

Kant, Schiller, Obligation and Chimerical Ethics¹

Charles Feldhaus*

Universidade Estadual de Londrina (Londrina, Brasil)

Introduction

The ethics of Kant is often referred to as a deontological ethics, as one ethical conception, whose fundamental concept is moral obligation in contrast to the teleological ethics, whose fundamental concept is end. This dichotomy does not naturally capture the complexity of the ethical conception of Kant in relation to other ethical views as utilitarianism, ethical virtues, among others. The ethics of Kant also operates with the concept of end in the second part of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, the Doctrine of Virtue. Kant said that there are two ends which are both duties (MS, AA 06 382-3), namely, a "categorical imperative of pure practical reason (...)the concept of duty will lead to ends and will have to establish maxims with respect to ends we ought to set ourselves". These ends are our own perfection (*eigene Vollkommenheit*) and the happiness of others (*fremde Gluckseligkeit*). However, as claimed by Oliver Sensen (2015, p. 139), even if the concept of obligation (*Verbindlichkeit, Verpflichtung, obligatio*) is not that concept which routinely is used to summarize the ethical thinking of Kant, "obligation is at the heart of moral philosophy of Kant, and the bond behind many of the other concepts. " That is the case mainly when discussing the development of ethical thinking of Kant, especially the precritical ethical thinking, namely, what Kant thought about ethics before publication of *The Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals* in 1785. The first book where Kant deals with moral philosophy is the *Enquiry into the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morals* or what is normally called the *Prize Essay* in 1763. The central concept here is the notion of the primary obligation and the precarious condition of the moral philosophy in this moment (A. A, II, 298). The concept of obligation here is not

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* E-mail: charlesfeldhaus@yahoo.com.br

related to the duties or to the particular actions that the duties require, but to the normativity or to the necessity involved in morality. Moreover, this same concept is developed in the course of the *Lectures on Ethics* as well as in the *Lessons on Natural Law Naturrecht Feyerabend* and Kant relates the concept of obligation with the of autonomy in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. It is important to say that Kant develops the concept of obligation as an alternative to the conception of the obligation to the theological voluntarism of Pufendorf and theological intellectualism of Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, among others in the precritical period.

In this development process of the notion of obligation, it is important to emphasize the relevance of Christian Wolff, who, according to Schwaiger (2009, p. 62), introduced conceptual innovation in the theory of obligation based on the idea of an inner motivation to perform those actions which are recognized as correct and refused to the assumption of an external authority as supreme legislator as a requirement of the obligation and Alexander Baumgarten who was the first to interpret the whole of moral philosophy from the point of view of a theory of obligation (Schwaiger, 2009, p. 63). The main conceptual innovation of Kant would have been the transformation of the word 'imperative', featuring a grammatical category of express sentences in a certain way, a term to define the specific characteristic of moral philosophy, namely the imperative form, the categorical imperative as kind of specifically moral judgment (Schwaiger, 2009, p. 70). However, this study aims to show how the notion of obligation and duty play a central role in the debate between Kant and Schiller and that, contrary to what may seem to at first sight the position of Schiller, the ethics of the German poet do not completely abandon the perspective of normative and deontological ethics. David Pugh (1996, p. 240, note) says that there is a tendency for researchers of the moral philosophy of Schiller to focus only in the work *On grace and dignity* and this first part that deals with the concept of grace and ignore almost completely the second part of their work dealing with the concept of dignity. This emphasis only on the first part of the work leads to these researchers to interpret the moral conception of Schiller based on notions of harmony and beauty and forget that this text was written by a writer whose major works were tragedies, of which the central element is the sublime and not the beautiful.

Historical considerations in relation to the concept of obligation

Zoller examines the conceptual history and function of two concepts: obligatory (*Verbindlichkeit*) and obligation (*Verpflichtung*), from Roman law to mature moral philosophy of Kant, particularly comparing and contrasting the concept of obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*) of *Lectures on Natural Law*

NaturrechtFeyerabend with the conception that Kant presents in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Zoller, 2015, p. 347). The concept of obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*) and its successor are derived from Roman law, in particular the Latin concept of obligatio. Kant is concerned and limited to discussing the basic methodological concepts, which are translated from juridical sphere to the moral one (Zoller, 2015, p. 349). Political and legal concepts originally like the idea of the will, law, autonomy migrate from the legal sphere and political to the ethics one (Zoller, 2015, p. 350). The term obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*) designated in financial discourse in the Germany the customary monetary obligations. However, hence arises the problem of differentiating the two terms usually translated by obligation, the concept of *Verbindlichkeit* of *Verpflichtung*. From this comes the suggestion to translate *Verbindlichkeit* by mandatory (bindingness) and *Verpflichtung* by obligation (obligation) (Zoller, 2015 p.351). But the Latin term obligatio is usually translated into German by *Verbindlichkeit* and designates the legal strength and effectiveness of a contractual relationship. (Zoller, 2015, p. 352) *Obligatio* was restricted to the area of contractual and even restricted to the transference of ownership and monetary equivalents relations. What was originally translated by *Verbindlichkeit* in the eighteenth century, it becomes translated by *Verpflichtung*, which is derived from the German word *Pflicht*. *Obligatio* as *Verbindlichkeit* was first of all a legal concept, as *Verpflichtung* is more suitable for both the legal sphere and the moral sphere. (Zoller, 2015, p. 354) "It was Kant who undertook the dual and linked conceptual transition from the specific legal obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*) the general obligation (*Verpflichtung*)" (Zoller, 2015, p. 355)

The concept of *verbindlichkeit* in prize essay

In the precritical work *Enquiry into the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morals*, Kant points out that philosophy was still far from finding the first distinct concept of obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*). To Korsgaard (1989, p 313), the problem that Kant attempts to resolve in the final part of the text that deals with moral philosophy is to "find an analysis of the obligation that combines the two elements of the obligation or normativity: motivation (motivation) and compulsory (bindingness)". Robert Stern (2013, p. 129) argues that the distinction between holy will and human will occupy a key role in explaining how the binding force and the necessity involved in morality without recourse a divine commander is possible. However, the distinction between holy will and human will is essential to understand the sense of obligation involved in morality, since the deontological moral conception of Kant was still committed to the figure of an external being in the explanation of the possibility of morality as

mandatory. Stern (2013, p. 140) explores the possibility of explaining the mandatory nature of morality without recourse to distinguish between holy will and human will. But that will not be the subject of this study.

Stern takes up the attempt of Korsgaard to explain normativity, particularly the distinction between two types of response to this question: a) the framework of the virtuous agent as a person whose desires and inclinations were so trained so that she does not longer experience the moral law as an obligation and acts in a spontaneous way, Korsgaard called this one a good dog agent; b) the framework of the virtuous agent as someone in need of a constant reform, which requires a suppression of desires in order to conform to the demands of duty, she called this one a miserable sinner agent. Korsgaard ranks the position of Kant at least partly as an example of the second case, the miserable sinner (Korsgaard, 2009, p.7; Stern, 2013, p. 141). She proposes an alternative interpretation to the explanation of the notion of moral obligation based on the idea that the fight involved in morality concerns a struggle to achieve psychic unity and not a struggle to be rational or morally good as Kant is supposed to do. Stern said that Korsgaard "puts necessitation in the wrong place," there is not at least in the moral philosophy of Kant, a struggle for psychic unity, but still a struggle to act in a moral way. Although the position of Kant regarding the moral obligation shares some aspects with what Korsgaard called the miserable sinner, I would say that the debate between Kant and Schiller could serve to clarify how Kant's position distances also from this conception of obligation based on the notion of the miserable sinner. Kant in *Metaphysics of Morals* clearly differentiates his conception of the virtue from an ascetic monastic ethics and that seems much closer to what Korsgaard called a miserable sinner. Kant said that the ascetic monastic morality consists of a kind of moral fanaticism to be avoided (MS, AA 06 484-5). The good dog picture seems to be similar to what Schiller called a beautiful soul.

In *Enquiry into the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morals*, Kant (UD, AA 02 298) differentiates between two obligation senses: as a means to a desired end; and as something that should be done immediately. The first sense of necessitation is related to the means to solve some problems and in fact is not any obligation, but a precept for solving problems, since they only indicate what are the necessary means to be employed to achieve certain ends. At this point in the development of his ethical thought, Kant argues that in order to call something a 'duty', it is necessary to find an end in itself. The ground of the obligation must order an action as necessary in an immediate way and not as means to a contingent end. Kant here also argues that the material principle of the obligation is something not able to be provable and seems to defend a version of perfectionism of Wolffian school as the formal principle of obligation (Korsgaard, 1989, p. 313). Although Kant also argues that the perfectionist criterion, without the inclusion of material principles of obligation, would be formally empty or

unable to derive duties and a similar objection will be presented by Hegel against the ethics of Kant based on the categorical imperative as developed from 1785 on, with the publication of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Thus, "the discussion of ethics *Essay Prize* ends inconclusively" (Korsgaard, 1989, p. 313). Dieter Henrich points out that Kant understands that "the flaws in the obligation of concept analysis are responsible for the opacity and the death of the evidence in the practical wisdom of the world" (Henrich, 2012, p. 24). Also, Henrich (2012, p. 27) points out that Kant would have left the 1762 project, so that the "problem of the relationship between formal principles and obligation to materials that still in 1762, was therefore resolved so that it became characteristic of the whole Kantian ethics. At the root of this solution is the insight that ethical obligation establishes a demand for volition and action. "

The response of Kant to Schiller in *religion*

In response to Schiller in the second edition of the *Religion within the limits of the simple reason*, Kant (*RGV*, AA 06 24) points out that Schiller disapproves the presentation of the concept of duty, which could give the impression of being a monastic conception of virtue. Kant gave already an answer to this objection in the note of the *Religion with the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, although he offered an answer with more details only in the *The Metaphysics of Morals* and in the *Lectures on Ethics Metaphysics of Morals Vigilantius (1793-4)*. Someone could say that the disagreement between Schiller and Kant is not about that duty has a role to play in the moral reflection, but that virtue should not be presented as something that gives the impression that the moral requirement is the negation of the sensitive part of the human being. Kant seems to realize this point when he emphasizes that the concept of virtue is not incompatible with a joyful heart in the fulfillment of duty, although Kant also understands that the concept of grace and the concept of duty cannot be harmonized in the way that figure of the beautiful soul of Schiller supposes. That the concept of duty still occupies a role in the ethical conception of Schiller is evident when he deals particularly with the concept of dignity, that is the focus of the second part of the work *On Grace and Dignity*. Moreover, it is important to observe that Schiller still employs the deontic language in ethics, so it is wrong to hold that there is a difference between Schiller and Kant with regard to the specificity of ethics, when he says, for example, that "human being not only can, but must combine pleasure and duty; it must comply with the joy his reason" (Schiller, 2008, p. 38). Schiller and Kant consider the natural philanthropist as not a model of moral virtue. To be a virtuous person require for both of them control the inclination that are against what the morality require from the human beings.

Schiller and *the metaphysik der sitten vigilantius*

In *Lectures on Ethics Metaphysik der SittenVigilantius*, Kant is devoted explicitly to answer the objections of Friedrich Schiller to his moral conception. The position of Kant in relation to Schiller here is less conciliatory, but a central element, although still less explored in the note to the second edition of *Religion with the Boundaries of Mere Reason* here is presented, namely the incompatibility between the concept of grace and the concept of duty or obligation, because the concept of duty contains the concept of an unconditional obligation, that is in contradiction with the concept of grace. Kant believes that when duty speaks, grace keeps away. Kant appeals to another ancient Greek myth in response to the myth of the goddess of the beautiful used by Schiller in *On Grace and Dignity* to defend the harmony between duty and inclinations, the myth of Hercules. Kant emphasized that the greek demigod need and should first realize some hard works and only after doing it he could enjoy the muses. The joy can be a part of the moral life, but only after the control of the inclinations against the moral law. Naturally, Schiller could agree with Kant here, since he thinks the natural philanthropist is not a model of moral perfection, but Schiller believes that was possible a complete harmony between duty and inclinations, or at least this should be the final end of the moral life. Kant thinks that is simply impossible to human beings, that's why I would say that Schiller requires from us something that is beyond the limits of the human capacities and this is exactly what Meier and Baumgarten said one chimerical ethics was (Dyck, 2012, p. 42). In *Lectures on Ethics Metaphysik der SittenVigilantius*, Kant distinguishes between morose and rigorist ethics of a rigid ethics. A rigid ethics determines all duties strictly and absolutely, but it does not advocate to abandon all the joy of life (*alle Freuden des Lebens*) (*V-Met\Vigil*, AA 27 623). The concern here seems to be to avoid a link between the notion of the moral obligation with an ethical conception whose main model was one of a Carthusian priest or a miserable sinner (to use the Korsgaard expression). In addition, Kant maintains that its ethical conception is nothing similar to a slave ethical conception and that his concept of virtue is compatible with a cheerful heart in the accomplishment of the duty, what is even a criterion of authenticity of virtuous behavior (*KpV*, AA. 08 23, note) Robert Louden (2015, p. 93) states that Kant agrees with Schiller that genuinely virtuous human beings act with joy of the duty but that does not imply that necessitation is absent in moral human conduct. Louden also believes that Kant was arguing that the position of Schiller as a kind of moral fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*). I would agree with Louden here and besides I would add that could be interesting to approximate the notions of chimerical ethics and moral fanaticism, in order to understand better the debate between Kant and

Schiller. The ideal of beautiful soul and the notion of grace of Schiller are beyond the horizon of human nature and Kant accused the stoic ethics of moral fanaticism exactly because the notion of the *ataraxia* is beyond the horizon of the human nature in the *Critique of the practical reason*. In other passage of *Lectures on Ethics Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant refers explicitly to Schiller, he is emphatic that strict duties do not do well (*sichmitvertagen*) with the concept of love (*V-Met\ Vigil*, AA 27, 623). Kant distinguishes between practical love and pathological love. We can have an obligation to practical love but not of a pathological love. It is beyond of the human nature a moral requirement of a pathological love.

Schiller and *die vorarbeiten zur religionsphilosophie*

In the *Vorarbeiten on the philosophy of religion*, Kant responds again explicitly to criticisms of Schiller to his moral philosophy and it is possible to realize here, that Kant really read the work of Schiller *On grace and dignity* and not only restricted to respond to the brief presentation of the criticisms of Schiller contained in the letter of Biester of 05.10.1793 (AA11 456-7), since there are passages of this book of Schiller included in these text of Kant. In these fragments, Kant claimed that the concepts of duty (*Pflicht*) and grace (*Anmut*) are heterogeneous, that obligation (*Verpflichtung*) is completely distinct from fear. The moral law raises respect (*Achtung*) and not fear (*Furcht*). Kant argues that "to be gracious is by no means a characteristic that with the duty as such can belong to and therefore be bound" (*VARGV*, AA 23100) and "something to do voluntarily for the sake of duty and for inclination is a contradiction" (*VARGV*, AA 23 100). But why the concept of duty and the concept of grace would be heterogeneous? Why would it be a contradiction to practice something for duty with grace and at the same time? Kant understands that the concept of obligation expresses a kind of necessitation. The concept of obligation expresses a kind of necessitation of the will and coercion. Robert Stern (2013, p. 127) thinks the distinction between the human will and the holy will is central to understand the conception of moral obligation in the moral philosophy of Kant. But I will not explore this interpretation here. Coercion always involves some sort of obstacle that someone feels when he fulfills the moral law. Compulsion occurs when one acts morally but reluctantly. That is the position of the finite rational beings as human beings. And Kant also added that the concept of duty has no grace in their representation (*Vorstellung*) (*VARGV*, AA 23100). Kant comes to recognize that an action according to duty (*pflichtmäßige Handlungen*) can be made with pleasure but cannot be made with pleasure for the sake of duty, because this leads to a

contradiction (*VARGV*, AA 23100). Kant said that grace cannot be accepted (*sichschicken*) as a legislation (*VARGV*, AA 23100). I suppose that Kant is claiming that grace could not be made a principle. If it is remembered from the distinction between true virtue and adopted virtue in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, it is possible to say that Kant maintains one similar position here, since he believes grace could not be made a law, grace could not be made a principle of action.

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Abstract: This study analyzes the debate between Kant and Schiller about the role of feelings in the moral sphere based on the concept of obligation (*Verbindlichkeit*) and the concept of chimerical ethics. The concept of obligation is a central concept in all development of ethics of Kant from the *Prize Essay* (1763) on. The notion of obligation plays an important role in the debate between Kant and Schiller, since Kant said the concept of duty and the concept of grace could not be harmonized as Schiller thought with the figure of the beautiful soul in *Grace and Dignity* (1793). Kant discusses the notion of the chimerical ethics in the *Lectures on Ethics* based on the Baumgarten and Meier. One main characteristic of a chimerical ethical is imposed to human beings to perform an obligation that exceeds the human capacity. One could say that the concept of chimeric ethics influences the conception of moral fanaticism of the *Critique of Practical Reason* of Kant and the refusal of the ideal of perfection of Stoic ethics. In the debate between Kant and Schiller, the main point of divergence between them is about the possibility of realizing the ideal of moral perfection contained in the concept of the beautiful soul.

Keywords: duty; inclination; virtue; obligation

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