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FOOT'S DOCTRINE OF MORALITY AS A SYSTEM OF HYPOTHETICAL IMPERATIVES[1]

MARCO RUFFINO

Departamento de Filosofia,
Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais,
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro,
Largo São Francisco de Paula, 1,
20051-070 RIO DE JANEIRO, RJ
BRAZIL

ruffino@bronislau-out.ifcs.ufrj.br

In this paper I critically discuss Foot's criticism of morality as a system of categorical imperatives. I develop some possible lines of reply based on Kant's work. I also examine McDowell's reply to Foot, and argue that his reply is not as far from Kant as he seems to think.

Oswaldo Chateaubriand is one of those rare combinations between an extremely knowledgeable teacher and an admirably original philosopher. I could hardly describe how much he has influenced my work in the last couple of years, as well as the work of a whole generation of young Brazilian philosophers. It is impossible not to be captivated by his personality: he has a charming and friendly way with his colleagues and students, and is one of those persons who reminds us that professional philosophy carried on with very high standards of relevance and rigour can be

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pleasant and fascinating at the same time. Oswaldo is for me a permanent source of inspiration, enthusiasm and critical background. I dedicate this paper to him.

One view of the Kantian doctrine of morality sees it as claiming that there are reasons for acting that are completely isolated from the way human beings actually construct ends for themselves, i. e., independent of any concrete volition. According to this interpretation, Kant's doctrine would imply that acting morally would be acting according to principles furnished by a theory that completely ignores concrete psychological processes normally involved in human action.

In my view, this interpretation is an over-simplification of the Kantian doctrine of morality. The derivation of the categorical imperative as it appears in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (from now on simply *GMM*) is primarily guided by certain basic premises according to which human volition in general can be understood. One of these premises is the requirement of the existence of an end in itself. This naturally suggests an analogy with the first book of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. In the same way that, for the Aristotelian doctrine, an action is irrational if it is not directed towards the highest achievable human good, acting against the categorical imperative contradicts rationality in the Kantian doctrine. For in the Kantian doctrine, acting against the categorical imperative means to move away from an end in itself.

Although much of this paper is inspired by this interpretation of the Kantian doctrine, I shall not undertake a detailed discussion and defense of it here. I shall rather focus on a particular argument presented by Philippa Foot against the Kantian thesis that morality has to be a system of categorical imperatives. In the first part of this paper I will present Foot's argument. In the second part, I discuss some relevant passages of Kant's *GMM* that might be seen as suggesting a general strategy for solving the puzzle created by Foot's argument. Although I will agree with her that the mere form of the categorical imperative is insufficient to guar-

antee its reason giving force, I will argue that Kant does not hold this naive position. In the third part, I will present John McDowell's view of categorical imperatives as moral requirements, as well as his criticism of Foot's position. I will argue that his view of the categorical imperative leaves some questions open. Finally, I will discuss some textual evidence showing that some aspects of McDowell's view are not as far from Kant's view as McDowell himself seems to assume.

I. FOOT'S CHALLENGE TO THE *CI*-THEORIST

Kant introduces his famous distinction between the two kinds of imperative judgments on p. 414 of *GMM*:[2]

> All *imperatives* command either *hypothetically* or *categorically*. Hypothetical imperatives declare a possible action to be practically necessary as a means to the attainment of something else that one wills (or that one may will). A categorical imperative would be one which represented an action as objectively necessary in itself apart from its relation to a further end.

As is well known, Kant thought that morality would only be possible if we consider the genuine moral judgements as having the form of a categorical imperative.

In her paper "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" (1972), Philippa Foot raises a challenge to those who accept the view that moral judgements are to be seen as categorical imperatives in the Kantian sense above. (For the sake of brevity, I am going to refer to the thesis that moral statements are categorical imperatives as the *CI*-thesis.) As Foot notices, we find two uses of "should" or "ought" in ordinary language, and these different uses correspond to Kant's distinction between both kinds of imperatives. One is a conditional use. Consider the following example: if

[2] Here, as elsewhere, references from *GMM* give pages according to the *Akademie* edition.

somebody in an airport tells us that he wants to go to New York, then our assertion could be "You should take flight number 720". This use of "should" is essentialy dependent on a certain interest or desire of the agent, and we could perfectly well, according to a suggestion made by Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein (1989), p. 12), replace the above assertion by "You should take flight number 720 if you want to go to New York". But there is a second use of "should" which does not seem to rest upon any condition such as a person's interests or desires. The "should" in this case does not depend on any special immediate or non-immediate project, and is even independent of the existence of any such project. For example, the assertion "you should not steal this book" is not dependent on any kind of interests or peculiar circumstances – such as the fact that this is my professor's book, and I don't want him to think badly of me – and it cannot be withdrawn by force of some contingency either – such as the fact that nobody will possibly notice the theft. This second use of "should" is an example of a categorical imperative and, according to the *CI*-theorist, this is the proper use of "should" in moral contexts. For Foot, the main difference between the two uses of "should" is that in the first kind of judgment we are ready to withdraw our assertion or substitute it with a different one if, either we discover that the agent has another end in mind than the one we thought, or we discover that there is a preferable way of achieving the original end than the action originally prescribed in our first assertion. In the second kind of use we are not ready to withdraw the assertion as a result of any kind of consideration concerning the agent's interests or desires.

Now Foot's argument is, in its general lines, simple. According to her, if we can find in ordinary language special non-hypothetical uses of "should" or "ought" which are clearly not in the context of what is normally considered as moral judgements, then a puzzle arises for the *CI*-theorist: how can one specify what makes the moral categorical imperative special with respect to the other

(non-moral) non-hypothetical uses of "should"? In a word: what is it that gives the moral categorical imperative its dignity? She presents the following as examples of non-moral categorical uses of "should":

> For instance, we find this non-hypothetical use of "should" in sentences enunciating rules of etiquette, as, for example, that an invitation in the third person should be answered in the third person, where the rule does not *fail to apply* to someone who has his own good reasons for ignoring this piece of nonsense... Similarly, there is a non-hypothetical use of "should" in contexts where something like a club rule is in question. The club secretary who has told a member that he should not bring ladies into the smoking-room does not say, "Sorry, I was mistaken" when informed that this member is resigning tomorrow and cares nothing about his reputation in the club. Lacking a connection with the agent's desires or interests, this "should" does not stand "unsupported and in need of support"; it requires only the backing of the rule. ((1972), p. 160)

Such are, according to Foot, examples where the "should" cannot be possibly withdrawn, and this is so quite independently of the agent's desires or projects. If there are in our language these other possible forms of unconditional use of "should", and if the *CI*-theorist would not recognize in them examples of genuine categorical imperatives, then the *CI*-theorist owes an explanation of what is so special about the unconditional use of "should" in moral contexts that makes it distinct in dignity from other (non-moral) uses.

A first, immediate response to Foot's challenge would probably be the following: the moral categorical imperative necessarily has a reason-giving force, while the other uses of "should" do not. But, as she comments in footnote 8 ((1972), p. 168), this answer merely rephrases the problem in another form. This answer generates the following dilemma: either (i) every non-hypothetical use of "should" has a reason-giving force or, (ii) the "should", when used in moral contexts, has something special. Alternative

(i) is implausible, as the examples chosen by Foot seem to show. And (ii) is yet to be explained by the *CI*-theorist. By proposing this dilemma, Foot wants to make the following point, which I think is basically correct: the mere form of the categorical imperative is not enough to guarantee its reason-giving force, as Kant (according to her) thought it was. Concerning the task of providing an independent (non-circular) explanation of the reason-giving force of the moral unconditioned use of "should", Foot complains that most philosophers of Kantian inclination merely repeat the proposition, instead of explaining it ((1972), p. 161). She briefly reviews some attempted explanations for the second horn of the dilemma which appeal to such terms as "normative character" (p. 162), "binding force" (p. 162), "necessity" (p. 163) and "another sense of the words 'have to' or 'must'" (p. 163) which could possibly escape the dilemma. As she argues, all these explanations either make use of some more obscure notions or presuppose some other version of that which they are supposed to explain. Foot concludes that "moral judgements have no better claim to be categorical imperatives than do statements about matters of etiquette" ((1972), p. 164).

Based on this apparently insuperable challenge to the *CI*-thesis, Foot suggests that the situation would be better if moral judgements were seen as hypothetical rather than categorical imperatives. She explains at length in her paper how this alternative can be made plausible, without leading in the disaster that Kant and other *CI*-theorists have predicted for morality. According to Foot, we may consider moral judgements as hypothetical imperatives simply by allowing as ends things that seem to be ends, such as truth, liberty and justice. If we see hypothetical imperatives as statements that have the general form:

you should do *X* in order to obtain *Y*

morality is now possible if we accept that there is a special class of *Y*s that seem to be ends for the majority of human beings. A certain action is virtuous if it is possible to show that it has an internal connection with some end *Y* of this class.[3] It is, of course, a *contingent* fact that the majority of human beings have these ends in common; but Foot sees no reason to be alarmed by the contingency of this fact, as she explains in a nice passage of her paper:

> We are apt to panic at the thought that we ourselves, or other people, might stop caring about the things we do care about, and we feel that the categorical imperative gives us some control over the situation. But it is interesting that the people of Leningrad were not struck by the thought that only the *contingent* fact that other citizens shared their loyalty and devotion to the city stood between them and the Germans during the terrible years of the siege. ((1972), p. 167)

It is important to notice that Foot's criticism must be seen not as a definite refutation of the *CI*-thesis, but rather as a challenge for the *CI*-theorist. It is open to the *CI*-theorist to try some other alternatives of explanation of the reason-giving force of the moral categorical imperative. Her criticism is, nevertheless, quite convincing as a refutation of a crude view of the moral categorical imperative. But it is unfair to Kant himself to consider him as having held this crude view. This is what I shall discuss in the next section. In addition, McDowell's more elaborate view can also be seen as escaping Foot's puzzle, as I shall explain in the third section.

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[3] In another paper (1958-59) Foot develops an argument for the claim that justice is a virtue in the following way: she first accepts what she calls Trasymachus' premise and tries to deny his conclusion (injustice is more profitable than justice) by showing the benefits *Y* for human beings that are internally connected with acting in accordance with justice ((1958-59), pp. 125-129).

II. SOME POSSIBLE KANTIAN STRATEGIES

Although Foot's criticism is addressed to the *CI*-theorists in general, it is natural to have Kant in mind as her main interlocutor. What I intend to do now is to bring some considerations based on passages of Kant's *GMM* that could possibly suggest an strategy for escaping from Foot's puzzle.

II.1 Let us pay attention to the following restriction made by Kant about the possibility of the categorical imperative:

> Suppose, however, there were something *whose existence* has *in itself* an absolute value, something which as *an end in itself* could be a ground of determinate laws; then in it, and in it alone, would there be the ground of a possible categorical imperative – that is, of a practical law. (*GMM*, 428)

This appears to be a fundamental aspect of Kant's view of the moral law: the rule to which the non-hypothetical "should" will be added in order to build a categorical imperative must have a connection with an end in itself. Moreover, the moral rule can exist only if some end in itself exists. I am not concerned here with the plausibility of what Kant presents as the end in itself (the rational being), but merely with the formal effects of such a restriction.

Let us consider once more Foot's examples of non-conditional uses of "should". As she suggests in p. 168 (footnote 8), these examples can be generalized in the following way: put together any set of rules you want and add to it an unconditional "should":

You should φ

Now, her challenge was: What differentiates the moral categorical imperative from any other statement of the form above? Paying attention to the restriction that Kant makes in the quotation

above, a possible line of thought would be that, in the moral categorical imperative, the φ in question must have an internal connection with an end in itself. The passage quoted from the *GMM* shows, in my opinion, that Kant was aware of the fact that it is not the simple addition of an unconditional "should" to the set of rules φ that produces a categorical imperative. There must be something special about the nature of φ, and this is its conection with an end in itself.

But what does it mean to say that every rational being wants this end in itself? It seems that, for Kant, the volition of a rational being can only be understood if we presuppose the existence of an end in itself. According to him, the end in itself has no existence parallel to other possible ends, but it has just the status of a *formal* end. This formal end is not to be wished by a concrete will in the same way that, say, a certain job or ice-cream is desired. This is what, I think, Kant suggests in the following remark:

> Rational nature separates itself out from all other things by the fact that it sets itself an end. An end would thus be the matter of every good will. But in the Idea of a will which is absolutely good – good without any qualifying condition (namely, that it should attain this or that end) – there must be complete abstraction from every end that has not to be *produced* (as something which would make every will only relatively good). Hence the end must here be conceived, not as an end to be produced, *but as a self-existent* end. It must, therefore, be conceived only negatively. (*GMM*, p. 437)

But although this end in itself has no parallel existence to other ends such as a job or ice-cream, it is, nevertheless, implicit in every individual act of our volition:

> Now this end can be nothing other than the subject of all possible ends himself. (*ibid.*)

These considerations naturally suggest a certain parallel with the first book of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*. "I refuse to act according to the categorical imperative" means, from this perspective, something like "I refuse to engage in a certain action that will bring me closer to the end in itself". According to the Aristotelian view of ethics, there must be some end which is desired for its own sake and not simply as an instrument for other ends, for otherwise we would have an infinite regress of ends, and in this situation human action would not be intelligible. The equivalent to the refusal above would be "I don't want to be happy", which means "I don't want the highest achievable human good". In both cases, the agent is violating some constraints of rationality.[4]

This reflections suggest a possible way of disqualifying Foot's examples of non-moral categorical uses of "should". Consider the following general test: if the question "why should I follow φ?" remains intelligible in our ordinary understanding when we substitute a certain rule *R* for φ, then the addition of "should" to *R cannot* be the expression of a legitimate categorical imperative. We could say that, in this situation, there are some additional aspects of the meaning of the terms involved in *R* that may not have been fully clarified yet, but which will certainly show that "you should *R*" is in fact asserted under certain more general conditions. Now it seems clear that the question proposed remains intelligible if we substitute for φ rules of etiquette or some club rule. Different answers to the question above could be given, appealing, e. g., to the worth of keeping a certain tradition, or to the possible benefits of adopting a certain attitude in society, or even to the aesthetic effect caused by certain words or gestures. In each of these cases, our analysis would show that it is not quite legitimate

[4] The parallel I am suggesting here is, of course, limited. For the final end considered by Aristotle (happiness) and the Kantian end in itself have some important difference in their status as ends. But, again, I do not want to discuss in further detail the content of the end in itself in the Kantian philosophy.

to consider the uses of "should" in question as unconditional. The situation is different if we now substitute for φ some rule attached to an end in itself: the question no longer remains intelligible. In these circumstances, the question would rather be the expression of a grammatical misunderstanding of the terms involved in the rule, analogous to "why should I use some metric system to measure the length of this table?".

This suggests the following: if the analysis of examples such as rules of etiquette could be more complete than Foot considered it, we could see that what appears to be a categorical use of "should" is actually a hypothetical use in the Kantian sense if the use of "should" in question is considered in a broader context. We may also see a way of excluding the examples presented by Foot as candidates for categorical imperatives.

Foot's original criterion for the recognition of a non-hypothetical use of "should" in a certain imperative was:

(1) *we are not prepared to withdraw our assertion by considerations of the agent's interests or desires*

But it seems legitimate, in the light of our test proposed above, to require a further clause:

(2) *the question "why should I follow φ" must be unintelligible when applied to the use of "should" in question.*

As we saw, it seems that clause (2) is implied if Kant's following (stronger) condition is imposed:

(2') φ *must be dependent on the existence of an end in itself.*

(1) and (2') together seem to imply not only that there is a distinctive feature of the moral categorical imperative, but also the

stronger thesis that the only categorical imperative is the moral one.

II.2 In the footnote of p. 410 of the *GMM*, Kant compares the pure philosophy of morals with pure mathematics, as opposed, respectively, to applied morals and applied mathematics. It is well known that Kant considers mathematics as a system of synthetic *a priori* statements. Consistently, Kant comments that:

> [W]ith this categorical imperative or law of morality the reason for our difficulty (in comprehending its possibility) is a very serious one. We have here a synthetic *a priori* practical proposition; and since in theoretical knowledge there is so much difficulty in comprehending the possibility of propositions of this kind, it may readily be gathered that in practical knowledge the difficulty will be no less. (*GMM*, p. 420)

Now, part of the puzzle posed by Foot to the *CI*-theorist involves the question what is implied by the rejection of a moral statement? As she comments:

> The fact is that the man who rejects morality because he sees no reason to obey its rules can be convicted of villainy but not of inconsistency. Nor will his actions necessarily be irrational. Irrational actions are those in which a man in some way defeats his own purposes, doing what is calculated to be disadvantageous or to frustrate his ends. Immorality does not *necessarily* involve any such thing.((1972), pp. 161-162)

I believe that, by exploring the Kantian analogy between moral philosophy and mathematics above, it is possible to see a strategy for answering this question. Mathematics as a synthetic *a priori* discipline makes explicit the conditions under which we can understand nature. In other words, mathematics has the special task of elucidating what is already presupposed in our apprehension of external reality – and hence in our discourse about nature. A mathematical truth differs from an analytical truth in that its nega-

tion does not imply a contradiction. But although a description of the physical world that does not follow the canons of arithmetic and Euclidian geometry is not contradictory, it is not understandable, and therefore not rational. In a word: the existence of another universe which is not Euclidian or in which our arithmetic does not hold, is conceivable but this universe could never be understood by our reason. Moral Philosophy as a discipline of practical reason can be seen as having a similar task: it has the special function of making explicit certain canons of our understanding of human action. This interpretation finds support in the way Kant describes the role of the categorical imperative in the *GMM*:

> It is concerned, not with the matter of the action and its presumed results, but with its form and with the principle from which it follows. (p. 416)

Somebody who refuses the categorical imperative as furnishing reasons for action cannot be convicted of inconsistency if the term "inconsistency" is understood in a strict sense – i. e. in disagreement with some logical law. But this person can be convicted of irrationality in the sense that he fails to understand certain basic constitutive aspects of human volition. (In the same way that someone who refuses to add according to ordinary arithmetic is not violating any logical law, but is violating a canon of rationality.) And this person can certainly be convicted of irrationallity precisely in the sense of irrationality exposed by Foot in the passage quoted above. He is irrational because he is defeating his own (implicit) purpose: the end in itself. And, as we have seen, the existence of this end in itself is a necessary condition for the derivation of the moral law.

III. MCDOWELL'S DEFENSE OF THE *CI*-THESIS

A different response to Foot's challenge was outlined by John McDowell in his article "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" (1978). McDowell agrees with Foot that an agent cannot be charged with irrationality if he fails to be motivated by the moral law. But he disagrees that this implies the exclusion of the categorical imperative as the adequate form of moral rules. His argument has two main steps. First, McDowell claims that Foot would have no qualms with a certain model of explanation for prudent behavior (which I will explain shortly). But, according to him, if she accepts this model for prudent behavior, there seems to be no reason for not extending it to virtuous behavior as well. McDowell describes this first step as an *ad hominem* argument. Then he moves on to the second step, which is basically the following claim: if we accept that this model of explanation can be extended to virtuous behavior, then there is a much more plausible way of describing virtuous action as "action in accordance with the categorical imperative" than simply as "obedience to a code". There is also a more plausible way of understanding the difference between moral requirements and hypothetical imperatives.

The model of explanation of prudent behaviour mentioned above comes from a special view (originaly defended by Thomas Nagel) about the relation between desires and beliefs, which I am going to call D/B-thesis: *a full specification of reasons for acting must include an explanation of why those reasons are capable of motivating the agent.* According to the D/B-thesis – as McDowell understands it – ascribing a certain desire to an agent may be seen simply as a part or as a consequence of our assertion that the agent can be motivated by certain reasons. In other words, the D/B thesis implies that accounting for the conception that the agent has of the circumstances or for the way he sees facts may suffice as an explanation of why this and not that reason is capable of motivating the agent. In this explanatory framework, a certain desire is not to be understood as an isolated and purely subjective

entity endowed with a certain primitive causal power which, when added to a set of beliefs, leads to action.[5]

In the fourth section of his paper McDowell considers the following question: would it be possible for two persons to have exactly the same conception of the circumstances and, nevertheless, one of them be motivated by certain reasons and the other not? If this is the case, then the former thesis that attending to the agent's conception of the circumstances suffices to explain the way certain reasons motivate him may be wrong. But if we regard this possibility as real, we are presupposing that a conception of the circumstances may be motivationally neutral, and the desires or interests come as something extra added to this conception, and this is, according to McDowell, a wrong point of view:

> It is not that two people share a certain neutral conception of the facts, but differ in that one, but not the other, has an independent desire as well, which combines with that neutral conception of the facts to cast a favourable light on his acting in a certain way. ((1978), p. 17)

However, McDowell does not have a definite argument showing the absurdity of the possibility in question. Indeed, all he can claim is that this possibility is excluded by someone who has a view of the relation between conceptions of the facts and motivations for acting consistent with the D/B thesis. This becomes clear when he considers, in the fifth section, a possible objection to his model of explanation for virtuous behavior: someone can simply refuse to see this interdependence between the conceptual and the motivational level as valid for prudential behavior, and so not be impressed by McDowell's *ad hominem* argument. This competing view sees the will and the cognition as distinct and independent human

[5] "But the commitment to ascribe such a desire is simply consequential on our taking him to act as he does for the reason we cite; the desire does not function as an independent extra component in a full specification of his reason."((1978), p. 15)

faculties. A view of how things are is a feature or a disposition of this cognitive aspect, but only independent psychological facts would be the relevant elements in an explanation of why a certain action appears in a favourable light to the agent. Consequently, an explanation of certain behavior must include, according to this picture, two distinct and isolated levels – namely, the cognitive and the psychological levels. McDowell makes it clear that he presupposes that the reader accepts his special view about the relation between the cognitive and the psychological levels as an explanation for prudential behaviour, and does not want to argue exhaustively, in this paper, for the incorrectness of the competing picture.[6]

The core of McDowell's objection to Foot's criticism of the *CI*-thesis is explained in the following passage:

> Mrs Foot sometimes seems to suggest that if someone acts in a way he takes to be morally required, and his behaviour cannot be shown to be rational as a case of conformity to an hypothetical imperative, then he must be blindly obeying an inculcated code... But if we deny that virtuous behaviour can always be explained as the outcome of independently intelligible desires, we do not thereby commit ourselves to its being mere obedience to a code. ((1978), p. 20)

McDowell does not directly contradict her thesis that morality is a system of hypothetical imperatives, but rather suggests that Foot had an incorrect picture of what could be counted as an alternative to her own position. According to McDowell, Foot was a victim of the following false dilemma: either (1) virtuous behavior can only be explained as the outcome of independently intelligible

[6] "This paper is primarily addressed to those who are vulnerable to the *ad hominem* argument. In their view, since the line of thought I have just sketched [the concurrent view] falsifies the workings of prudential explanations of behaviour, it simply cannot be generally right." ((1978), p. 18)

desires or (2) virtuous behavior can be explained by obedience to a code. But, as McDowell sees it, (2) is not the only alternative to (1). This dilemma is extremely significant, since two great lines of moral philosophy seem to be constituted according to the acceptance of (1) or (2). Hume certainly had the dilemma in mind, and tried to reduce possibility (2) to an absurdity. Kant, according to Foot and McDowell, also accepted the dilemma:

> Kant, in fact, was a psychological hedonist in respect of all actions except those done for the sake of the moral law. (Foot (1978), p. 165)

> If so, we need not suppose – as Kant perhaps did – that an action's being the outcome of a natural desire disqualifies it as a manifestation of virtue. (McDowell (1978), p. 21)

McDowell's position about the falsity of the dilemma seems to me essentialy correct. But his claim that Kant accepted (2) needs some qualification, as I will argue shortly.[7]

As I mentioned before, McDowell's *ad hominem* argument states that, if Foot accepts this relation between the agent's conception of the circumstances and the agent's desire as an explanation of prudential behavior:

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[7] McDowells claim that Foot was a victim of the false dilemma also seems to be in need of some qualification. She does advocate a necessary connection between justice and "what one wants", if justice is to be seen as a virtue at all ((1958-59), p. 127). But she suggests elsewhere that "what one wants" is not to be understood as independently intelligible desires. For example, in "Hume on Moral Judgments" (1963), she says:

> We are not inclined to think that when a man says that an action is virtuous, or vicious, he is talking about his own feelings rather than a quality which he must show really to belong to what is done. (p. 77)

> Why should the reasons which move people to virtuous behaviour not be similar to the reasons which move them to prudent behaviour?... Why should it not be the case, here too, that the agent's conception of the situation, properly understood, suffices to show us the favourable light in which his action appeared to him? If we credit him with a suitable desire, then, as before, that need be no more than a consequence of the fact that we take his conception of the circumstances to have been his reason for acting as he did. ((1978), pp. 15-16)

Now McDowell's special version of the categorical imperative does not recognize a gap between acting according to rules stated categorically and acting according to the agent's desires. According to him, to accept moral rules as unconditionally furnishing reasons for acting may be, at the same time, to have a special sensibility for these rules. The question "what kind of reward may I expect in following this rule?" may not make sense if the person comes to see the situation in an appropriate way, namely, in the way that a virtuous person would see it. McDowell mentions a "perceptual capacity" according to which one can "see situations in a special light" ((1978), p. 21). The exercise of this perceptual capacity makes unnecessary, in some cases, the addition of a supplementary reward so that an action appears to be the right thing to do. The purpose of moral education would then be the development of this perceptual capacity, in order to come to see the facts in the appropriate way.

A crucial question for McDowell's approach is how to distinguish moral requirements from prudential considerations. He explains this point in the following passage:

> If a situation in which virtue imposes a requirement is genuinely conceived as such, according to this view, then considerations which, in the absence of the requirement, would have constituted reasons for acting otherwise are silenced altogether – not overridden – by the requirement. ((1978), p. 26)

That is, coming to see the facts in a way that matches the perspective of a virtuous person is concomitant with absorbing a hierarchy of reasons that makes parallel reasons insignificant when confronted with moral ones. If moral requirements are so conceived, then, according to McDowell, there is a different sense in which we can say that prudential considerations are hypothetical imperatives: their influence on the will does not depend on the existence of a desire, but on the absence of a moral requirement. The latter, however, is not dependent on the existence of a desire or on the absence of any other requirement.

A problem with McDowell's distinction is that it is not sharp enough, and leaves some fundamental questions open. The first unanswered question is, of course, what exactly McDowell means with his suggestion of moral reasons *silencing* other reasons. Second, I do not see a clear exclusion of the possibility that some prudential considerations might, under certain circumstances, silence any other competing considerations. Imagine the situation in which we have two different conceptions of the circumstances (in McDowell's sense), and only one of them matches that of the virtuous person. May we not say that in the case of the non-virtuous person's conception certain considerations, if properly appreciated, silence every competing consideration altogether? In other words, if what differentiates moral from prudential considerations is their special (internal) role in the virtuous person's way of perceiving the circumstances, why should we not recognize this special (internal) role played by some different kind of considerations in a non-virtuous way of perceiving the circumstances? It seems that we still can say, consistently with McDowell's framework, that there are other moral considerations besides those which a virtuous person would embrace. I do not see a clear way out in McDowell's approach.

Two final remarks should be made. First, I think that we can see in the following note of Kant's *GMM* a suggestion that sounds

very much like McDowell's (vague) idea about moral reasons silencing prudential considerations:

> I have a letter from the late distinguished Professor Sulzer, in which he asks me what is it that makes moral instructions so ineffective, however convincing it may be in the eyes of reason. Because of my efforts to make it complete, my answer came too late. Yet it is just this: the teachers themselves do not make their concepts pure, but – since they try to do well by hunting everywhere for inducements to be moral – they spoil their medicine altogether by their very attempt to make it really powerful. For the most ordinary observation shows that when a righteous act is represented as being done with a steadfast mind in complete disregard of any advantage in this or in another world, and even under the greatest temptations of afflictions or allurement, it leaves far behind it any similar action affected even in the slightest degree by an alien impulsion and casts it into the shade: it uplifts the soul and rouses a wish that we too could act in this way. Even children of moderate age feel this impression, and duties should never be presented to them in any other way. (p. 410, footnote 2)

It seems that, for Kant, the proper function of moral education is to place the moral action – i.e., the action in accordance with the moral law – in a special light, so that no prudential consideration can be compared to it. The contrast Kant makes between the wrong and the correct way of showing the value of an act of honesty seems to go in the same direction of McDowell's contrast between what he describes as a moral consideration *overridding* a prudential consideration and a moral consideration *silencing* prudential considerations. That is to say, McDowell's picture of morality is not as far from Kant's doctrine as he seems to suppose. Indeed, Kant's doctrine can even be used to make sharper some distinctions that are left vague in McDowell's approach.

Finaly, it does not seem quite correct to see Kant as saying that any action that is the outcome of a natural desire cannot be qualified as moral in the proper sense. In this perspective, Kant

seems to be prescribing complete emotional sterility as the only possible way of acting morally. I think that a better interpretation of Kant's view is the following: to be (or not to be) the outcome of a natural desire and to be (or not to be) in accordance with the moral law are two different *aspects* according to which an action can be considered. But what is relevant to classifing the action as moral or non-moral is only the second aspect. The first aspect is simply irrelevant for this purpose. It is not exactly correct to say that, for Kant, acting in accordance with one's desires is incompatible with acting in accordance to the moral law (as McDowell and Foot suggest). In p. 442 of the *GMM*, for example, Kant praises the moral feeling as "closer to morality" and adds that "it [the moral feeling] does virtue the honour of ascribing to her *immediately* the approval and esteem in which she is held". This is, in my view, entirely compatible with the following claim: if we want now to have a clear representation of a virtuous action, the best way of achieving it is to imagine an action completely devoid of all its irrelevant aspects. It seems to me that Kant has both ideas. Philosophers like Foot and McDowell tend to concentrate on the second one, and to mistakenly understand it as a prescription for moral actions.

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