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KANT, THE PASSIONS, AND THE STRUCTURE OF MORAL MOTIVATION

John Hare

This paper is an account of Kant's view of the passions, and their place in the structure of moral motivation. The paper lays out the relations Kant sees between feelings, inclinations, affects and passions, by looking at texts in *Metaphysics of Morals*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, *Anthropology*, and *Lectures on Education*. Then it discusses a famous passage in *Groundwork* about sympathetic inclination, and ends by proposing two ways in which Kant thinks feelings and inclinations enter into moral judgment, and two ways in which this can go wrong. This analysis involves responding to Karl Ameriks on the question of whether Kant is an internalist about moral motivation.

This paper is about Kant's view of the passions, which is, simply put, that he is against them. To use an Aristotelian phrase, passions are, for Kant, "named together with the bad."¹ He is typical here of a long tradition.² But I should say at once that the term 'passions' is misleading if we are talking about Kant's theory of emotion, or feeling, or desire more generally. He has a very specific meaning for the term 'passion,' and part of the difficulty in comparing his view with, for example, Aristotle's, is that the usage of the term is not the same in the two authors, in particular because in Aristotle only *some* of the *pathe* (often translated 'passions') are named together with the bad (e.g., spite, shamelessness and envy). First I want to lay out how Kant uses the terms 'feeling,' 'inclination,' 'affect,' and 'passion.' This will require looking at texts in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, *Anthropology*, and *Lectures on Education*. Then I will discuss a famous passage in the

¹The phrase is from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6, 1107a10.

²I will mention just three examples. Gregory Nazianzen, *Verses*, bk. 1, 10, "Formerly he was not counted among the wise, but rather was a servant of exceedingly shameful pleasures; later, he was possessed by a longing for the good, and . . . suddenly he was seen getting the better of the passions," *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1857–1866), vol. 35. Erasmus, *The Handbook of the Militant Christian*, 18th rule, "If, when passion stirs us to commit sin, we recall how loathsome, abominable, and detestable sin is, this will help to counteract the temptation," *The Essential Erasmus*, trans. John P. Dolan (New York: Mentor-Omega Books, 1964), 81. He mentions, in a list of the passions very similar to Kant's, ambition, envy, gluttony, lust, avarice, pride and haughtiness. A source closer to Kant himself is Rousseau, who talks of conquering our passions by acting on the terms of the general will, in "Political Economy," *Oeuvres* III.364–365.



Groundwork about sympathetic inclination, and that will enable me to propose two ways in which Kant thinks feelings and inclinations enter into moral judgment, and two ways in which this can go wrong. I will end with a paragraph defending Kant's view, but a full defense would take a much longer project.³

1. *Feeling, Inclination, Affect and Passion*

I will start with the *Metaphysics of Morals* since this sets out most clearly the relations Kant sees between these four terms, 'feeling,' 'inclination,' 'affect,' and 'passion.'⁴ Affects and passions, he says, are essentially different from each other.

Affects belong to feeling insofar as, preceding reflection, it makes this impossible or more difficult. . . . It even has one good thing about it: that this tempest quickly subsides. Accordingly a propensity to an affect (e.g., anger) does not enter into kinship with vice so readily as does a passion. A passion is a sensible desire that has become a lasting inclination (e.g., hatred, as opposed to anger).⁵

Desires can come and go, but when they become settled habits of mind, Kant calls them inclinations.⁶ He continues,

The calm with which one gives oneself up to a passion permits reflection and allows the mind to form principles upon it and so, if inclination lights

³There is a substantial recent literature defending Kant's view or a Kantian view of the emotions. I would mention especially Nancy Sherman, in a series of articles, especially "The Place of Emotions in Kantian Morality," in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Owen Flanagan and Amelie Rorty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Robert Louden, *Kant's Impure Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Patrick Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Jeanine Grenberg, *Kant and the Ethics of Humility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). The details of the Kant-exegesis in these texts varies, but a common thread, which I want to endorse, is the complaint that the secondary literature has often mischaracterized the opposition Kant draws (e.g., at *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 4: 400) between reason and inclination as one of exclusion rather than control. I have not used the term 'emotion' in this paper, because Kant does not. His closest term is perhaps *rührung* (e.g., *Critique of Judgment* 5: 273f). The term 'emotion' in its current sense is a nineteenth-century invention. See Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴The difference between feeling and desire is that the faculty of desire is the faculty of choice ("Desire is the self-determination of a subject's power through the representation of something in the future as an effect of this representation. Habitual sensible desire is called inclination," *Anthropology* 7: 251). Feeling does not, *qua* feeling, have representational content. Desire is connected to feeling because it is standardly (though not always) aimed at the feeling of pleasure and avoiding the feeling of pain. But not all pleasure is conversely connected with desire. See also *Metaphysics of Morals* 6: 212–213.

⁵6: 408.

⁶I will not, in what follows, observe this distinction between 'desire' and 'inclination,' unless it is necessary for the argument, and Kant does not always observe it.

upon something contrary to the law, to brood upon it, to get it rooted deeply, and so to take up what is evil (as something premeditated) into its maxim.⁷

We have in this passage a table of relations: as affect is to feeling, so passion is to inclination. When feelings are resistant to reason or reflection, or even make it impossible, Kant calls them 'affects.' When this resistance to reason is true of inclinations, he calls them 'passions.'⁸ Affects are characterized by turbulence, but passions can be calm, and are then all the more deadly because they allow reflective formation of an immoral maxim, or life-policy.⁹

Note that Kant does not imply, and I will suggest that at his best he denies, that inclinations are in themselves opposed to reason or reflection. He acknowledges in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*¹⁰ that it is tempting to locate the ground of evil "in the sensuous nature of the human being, and in the natural inclinations originating from it."¹¹ But he denies this, on the grounds that evil is imputable to us and the natural inclinations are not. Rather "the difference, whether the human being is good or evil, must not lie in the difference between the incentives that he incorporates into his maxim (not in the material of the maxim) but in their subordination (in the form of the maxim): which of the two he makes the condition of the other."¹² Inclinations are not in themselves the ground of evil, but what is evil is incorporating them into a maxim in a way that subordinates everything else to them. Evil, as imputable, has to be chosen, and the choice is the incorporation into a maxim. But an inclination can be incorporated in two fundamentally different ways, or, as Kant also puts it,

⁷Kant's distinction between affect, as brief, and passion, as lasting, is not present in his earlier lectures on Anthropology (e.g., the 1776 Friedländer notes, 25: 589–591, 612). See Patrick Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology*, 180.

⁸A fuller treatment would also look at Kant's discussion of the affect of enthusiasm, *Critique of Judgment* 5: 272–275, where he likewise distinguishes between the affect and the related passion, fanaticism, saying that the affect is an unbridled and temporary madness, but the passion is a deep-seated mania.

⁹I have not mentioned here the class of 'asthenic affects,' a term which Kant takes from John Brown (*Anthropology* 7: 256), and which are characterized not by turbulence but sedation. See Maria Borges, "Physiology and the Controlling of Affects in Kant's Philosophy," *Kantian Review* 13.2 (2008): 46–66. She emphasizes Kant's acknowledgement of the physiological basis of affect, both 'asthenic' and 'sthenic,' and the corresponding need for physical rather than merely mental therapy. For example, Kant says that when a man in a rage comes into the room, it is best to sit him down before trying to reason with him (*Ibid.* 7: 252), "because the comfort of sitting is a relaxation which does not really conform to the menacing gesticulations and screaming while one is standing." She also holds that Kant's view about the need for a cultivation of proper feeling only applies to three specific contexts (moderating one's shyness, using sympathy in the right contexts, and the moral feelings such as respect); but while these are indeed his examples, I do not think he means to confine the point to these examples.

¹⁰6: 35.

¹¹He betrays that he is himself tempted in this way, in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (e.g., 6: 384–5, "Since the basis of great crimes is merely the force of inclinations that weaken reason," though this does not imply that all inclinations do so. See also 6: 380 and 394.).

¹²6: 36.

the matter of the maxim can be given two fundamentally different forms. We can tell ourselves to pursue the satisfaction of the inclination and take any means necessary. In this case the indexing of the inclination to me, making it *my* inclination, is a necessary salient feature. Or, we can tell ourselves only to pursue the satisfaction of the inclination if this is consistent with duty, if the maxim can be willed as a universal law. In this case, the indexing of the inclination to me is not salient, since anyone can will that a person with this inclination should act to satisfy it. The same inclination can serve as the matter of the maxim in both cases, but the form is different. Kant says that in the first case I am under the evil maxim and in the second under the good maxim. We are born under the evil maxim, and it requires a revolution of the will, which we cannot accomplish entirely by our own devices, to reverse the order of incentives. Kant, in this set of ideas, is recapitulating Luther in *The Bondage of the Will*, who says that the source of evil,

is not in the flesh, in the sense of the lower and grosser affections, but in the highest and most excellent powers of man, in which righteousness, godliness, and knowledge and reverence of God, should reign—that is in reason and will, and so in the very power of ‘free-will’, in the very seed of uprightness, the most excellent thing in man.¹³

Kant uses the term ‘passion’ in his discussion in *Religion* of the three grades of evil, suggesting that passions are above or beyond inclinations. He says,¹⁴

Above inclination there is, finally, still another level of the faculty of desire, *passion* (not emotional agitation [perhaps this is affect], for this belongs to the feeling of pleasure and aversion), or an inclination that excludes mastery over oneself.

The three grades of evil are frailty, impurity and depravity. Depravity is where we adopt maxims contrary to the original predisposition to good, which is innate in us. Kant thinks, again like Luther, that there is an innate and imputable depravity in human beings, though he also thinks this propensity is not essential to us, in that we can be fully human and overcome it. In this way the propensity to evil is unlike the predisposition to good, or the seed of goodness, which *is* essential to us. So we are born under the evil maxim that subordinates duty to happiness. But this is not the same as the lower grades of evil that can coexist with the revolution of the will by which we come under the good maxim that subordinates happiness to duty. As in Luther, we can be *simul justus et peccator*, at the same time justified and sinner. Kant takes himself to be interpreting Paul in *Romans* 7 and (unlike some commentators, but like Luther) he takes Paul to be describing his state after conversion. Frailty is where an inclination is subjectively stronger than the good, which is “an irresistible incentive objectively, but is subjectively the weaker (in comparison with inclination) whenever the

¹³Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1957), 280.

¹⁴6: 29.

maxim is to be followed." So here is an inclination, or habitual desire, which wins repeatedly in the civil war, but is not yet taken up into a maxim of living contrary to the moral law. The frail person may be under a purely good maxim, but this does not have the right force to produce good action. I will suggest at the end of this paper that Kant could, though he does not in this passage, appeal to the notion of respect here, which is a feeling occasioned by consciousness of the moral law. The frail person is deficient in respect.

Frailty is different from impurity, where "although the maxim is good with respect to its object and perhaps even powerful enough in practice, it is not purely moral, i.e., it has not adopted the law *alone* as its *sufficient* incentive."¹⁵ For Kant, desire is always present for human action.¹⁶ The presence of desire, or (in its habitual form) inclination, is therefore not what prevents an action from being morally permissible. But when the will is moved by the law as the only sufficient incentive, the desire or inclination is taken up into the maxim as matter formed by the subordination of happiness to duty. With impurity, by contrast, even if the choice to do what conforms with the law prevails, "it needs still other incentives beside it in order to determine the power of choice for what duty requires." This is different from depravity, because there is no decision in principle to make duty subordinate to happiness. But impurity is different also from frailty because the commitment to the good needs a supplement from inclination that is more than just respect for the law.¹⁷ Kant describes what is presumably a relatively benign case of impurity in *Metaphysics of Morals*¹⁸ where he says we should cultivate sympathetic feelings and, for this reason, we should not avoid places (like poorhouses and hospitals) where we will find poor and sick people, because sympathy is one of the "impulses nature has implanted in us to do what the thought of duty alone might not accomplish."¹⁹

Kant gives us examples of what he means by passions later in *Religion*, where he discusses the role of society in the origin of evil, and in its solution. He says,²⁰

It is not the instigation of nature that arouses what should properly be called the *passions*, which wreak such great devastation in his originally good predisposition. . . . Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant

¹⁵6: 30.

¹⁶*Critique of Practical Reason* 5: 9, "The faculty of *desire* is the faculty such a being has of causing through its ideas, the reality of the objects of these ideas," and 5: 34, "Now it is indeed undeniable that every volition must also have an object and hence a matter; but the matter is not, just because of this, the determining ground and condition of the maxim."

¹⁷It is hard to reconcile Kant's view here with his rigorism at 6: 22. Perhaps Kant means that there is, even for the impure agent, only one maxim, good with respect to its object, but the maxim does not collect together all the agent's incentives for action.

¹⁸6: 457.

¹⁹See Nancy Sherman, "The Place of Emotions," 158–159.

²⁰6: 93.

inclinations associated with these, assail his nature, which on its own is undemanding (*an sich genügsame*), as soon as he is among human beings.²¹

The passions here are malignant inclinations occasioned by our contact with and our dependence upon other people, which, as social beings, we cannot do without.

Kant also draws the distinction between affects and passions in the *Anthropology*, and again ties passion to inclination and affect to feeling. He says,

Inclination that can be conquered only with difficulty or not at all by the subject's reason is *passion*. On the other hand, the feeling of a pleasure or displeasure in the subject's present state that does not let him rise to *reflection* (the representation by means of reason as to whether he should give himself up to it or refuse it) is *affect*.

With respect to affects, Kant accepts the Stoic principle of apathy, that the wise person must never be in a state of affect,²² because affect makes us (more or less) blind. A couple of examples will help us understand this point. Fear is a feeling but not yet an affect, but a panic attack (*Schreck*) is an affect, preventing us for the moment from seeing our situation as reason would present it to us. Similarly hilarity (*Fröhlichkeit*) is a feeling but not yet an affect, but when it becomes convulsive it is an affect, causing us for the moment to lose rational control. But Kant is not completely steadfast in his endorsement of the elimination of affect, because he allows in the *Anthropology* two cases where reason itself *produces* affect. For example, "courage as affect (consequently belonging in one respect to sensibility) can also be aroused by reason."²³ Kant imagines that we do something worthy of honor, and do not allow ourselves to be intimidated by taunts and derisive ridicule of it, and (I conjecture) he thinks this may require a temporary feeling, which I will call (though Kant does not) "bravura," that is like an affect because it has the same phenomenal character of independence from reason, even though reason arouses it. There is a parallel passage in the *Metaphysics of Morals*,²⁴ where he talks about "an aesthetic of morals," in which "the feelings that accompany the constraining power of the moral law (e.g., disgust, horror, etc., which make moral aversion sensible) make its efficacy felt." A second example in the *Anthropology* is when "he who thoughtfully and with a scrutinizing eye pursues the order of nature in its great variety falls into *astonishment* at a wisdom he did not

²¹For Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), our propensity to evil is equivalent and reducible to unsocial sociability, but see Jeanine Grenberg, "Social Dimensions of Kant's Conception of Radical Evil," in *Kant's Anatomy of Evil*, ed. Sharon Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Grenberg argues convincingly that the propensity to evil is something previous not only to social engagement but to any empirical exercise of freedom.

²²7: 253.

²³7: 257.

²⁴6: 406.

expect: an admiration from which he cannot tear himself away. . . . However, such an *affect* is stimulated only by reason."²⁵

Passion, on the other hand, is described as "inclination that prevents reason from comparing it with the sum of all inclinations in respect to a certain choice."²⁶ Unlike affect, passion is not a temporary tumult, but allows the reflective adoption of a maxim contrary to practical reason. Kant accepts the Stoic principle that wisdom admits of no passions at all.²⁷ Again an example will help. Kant thinks that ambition (*Ehrbegierde*, literally the desire for honor) is an inclination whose direction is approved by reason, but it is properly accompanied by all sorts of other desires, for example the desire to be loved by others, and for the maintenance of financial security. But when ambition becomes a passion, it is blind to these other ends, and it overlooks completely the risk of being hated by others, or impoverished through the required expenditure. Nevertheless, Kant thinks that we never lose the predisposition to good, and so some receptiveness to the moral call, however sunk in vice we become. So even in the passion, a person will feel the call of freedom, and will groan in his chains, but he cannot break away from them "because they have already grown together with his limbs."²⁸

I will close this section of this paper with a couple of passages from Kant's *Lectures on Education*. He says,²⁹ "the first step towards the formation of a good character is to put our passions on one side. We must take care that our desires and inclinations do not become passions, by learning to go without those things that are denied to us." Here he is explicit that not all desires and inclinations are passions, but we have to control them so that those which have the potential to become passions do not in fact do so. This requires, as the Stoics said, that we "bear and forbear." Earlier he gives an example of what controlling a desire or feeling is like. He describes with admiration how the Swiss venture along the narrowest paths with perfect confidence, and leap over chasms.

Most people, however, fear some imaginary danger of falling, and this fear actually paralyses their limbs, so that for them such a proceeding would be really fraught with danger. This fear generally grows with age, and is chiefly found in those men who work much with their heads.

The way to avoid this is to allow children to climb, run and jump, of their own accord putting their strength to the proof. They will learn by experience when there is danger and when there is not, and their fear will not be out of control; it will not be, as he says in the *Anthropology*, an affect. Another example is anger. Children have to learn how to control it, and Kant

²⁵*Anthropology*, 7: 261, emphasis on 'affect' added.

²⁶7: 265.

²⁷7: 271.

²⁸7: 267.

²⁹Chapter VI, section 93.

suggests that it should not be the parent's goal to *thwart* the child (because the child's inward rage will be all the stronger, even if he does not show it). On the other hand, if the children can get whatever they want by making a fuss, this increases the incentive to rage. So the parents should give the children what they want, if there is no important reason to the contrary, and if there is such a reason, it should not be given, and the parent should not then back down.³⁰ Anger, when it becomes a controlling desire for revenge, has become a passion.

The general point I want to make here is that Kant has an account of desires and inclinations which are not in themselves opposed to reason, and which can be and should be harnessed by reason. When desires and inclinations *are* opposed to reason, he calls them passions, and he is against them.

2. Inclination and Duty

There is a passage in the *Groundwork* that is often held to be inconsistent with this account. But I think Barbara Herman has been successful in her exegesis of the passage, and it does not have this implication.³¹ Kant describes persons "of so sympathetic a temper that, without any further motive of vanity or self-interest, they find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them."³² But such an action,

however right and amiable it might be, has still no genuinely moral worth. It stands on the same footing as [action from] the other inclinations—for example, the inclination for honor, which if fortunate to hit on something beneficial and right and consequently honorable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem; for its maxim lacks moral content, namely, the performance of such actions, not from inclination, but *from duty*.

When I teach this passage, I often find my students object. Action from duty, for example visiting a patient in hospital, seems less attractive, less desirable than doing that same thing out of love for the patient. If Kant's point were that the sense of duty is more reliable than sympathy, we could again object, on empirical grounds. People who find an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them can be *more* stable than those acting only from conscientiousness. My students' unease grows with the second stage of the example, where Kant imagines this same "friend of man" so overcome by sorrow that he is no longer moved by the needs of others. Kant continues, "Suppose that, when no longer moved by any inclination, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination for the sake of duty alone; then for the first time his action has its genuine moral worth." Richard Henson responds, "Surely the most obvious way of generalizing from this remark yields the doctrine

³⁰Chapter II, section 55.

³¹Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 4–22.

³²*Groundwork* 4: 398.

that only when one acts from duty alone—‘without *any* inclination’—does [the] act have moral worth.”³³ But this doctrine seems wrong.

Herman explains this passage by denying this implication. She points out that it is the *same person* in both stages of the example. He is a man of sympathetic temper who normally helps others because he is stirred by their need but sometimes, when he is in depression and his affective life has gone grey, he helps them because that is what duty requires. We do not need to suppose that his character changes. He is still a sympathetic kind of person, but in the new circumstances (of depression) the inclinations are not there to get him to act. Of *him* it was true that when he had the inclination, he did not act from duty. But there is no implication that for *others* the motive of duty requires the absence of inclination. Kant’s point is just that there is a particular kind of worth, which should occasion esteem. Sympathetic inclinations have a different kind of worth, which occasions praise and encouragement, but not esteem. The maxim of the person who acts from duty has moral content, and so moral worth, and the action of the “friend of man” does not. What is this moral content? The maxim of the act of helping has to be willed under the Categorical Imperative procedure, as a universal law. Herman mentions an example to show that merely helping is not going to be enough. “Suppose I see someone struggling, late at night, with a heavy burden at the backdoor of the Museum of Fine Arts. . . . The class of actions that follows from the inclination to help others is not a subset of the class of right or dutiful actions.”³⁴ In terms of the Third Formula of the Categorical Imperative in the *Groundwork*,³⁵ the Formula of the End-in-Itself, we could put the point this way. I am required to share the ends of those affected by my actions, and so make them my ends, but only if those ends are morally permitted. Kant can be understood as translating the Lutheran doctrine of sanctification this way: We grow towards being the kind of person who is not without inclinations, for we would cease to be human, but whose inclinations are in line with duty.

One small friendly amendment is necessary. Herman puts her point in terms of over-determination (replying to Henson). But it is better not to think about the usual case as one where inclination and the moral incentive are two rival determining factors, of which only the second is necessary and sufficient for moral worth.³⁶ It is tempting to think of incentives

³³Richard Henson, “What Kant Might Have Said: Moral Worth and the Over-determination of Dutiful Action,” *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979): 45.

³⁴Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 4–5.

³⁵4: 430.

³⁶Marcia Baron, “Overdetermined Actions and Imperfect Duties,” in *Moralische Motivation*, ed. H. Klemme, M. Kühn, and D. Schönecker (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006), 23–37, also argues that Kant does not have a notion of over-determined actions. But this is because she thinks that with perfect duties, duty has to be the only decisive motive and that imperfect duties (despite what Kant says) are not done from duty at all. On imperfect duties, I agree with Allen Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44, “The ‘necessity’ of duty . . . consists solely in the fact that duty involves *rational*

or motives acting mechanically, pushing and pulling like rival physical forces. But the rational motive is precisely not that kind of cause. Kant often uses the metaphor of form and matter, from Aristotle. The Categorical Imperative procedure, for example in its First Formula that requires that a maxim can be willed as universal law, gives us the form. But the matter of morality, which goes under that form, is standardly provided by desire and inclination, though Kant wants to preserve the possibility of duty motivating all by itself. I desire to borrow money without paying it back, and so I propose to myself the maxim of a false promise. But this matter resists the form, or is recalcitrant to it. In Aristotle, form is standardly not something separable from matter, but it is the specifying activity of a kind of living thing, and is the cause (in Aristotle's sense) of the development of the matter of the organism.³⁷ Matter does not exist on its own (except perhaps as prime matter, but that is for a different discussion), and neither does form (except in the case of God and the intelligences), but they exist together within material substance. This is important for Aristotle because he wants unity in the definition of substance, and he achieves this by saying that the matter is potentially just what the form is actually. The fact that there is material cause as well as formal cause does not mean that the substance is 'over-determined.' We cannot simply read forward the details of Aristotle's account into Kant's metaphor, but in the present context they fit. The choice against a false promise is a choice against an action in the world for an end in the world in a situation that arises in the world, and it is this conjunction of particulars that is recalcitrant to the morally good form.³⁸ There is no such thing as the material incentive being practical all by itself. It has to be taken up into a maxim either under the morally good form or its opposite, which subordinates duty to inclination. In the usual case, if there were no desire or inclination there would be no processing under the Categorical Imperative, which serves as a limiting condition.³⁹ When we do process the inclination, we acquire an "interest," in the sense of "a connection of pleasure with the capacity for desire that the understanding judges to hold as a general rule."⁴⁰ An interest is a settled pattern of affection and rational endorsement, and is thus a pattern of what Aristotle calls "deliberative desire," where "the reasoning affirms what the desire pursues."⁴¹

constraint on our actions." This includes imperfect as well as perfect duties. On perfect duties, we can agree that duty is the decisive motive without that preventing the presence of an incentive from inclination.

³⁷I give a brief account of one version of Aristotle's doctrine of form and matter in John Hare, *God and Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 21–23, but for a full account see Montgomery Furth, *Substance, Form and Psyche: an Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³⁸I am paraphrasing from Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology*, 98–99.

³⁹Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 15 and 31–32.

⁴⁰*Metaphysics of Morals*, 6: 212. See Jeanine Grenberg, *Kant and the Virtue of Humility*, 814f.

⁴¹*Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 2, 1139a 24–26.

The objection may be raised that there is also the *unusual* case in which Kant says the person “is no longer moved by any inclination.”⁴² But even here, there is something the person is moved by, namely the person’s respect for the moral law, and this respect still has to be incorporated into a maxim, if it is to result in a free action. There is no such thing as the matter even in this case being sufficient for an action. I will say more about respect in the following section. If an inclination were to be sufficient in the sense that it could lead to action without the motive of duty, this would have to be because the agent is under the evil maxim that subordinates duty to inclination.

3. *The Structure of Moral Motivation*

Having laid the groundwork, we can now go on to describe the ways in which Kant thinks desires and feelings enter into moral judgment, and the ways in which this can go wrong. Some of this will be obvious from what I have already said. I will be responding here to an important paper by Karl Ameriks, who locates Kant’s theory of moral motivation against the background of two debates within contemporary Anglo-American metaethics.⁴³ The debates are between ‘internalists’ (who hold that motivation is internal to moral belief or moral judgment) and ‘externalists’ (who hold that it is external), and between ‘realists’ (who hold that moral judgment is about moral properties that are really there in the world independently of volition or desire) and ‘expressivists’ (who hold that it is an expression of volition or desire).⁴⁴ Since there are many varieties under each of these labels, and since these are two of the most difficult topics in moral philosophy, it is not sensible to try to lay out all the options in the present paper. I will proceed by discussing the two positions within these debates that Ameriks wants to deny that Kant holds. The first position is ‘motive internalism,’ the position that “believing that something ought to be is tantamount to (i.e., has “internal” to it) being committed to trying to bring it into being.” Ameriks quotes a statement of this view from Michael Smith, “If someone judges that it is right that she does X, then, *ceteris paribus*, she is motivated to X.”⁴⁵ Note that this is an internalism about moral judgment. Kant does not use ‘judgment’ in exactly this sense, but I am going to defend the claim that he is an internalist about ethical ‘propositions’ when these play the role in life that he is most interested in showing they can play. But what matters is not the label, whether Kant is a kind of

⁴²Gl 4: 398.

⁴³Karl Ameriks, “Kant and Motivational Externalism,” in Klemme, Kühn, and Schönecker, *Moralische Motivation*, 3–22. See also Ameriks, *Kant and the Historical Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chap. 4.

⁴⁴I have defended a view called ‘prescriptive realism’ which combines realism and expressivism. See John Hare, “Prescriptive Realism,” in *Realism and Religion*, ed. Andrew Moore and Michael Scott (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 83–101.

⁴⁵Ameriks, *op. cit.*, 14. The quotation is from Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 12.

internalist, but to give a convincing account of what Kant in fact thinks about the relation between judgment (in Smith's sense) and motivation. The second position that Ameriks wants to deny that Kant occupies is the 'constructivist' position that "the validity of our judgment must be basically the effect rather than the cause of the relevant feeling" or (a different form of constructivism) that moral principles are constructed out of the "very idea of having a 'practical identity' at all, and these roots are what lead to, rather than presuppose, the rationalist Kantian perspective."⁴⁶

Ameriks lays out four stages that Kant thinks an agent goes through, with the fourth being the action itself, and I am going to add a fifth at the beginning, which is a supplement rather than a revision to Ameriks's account because he simply starts later in the process. My first stage is where the agent feels a desire or inclination for something. Usually, as I have said already, action starts with desire or inclination, and this does not differentiate a moral agent from any other kind of agent. The same would be true even if an agent had no interest in morality, but only in prudence (in making herself happy). The difference in a moral agent is that she is concerned with whether the maxim that prescribes satisfying this desire can be willed as a universal law. The second stage is applying the test of the categorical imperative. This is an intellectual procedure, a testing for one of two different kinds of consistency. This is not yet an act of willing. It would be possible for a person to determine that a maxim could be willed as universal law without thereby *willing* it as universal law.⁴⁷ But in humans, though not in rational beings as such, the apprehension of a maxim that can be willed as a universal law creates in us a third stage, what Kant calls 'respect.' Respect is a feeling, but it is unique in that it is occasioned only by the presentation by reason of the pure practical law.⁴⁸ This feeling

⁴⁶Ameriks, 2. He is talking in the first case about Humean empiricists, and in the second case about Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). In another paper, "On Schneewind and Kant's Method in Ethics," (*Ideas y Valores* 102 [Dec. 1996]: 48), Ameriks discusses the form of constructivism that holds that moral value is constructed from a procedure of practical reasoning, rather than desire. Both Humean and Korsgaardian forms of constructivism are a denial of what Korsgaard calls 'substantive moral realism.' See Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4–5.

⁴⁷Ameriks suggests that the second stage is a perception of value. I do not mind putting it this way, and I have in fact put it this way myself; see Hare, "Prescriptive Realism," in Moore and Scott, *Realism and Religion*. G. E. Moore makes a similar distinction between perceiving a value, the affective response, and then the judgment that is an endorsement of that response. See John Hare, *God's Call* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 3–6. For the present paper the important point is that the third of these, or Ameriks's third stage (my fourth), is a judgment that is itself prescriptive, an expression of a volition that has taken up the affective response into endorsement. In separating out the second stage, I am assuming that the perception or recognition of universalizability is conceptually separable from commitment to the moral life.

⁴⁸Kant says that respect applies to persons only, never to things (*Critique of Practical Reason* 5: 76), and is thus different from admiration. I respect the example of a humble plain man, in whom I perceive righteousness in a higher degree than I am conscious of in myself. But he also says (5: 78) that the respect that we have for such a person is really for the law, which his example holds before us.

is not the ground of morality, but is a consequence of our apprehension of the moral law. But there is, so-to-speak, a feedback mechanism, because the feeling of respect “promotes the influence of the law on the will.”⁴⁹

This is a problematic moment for Kant, because he cannot allow causal influences from the phenomenal realm on the noumenal. He tries to mitigate the difficulty by saying that all we feel is the dislodgement of an obstacle, not a direct influence on the will. The obstacle is our self-love, and so our attachment to the satisfaction of our inclinations as a sum, and the obstacle is removed by the lowering of our sense of the worth of this satisfaction in comparison with the worth of the moral law. Kant calls this our ‘humiliation,’ and says that the effect we perceive is negative. But rather like a pair of scales, where lowering one scale raises the other, the lowering of “the pretensions to self-esteem on the sensuous side is an elevation of the moral, i.e., practical, esteem for the law on the intellectual side.”⁵⁰ Respect is thus like the feeling of the sublime, which also starts from a negative moment (e.g., a sense of one’s smallness) and ends with a comparative sense of the higher worth of something inside oneself. We can say that because of this positive effect, or elevation, “respect for the law is not the drive to morality; it is morality itself, regarded subjectively as a drive, inasmuch as pure practical reason, by rejecting all the rival claims of self-love, gives authority and absolute sovereignty to the law.”⁵¹

Since respect “promotes the influence of the law on the will,” we can assume that the willing of the morally good action comes after the respect has had this influence. This, then, is the fourth stage, the willing of the morally good maxim as the agent’s own maxim, as a maxim *for her*. Kant talks about willing that the law be *my* law, which is what it means for the law to be *practical*. The respect is taken up, or incorporated, into the agent’s maxim.⁵² Note that there is still a gap between the adopting of a maxim and the action itself. I do not mean merely that there may be external impediments to the action (if the bus is late, for example), but that there may still be internal impediments to an action *with moral worth*. We still have to make room for what Kant calls impurity, “where although the maxim is good with respect to its object and perhaps even powerful enough in practice, it is not purely moral, i.e., it has not adopted the law *alone* as its *sufficient* incentive.”⁵³ We can see how to make room for impurity if we can suppose, as is strongly suggested by Kant’s language of ‘elevating’ and ‘lowering’ and ‘promoting the influence,’ that respect comes in *degrees*. There may be enough respect for a person to adopt a maxim that is good

⁴⁹KpV 5: 75.

⁵⁰Ibid..

⁵¹Ibid., 5: 76. Kant’s treatment of respect is a valiant attempt to say what happens at the junction of the noumenal and the phenomenal, but (like Descartes’ treatment of the pineal gland) it merely postpones the conceptual difficulties.

⁵²See *Religion* 6: 23, freedom “cannot be determined to an action through any incentive except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim.”

⁵³*Religion* 6: 30.

in terms of its object, but not enough so that it would lead to action if this incentive were to be all alone. (As argued earlier, this does not mean that the morally worthy action has to be *in fact* without any other incentive, but that the moral incentive would be enough even if it *were to be* alone.) If there is enough respect, then there will not be impurity, and the resulting action (the fifth and final stage) will have moral worth strictly speaking.

If this account is correct, what is the implication about whether Kant is or is not some kind of internalist? It will be helpful to describe a small piece of twentieth-century Anglo-American Kant-exegesis here, and ask whether it contains an insight worth preserving. John Austin coined the term ‘descriptive fallacy,’ and said that Kant had already discovered it.

It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or impart straightforward information about the facts: for example, “ethical propositions” are perhaps intended, solely or partly, to evince emotion or to prescribe conduct or to influence it in special ways. Here too KANT was among the pioneers.⁵⁴

No doubt Austin had in mind passages like Kant’s famous introduction to the formula of universal law in the *Groundwork* (in H. J. Paton’s translation), as “the formula containing the only proposition that can be a categorical imperative.”⁵⁵ In Anglo-American moral philosophy, the alternative that ethical propositions are intended to express emotion had been taken by the emotivists, A. J. Ayer in *Language, Truth and Logic*, and more systematically Charles Stevenson in *Ethics and Language* (who also emphasized the role of moral language as a social instrument of persuasion). On Stevenson’s account, normative judgments express attitudes and invite others to share these attitudes. R. M. Hare (who called his view ‘universal prescriptivism’) took Austin’s other alternative, that these ‘propositions’ are intended to prescribe conduct. He reports that a key step in the development of his view was when H. J. Paton drew to his attention “the essential similarity between Stevenson’s ‘attitudes’ and Kant’s maxims.”⁵⁶ Contrary to Stevenson, however, Hare wanted to preserve the prescriptive force of these ‘propositions’ without sacrificing their rationality. His *Language of Morals* can be understood as a restatement of a rational ethics in the Kantian mold, acknowledging the recent developments in the philosophy of language associated with Austin and the ‘ordinary language’ school.⁵⁷

I want to suggest that there is an insight here about the relation between ethical propositions and motivation that is worth preserving, and that fits the texts of Kant, though it is not required by them. Going back to the five stages I have just described from Kant, the connection between the

⁵⁴John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 3. The capitalization “KANT” is in the original.

⁵⁵GI 4: 420.

⁵⁶R. M Hare, “A Philosophical Autobiography,” *Utilitas* 14.3 (2002): 287.

⁵⁷See John Hare, *God and Morality: a Philosophical History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), chap. 4.

proposition and motivation will depend on where the proposition comes in the stages. I said I would defend the claim that Kant is a kind of internalist. I will put this, as Ameriks does (quoting Smith) in terms of judgment, though, as I said earlier, Kant does not use the term 'judgment' in quite this way. The first thing to say is that there could be judgments at *any* of the stages: the judgment that I am feeling the initial inclination (or, differently, the judgment that expresses such an inclination), the judgment that a maxim passes the Categorical Imperative test, the judgment that I am feeling respect (or, differently, the judgment that expresses this respect), the judgment that I am willing (or the judgment that expresses a willing), and the judgment that I am acting. But the judgment at the fourth stage is particularly important if we are interested in ethical propositions being *practical*. Kant says that the moral law, which is the objective determining ground of the morally good will, "must at the same time be the exclusive and subjectively sufficient motive of action if the latter is to fulfill not merely the letter of the law but also its spirit."⁵⁸ The motive is what actually moves the person to action, though as a reason rather than as a cause. Willing is causing, but unlike all other kinds of causing (except, perhaps, transcendental apperception), it is free. It is a plausible interpretation that an ethical proposition at the fourth stage, where there is enough respect so that an action with pure moral worth results, has an internal relation, on Kant's view, to the motive, and it has this because, as a first-person imperative, it expresses the already-present will.⁵⁹ If the moral law can be related to the will in *this* way, then it can be practical. Kant says, "The pure understanding (which in such a case is called reason) is practical through the mere representation of a law."⁶⁰ One merit of the five-stage account is that we can see how the very same form of words, or the very same representation, could, at *other* stages, not be practical (for example, at the second stage, where an amoralist could determine that a maxim could be willed as a universal law). This possibility for the amoralist is supposed to be the main objection to internalism. The difficulty is mitigated if we can see that an amoralist is perfectly possible, as long as she is not attributed a moral judgment at the fourth stage, with full respect for the law. But no-one ever supposed the amoralist does *that*. It is exactly this role for an ethical proposition whose possibility Kant is especially interested to defend.

This interpretation of what it means for an ethical proposition to be practical is not the only possible interpretation. One could suppose instead, for example, that an ethical proposition is entertained in its completeness by the intellect and it becomes practical when there is a subsequent and independent act of will. But this interpretation is hard to sustain, if we treat the

⁵⁸KpV 5: 72.

⁵⁹A first-person imperative is an imperative addressed by an agent to herself, often rendered in English by 'Let me do x.' In some inflected languages (like Greek and Latin) there is a separate form of the imperative for first-, second- and third-person imperatives.

⁶⁰KpV 5: 55.

ethical proposition as a maxim, and grant that the maxim has an ‘internal relation’ to the motive, and the motive is what is actually moving the agent as a reason for action.⁶¹ Surely it is more natural to take the moral maxim as a command that the will addresses to itself, or, less metaphorically, that the person in her willing addresses to herself.⁶²

We can now see two ways in which our affective lives are involved in Kant’s account of the good will, and two ways in which our affective lives could be an obstacle. The first way is that feelings and desires usually provide most of the material for the maxim that is eventually willed. The difference between a morally good maxim and a morally impermissible one is not that only the first takes its matter from our affective lives. But the matter contributed by a good person’s affections (in the broad sense) is receptive to the form that morality provides, and the maxim that incorporates them can be willed as universal law. So one way our affective lives can be an obstacle is, as Kant puts it in the *Lectures on Education*, when the desires and inclinations have become passions, and so in themselves resistant to reason, or to the form that morality provides. The second way our affective lives are involved in good willing is that when we have determined that the matter can take the required form, we human beings still need something in our affective life to get us to the corresponding willing. We need, that is, respect, and (if I am right) *enough* respect so that the moral incentive can be sufficient (even if, as is usually the case, not in fact alone). Again I am speculating, because Kant does not put it in exactly this way, but I think he thinks that all humans, however depraved, have *some* respect for the moral law. This is guaranteed by their predisposition to the good. But not all humans have enough respect to will a maxim that is good in its object, or even if they do this, enough respect so that the moral incentive is sufficient. So the second way our affective lives can be an obstacle is if we have deficient respect, or (though I have only briefly discussed these) the other moral feelings that come under ‘an aesthetic of morals.’

I want to end with a brief paragraph in defense of this complex view of our affective lives. Kant does not think, at least at the time of the Second Critique and later, that he can justify the claim that we are under the moral law. He simply starts from what he calls ‘the fact of reason’ that we are so bound. But if we are under the moral law, and so under the obligation to treat every human being as an end and no-one merely as a means, we can see why emotions, or desires, or affections, or passions in the broad non-Kantian sense have to be kept limited in their authority over us. We have to have some way of knowing that they have not turned into what Kant calls affects or passions. To use a humble analogy, the affections give us goals to pursue, and this is like driving in a car to some destination.

⁶¹Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 10–12.

⁶²In a fuller treatment I would discuss the point that the moral agent, according to Kant, both recognizes the obligation as God’s command, and makes it her own command. But this is not the topic of the present paper. See my *God’s Call*, chap. 3.

Usually there will not be much point in driving if we are not trying to get somewhere. But we need to make sure that our driving to this destination is consistent with the goals of the other drivers on the road. We have to check in our rear-view mirrors, stay a safe distance behind the vehicles in front, and so on. This is because our getting to our destination is no more important (from what Henry Sidgwick called 'the point of view of the universe') than their getting to theirs. The other drivers count morally the same as we do. Some philosophers have denied that it makes sense to talk about the point of view of the universe, or that even if it does make sense, it is inconsistent with human agency. I am not going to try here to refute this view. But if we start, like Kant, from the fact of reason, we can see that the affections do not in themselves carry the necessary limitation or constraint. Some of them are in themselves hostile to such constraint (Kant calls them 'affects' and 'passions'), and others are not. But even the ones that are not need the supplement that before we act on them, we consider the well-being of all those affected by what we propose to do, and we count all those people equally. Only this consideration will give what Kant calls 'moral content' to the maxim of our action, and so give the action moral worth.⁶³ This paragraph will not persuade anyone who does not already agree that we have moral obligations of a Kantian kind. But it would be too large a task for the present paper to try to say more.

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⁶³*Gl* 4: 398.