarily morally worthy is that, though these agents recognize the correct moral principles, and though they determine their actions in accordance with these principles, they do not act from respect for the law. Since they do not act from respect for the law, the incentives that motivate these agents are

sense-based desires, such as the desire to be liked by others, or the desire to avoid punishment, etc. Kant says that those who act in accordance with the moral law but who do not do so from respect for the law subordinate the moral law to the principle of self-love (*RGV* 6:30). He suggests that these agents are not motivated by the sole incentive that preserves the morality in actions, i.e. respect for the moral law. Thus, they determine their actions in accordance with the law, but the law does not motivate them.

From Kant's discussion, it is clear that in order to give a proper account of moral motivation, it is not sufficient to claim that human beings can recognize moral reasons for acting, or moral principles, and can determine their actions in accordance with these principles. According to McDowell's account, if an agent recognizes certain requirements and is motivated to act in accordance with these requirements, we can infer that she was motivated by the moral requirement in accordance with which she determined her action. However, as we have seen, Kant does not agree with McDowell on this point. According to Kant, in order to infer that the agent was in fact motivated by the law and its requirements, we must account for how the law itself became her incentive and not just the rule by which she guided her actions

7 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of my criticisms has not been to argue that McDowell's interpretation is not adequate as an account of moral motivation. Rather, the goal of my paper has been to argue that McDowell's account fails as a defense of Kant's particular theory that moral requirements are categorical imperatives. Though my arguments do not refute McDowell's theory on its own terms, they do cast doubt on his account by bringing to light three main objections that Kant would have against its validity. Kant believed that categorical requirements must have certain features, and that they needed to motivate agents in a very particular fashion in order to be

legitimate categorical or moral requirements. I think Kant had good reasons to believe that in order to prove that moral requirements are categorical imperatives, we must be able to argue that they are not grounded in experience, that they motivate through an active constrain of and struggle against sense-based desires, and that the moral law itself can become an incentive for agents through the feeling of respect, rather than being a mere rule in accordance with which to model one's external actions. I hope to have shed light on Kant's reasons for thinking that moral requirements must meet these criteria if they are truly moral requirements and thus categorical imperatives. Furthermore, I hope to have motivated some concerns regarding the validity of McDowell's approach for arguing that moral requirements are categorical imperatives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aristotle. The *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans Sara Boradie and Christopher Rowe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Baxley, Margaret A. (2010) *Kant's Theory of Virtue.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foot, Philippa. (1972) 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives'. *The Philosophical Review* 81; 3, pp. 305-316.

Foot, Philippa (2001) *Natural Goodness.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Guyer, Paul. (200) *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guyer, Paul. (2008) *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hill, Thomas E. Jr. (1980) 'Humanity as an End in Itself'. *Ethics* 91:1, pp. 84-99.

Hill, Thomas. (1992) *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hill, Thomas (2012) *Virtue, Rules, and Justice: Kantian Aspirations.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kant, Immanuel, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy), ed. and trans. Robert Louden, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Kant, Immanuel, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, ed. and trans. Allen Wood and George de Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Kant, Immanuel, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, trans. Peter Heath. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Kant, Immanuel, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Timmermann, Jens. (2007) *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McDowell, John. (1978) 'Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?' *Proceedings of*

the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes, 52, pp. 13-29.

McCarty, Richard R. (1993) "Kantian Moral Motivation and the Feeling of Respect" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31:3, pp. 421-435.

Nagel, Thomas. (1978) *The Possibility of Altruism.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Reath, Andrews (2013) 'Kant's Moral Philosophy'. In Roger Crisp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stern, Robert. (2012) *Understanding Moral Obligation: Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, Allen. (1999) *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, Allen. (2008) *Kantian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.