

## *Rational Feelings\**

*Alix Cohen*

While it is well known that Kant's transcendental idealism forbids the transcendent use of reason and its ideas, what had been underexplored until the last decade or so is his account of the positive use of reason's ideas as it is expounded in the appendix of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>1</sup> The main difficulty faced by his account is that, while there is no doubt that for Kant we need to rely on the ideas of reason in order to gain knowledge of the empirical world, the justificatory grounds for our use remain unclear. Commentators have suggested various ways of addressing this worry. Some emphasize that reason's demand for systematicity is purely methodological. Others stress that the assumption that nature itself is systematically unified is transcendently necessary.<sup>2</sup> Some simply deem Kant's account "extremely self-contradictory."<sup>3</sup> What is clear is that if neither the presupposition of nature's systematic unity nor the command to seek this unity have any justification, reason's regulative function, which plays a crucial role in Kant's account of cognition, also lacks justification. This would be a disastrous result, for it would threaten the very possibility of cognition and its progress.

This chapter proposes to tackle this problem from a new angle by exploring the role of reason's feelings in Kant's account. While the relationship between practical reason and feeling has been explored at length in the literature, the relationship between theoretical reason and feeling has not, and my aim is to suggest that doing so can shed new light on reason's

\* Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

<sup>1</sup> See "Transcendental Dialectic," *Critique of Pure Reason*.

<sup>2</sup> For the first, see for instance Paul Guyer, "Reason and Reflective Judgment: Kant on the Significance of Systematicity," *Noûs* 24, no. 1 (1990): 17–43. For the second, see for instance Michelle Grier, *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 286.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 547. See also Thomas E. Wartenberg, "Reason and the Practice of Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 231.

cognitive activity. For focusing on the fact that theoretical reason's need manifests itself as a feeling will enable me to reassess how this need is met through reason's regulative use of its ideas.

Following a summary in Section 1.1 of Kant's account of the regulative use of the ideas of reason, Section 1.2 turns to reason's feelings. After spelling out the function of feeling in the general economy of the mind, I put forward an account of the genesis of theoretical reason's feelings that defines them as affective manifestations of reason's activity. To support the claim that these feelings can play a legitimate role in cognition, Section 1.3 argues that we should think of them on the model of the feeling of respect for the moral law. They are both rational feelings in the sense that they are effects of reason on feeling – affective manifestations of reason and its activity. On this basis, Section 1.4 shows that the function of the feeling of reason's need allows us to vindicate the regulative use of the ideas of reason, although it does so for the sole purpose of enabling our cognitive activity.

### 1.1 The Cognitive Function of the Ideas of Reason

Although Kant defines reason's ideas as concepts to which no corresponding object can be given in experience, they nevertheless have a legitimate role to play in it.

[I]n regard to the whole of possible experience, it is not the idea itself but only its use that can be either **extravagant** (transcendent) or **indigenous** (immanent), according to whether one directs them straightway to a supposed object corresponding to them, or only to the use of the understanding in general regarding the objects with which it has to do. (A643)

In its more general form, the positive function of reason is to project the idea of systematic unity as the regulative principle of cognition: "what reason quite uniquely prescribes and seeks to bring about concerning it is the systematic in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle" (A645). By turning its ideas into heuristics, reason provides orientation within the empirical world by commanding us "to seek out the necessary and greatest possible unity of nature" (A679). It enables the progress of cognition by demanding that we structure and unify our cognition of the world – Kant talks about "the systematic connection that reason can give to the empirical use of the understanding" (A680).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> While I cannot get into the details of these principles here, note that each corresponds to an idea of reason. They consist in looking for homogeneity (by searching for "sameness of kind"), variety (by "distinguish[ing] subspecies") and continuity (by looking for the "affinity of various branches")

Although the complete systematization of knowledge can never be realized, reason can nevertheless be successful in enabling the concrete unification of certain laws, in particular by bringing heterogeneous laws of nature under higher ones. For instance, “under the guidance of those principles we come to a unity of genera in the forms of these paths [i.e., orbits of planets], but thereby also further to unity in the cause of all the laws of this motion (gravitation)” (A663). The regulative use of the ideas of reason thus plays a crucial role in Kant’s account of cognition, its condition of possibility, and its progress.

Though the preceding claims have been much discussed in the literature, what is often left out is that the ground of reason’s demand for systematicity is its need for it: “this guiding thread [i.e., the principle of systematicity] is not an objective principle of reason, a principle of insight, but a merely subjective one [i.e. a maxim] of the only use of reason allowed by its limits – *a corollary of its need*” (OT 140; emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> While reason cannot presuppose the objective reality of its ideas in the empirical world, it can orient itself in the sensible world on their basis as long as this orientation is based on its need. Yet how are we to make sense of the status of this need? As Paul Guyer first noted, adopting regulative principles seems to amount to “merely postulating or presupposing that an object will meet one’s needs, rather than obtaining evidence that it does.” Thereby, we merely “transform our own need for systematicity into a self-serving delusion that nature is systematic.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, neither the presupposition of nature’s unity nor the command to seek unity on which it is based seem to have any justification. If true, this would entail that reason’s regulative function, which plays a crucial role in Kant’s account of cognition, its condition of possibility, and its progress, also lacks justification.

(A660). For illuminating discussions of how the regulative use of the ideas of reason furthers the progress of cognition, see Frederick Rauscher, “The Appendix to the Dialectic and the Canon of Pure Reason: The Positive Role of Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 290–309, and Nicholas Rescher, *Kant and the Reach of Reason: Studies in Kant’s Theory of Rational Systematization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 64–98.

<sup>5</sup> See also: “The second regulative idea of merely speculative reason is the concept of the world in general. For nature is really the single given object in regard to which reason *needs* regulative principles” (A685; emphasis added). “[I]n relation to that which is given to the senses as existing, we *need* the idea of a being which is **necessary** in itself, but can never have the least concept of this being and its absolute **necessity**” (A679; emphasis added).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 44, 42.

Commentators have suggested various ways of addressing this worry with mixed degrees of success.<sup>7</sup> What has not been explored, however, is the role the feeling of reason's need plays in Kant's argument. While this feeling does not appear in the first *Critique*, it figures prominently in the essay, "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" where Kant talks about "reason's feeling of its own need [*Bedürfnis*]," "a felt\* need of reason" [*gefühltes Bedürfnis der Vernunft*] (OT 136, 139). The few commentators who do discuss this feeling suggest that it should be interpreted metaphorically. According to Pauline Kleingeld, for instance, the conative terms in which Kant describes reason should be understood as cases of "symbolic exhibition" so as to avoid "confounding [Kant's] distinction between reason and feeling."<sup>8</sup> Similarly for John Zammito, "*Bedürfnis* must not be read too literally as itself a feeling or need."<sup>9</sup> These metaphorical interpretations are largely based on the footnote that claims that "[r]eason does not feel" (OT 139n). By contrast with these interpretations, I will argue that they are rational feelings in the full nonmetaphorical sense of the term. To support this claim, the following section will put forward an account of the genesis of theoretical reason's feelings that defines them as affective manifestations of reason's activity.

### 1.2 Theoretical Reason's Feelings: The Pain of Reason's Need vs. the Pleasure of Systematization

The argument I defend here starts from a conception of feeling that I began to develop in previous work.<sup>10</sup> In this chapter I simply lay out features of that view, without trying to defend them in any detail. As I see it, making sense of the function of feeling in the general economy of the

<sup>7</sup> See the commentators mentioned in notes 3 and 4. As Hannah Ginsborg succinctly puts it, "Either way, it might seem, to adopt the principle of judgment is to presuppose something factual about nature, some objective feature in virtue of which it meets our cognitive needs. And, either way, Guyer's problem arises: what justification do we have for presupposing *a priori* something whose obtaining is discoverable – at least to some extent – by empirical enquiry?" (Ginsborg, "Why Must We Presuppose the Systematicity of Nature?" in *Kant and Laws*, ed. Michela Massimi and Angela Breitenbach [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming]).

<sup>8</sup> Pauline Kleingeld, "The Conative Character of Reason in Kant's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (1998): 84. She argues that "Kant's talk of the needs, striving, and satisfaction of reason . . . can be understood as based on an analogy . . . An organism (1) is to the object of its needs (B) as reason (C) is to the regulative ideas or postulates (D)" (Kleingeld, "The Conative Character of Reason in Kant's Philosophy," 96).

<sup>9</sup> John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 238.

<sup>10</sup> See Cohen, "Kant on Emotions, Feelings and Affectivity," in *The Palgrave Kant Handbook*, ed. Matthew C. Altman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

mind will enable me to determine the role of rational feelings in Kant's account of theoretical reason's activity.

According to Kant, our mental powers are constituted by three faculties: the faculty of cognition, which generates cognitions; the faculty of desire, which generates volitions; and the faculty of feeling.<sup>11</sup> Without getting into the detail of Kant's account, what is crucial for the purpose of my argument is that each faculty gives rise to different kinds of mental states and has a distinct function in the general economy of the mind.<sup>12</sup> While the faculty of cognition is cognitive and the faculty of desire conative, Kant defines the feelings of pleasure and pain in terms of the promotion and hindrance of life: "Pleasure is *the representation of the agreement of an object or of an action with the subjective conditions of life*" (CPR 9n). What this means in my view is that the faculty of feeling enables the agent to track and evaluate his mental activity and its conditions – its function is orientational.<sup>13</sup> On this basis, we can make sense of the painfulness of feelings of pain and the pleasantness of feelings of pleasure in light of the fact that they manifest the negative or positive effects of a representation upon the subject and his potential for activity. Anything that inhibits his potential for activity is painful while everything that facilitates it is pleasurable. The function of feeling is thus to make the subject aware of what promotes and what hinders his activity: "Life is the inner principle of self-activity. . . . Only active beings can have pleasure and displeasure. Subjects that are active according to representations have pleasure and displeasure" (AK 28:247–48).

According to Kant, feelings can be oriented either toward objects or toward the subject. This is due to the fact that each faculty of the mind has a higher and lower subfaculty. Whereas the lower faculties passively receive

<sup>11</sup> These faculties are distinct in kind, so that contrary to common misconceptions, the faculty of cognition does not include "all the faculties of the mind" . . . "We can trace all faculties of the human mind without exception back to these three: the faculty of cognition, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire" (CJ 206). For a comprehensive map of the different faculties, their subfaculties, and their interrelations, see Julian Wuerth, *Kant on Mind, Action, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 221–34.

<sup>12</sup> "To every faculty of the mind one can attribute an *interest*, that is, a principle that contains the condition under which alone its exercise is promoted" (CPR 120). For detailed discussions of Kant's account of the faculties and their functioning, see in particular Alfredo Ferrarin, *The Powers of Pure Reason: Kant and the Idea of Cosmic Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 25–57.

<sup>13</sup> Kant hints at this definition of feeling in the following passage: "Here the representation is related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, which grounds *an entirely special faculty for discriminating and judging* that contributes nothing to cognition but only holds the given representation in the subject up to the entire faculty of representation, of which the mind becomes conscious in the feeling of its state" (CJ 204; emphasis added).

representations from objects, the higher faculties are themselves sources of representations. In the case of the faculty of feeling, its higher faculty is concerned with the subject, its lower faculty with objects.

The *lower* faculty of pleasure and displeasure is a power to find satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the objects which affect us. The *higher* faculty of pleasure and displeasure is a power to sense a pleasure and displeasure in ourselves, independently of objects. (AK 28:228–29)

Insofar as lower feelings are object based, when a sensible feeling of pleasure is triggered by the representation of an object, it gives rise to a sensible desire: “inclination is thereby aroused” (CJ 207). By contrast, higher feelings are subject based in the sense that they manifest the state of the subject’s mental agency. The feeling of reason’s need is one of these higher feelings.

While Kant does not offer an account of the genesis of the feeling of reason’s need, his clearest statement asserts that “Reason does not feel; it has insight into its lack and through the *drive for cognition* it effects the feeling of a need” (OT 139n). This suggests that the feeling of reason’s need already presupposes cognitive activity. The gap between reason’s ideal for cognition and the current state of cognition gives rise to a feeling of need when it is combined with a drive to cognize.

To make sense of this claim, recall that, as spelled out in Section 1.1, while reason’s aim is the systematization of knowledge, it is incapable of fully achieving its end. The world can never be fully cognized and thus our knowledge of it can never be fully unified. The incompleteness of our knowledge takes the form of an unbridgeable gap between reason’s ideal for cognition as it is presented by the ideas of reason and cognition in its current state. Although reason has a conception of what the complete conditions of appearances should look like, it is unable to provide them. The feeling of reason’s need is the effect of the incompleteness of the agent’s theoretical framework on feeling. In order, to avoid potential misunderstandings, note that this feeling is not the effect of the recognition or judgment of incompleteness, but rather the affective manifestation of reason’s incapacity to achieve the complete systematization of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, as already noted, although the complete systematization of knowledge can never be realized, reason can nevertheless be successful in the concrete unification of certain laws, in particular when it brings

<sup>14</sup> I would like to thank Yoon Choi for helping me clarify this point.

heterogeneous laws of nature under higher ones. What is often overlooked, however, is that this epistemic success gives rise to a feeling of pleasure.

[T]he discovered unifiability of two or more empirically heterogeneous laws of nature under a principle that comprehends them both is the ground of a very noticeable pleasure, often indeed of admiration, even of one which does not cease though one is already sufficiently familiar with its object. (CJ 187)<sup>15</sup>

This pleasure manifests the achievement of a distinct kind of cognition, systematized cognition, which alone fulfills the end of reason.<sup>16</sup> For as Kant notes, “The interest of [reason’s] speculative use consists in the *cognition* of the object up to the highest a priori principle” (CPR 120). When this interest is fulfilled and cognition is unified according to general a priori principles, no matter how partially, it gives rise to what I would like to call the pleasure of systematization. This feeling manifests the effective realization of the ideas of reason in the form of systematic knowledge – although of course, this realization can only ever be partial.

In this sense, the activity of speculative reason is the cause of two distinct feelings: a positive one, the pleasure of systematization, and a negative one, the feeling of reason’s need. Crucially for my account, they are intrinsically connected to each other, for there is a loop from the pain of reason’s need to the pleasure of systematization. Insofar as the feeling of reason’s need is a negatively valenced feeling, it triggers a desire to dispose of it and thus of what has caused it, namely the gap between reason’s ideal for cognition and its current state.<sup>17</sup> This gap is thus filled by using the

<sup>15</sup> See also: “It thus requires study to make us attentive to the purposiveness of nature for our understanding in our judging of it, where possible bringing heterogeneous laws of nature under higher though always still empirical ones, so that if we succeed in this accord of such laws for our faculty of cognition, which we regard as merely contingent, pleasure will be felt” (CJ 187–8).

<sup>16</sup> This type of cognition corresponds to what Kant calls the act of “comprehension.” It consists in making sense of something by means of the general principles and grounds that determine it as well as other instances of the same kind, by contrast with “conception,” which consists in understanding something by means of concepts: “to *understand* something (*intelligere*), *i.e.*, to cognize something *through the understanding by means of concepts*, or to *conceive . . . to comprehend* [*begreifen*] something (*comprehendere*), *i.e.*, to cognize something through reason or a priori to the degree that is sufficient for our purpose” (AK 9:65). See also AK 24:135 and 24:845–46. For an account of the distinction between understanding and comprehension, see Angela Breitenbach, “Understanding, Knowledge, and the Touchstone of Truth,” in *Proceedings of the 12th International Kant Congress*, ed. Violetta L. Waibel and Margit Ruffing (Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> As Kant writes, “Pleasure is a state of the mind in which a representation is in agreement with itself, as a ground, either merely for preserving this state itself (for the state of the powers of the mind reciprocally promoting each other in a representation preserves itself), or for producing its object” (AK 20:230–31). Conversely for pain: “What directly (through sense) urges me to leave my state (to go out of it) is disagreeable to me – it causes me pain” (APV 231). For a discussion of the motivational function of feeling in this context, see Rachel Zuckert, “A New Look at Kant’s Theory of Pleasure,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 3 (2002): 239–52.

ideas of reason as a regulative guide for cognition so as to further the unification of knowledge. When reason's need is fulfilled through the progress of the empirical systematization of cognition, it occasions a feeling of pleasure – the pleasure of systematization.<sup>18</sup> Thus the loop from the pain of reason's need to the pleasure of systematization effects the ongoing and never-ending progress of systematized cognition.

However, assigning a cognitive role to the feeling of reason's need goes against Kant's account of cognition, which prohibits feelings from providing any cognitive content, epistemic standard, cognitive ground, or epistemic guidance. As he repeatedly claims, "pleasure and displeasure in general . . . is something merely subjective, which yields no cognition" (MM 400).<sup>19</sup> Let me briefly spell out what this claim entails.

First, in feelings, "nothing at all in the object is designated" (CJ 204), for they "involve what is *merely subjective* in the relation of our representation and contain no relation at all to an object for possible cognition of it (or even cognition of our condition)" (MM 211–12). No knowledge can be attained through them: they "can never produce a cognition" (AK 24:730). This is because they do not yield objective but merely subjective certainty:

[F]requently we take something to be certain merely because it pleases us, and we take something to be uncertain merely because it displeases or annoys us. This certainty or uncertainty is not objective, however, but instead subjective. (AK 24:198)

Second, feelings cannot be used to justify or validate beliefs in any way. Epistemic justification is only a matter of evidence, judgment, and logical inference, and affective states are thus irrelevant.

Someone can be aesthetically certain if he holds the opposite of a thing or cognition that he has to be impossible merely because it does not please him. Thus, e.g., if his cognition is to believe in a divine being, eternal government, a future world, reward for good actions, punishment for bad

<sup>18</sup> My account of the genesis of the feeling of reason's need can be used to address a potential objection raised by Kleingeld. She notes that "nowhere does Kant discuss the anthropological structures that would account for the genesis of the feeling of the 'need of reason' in a manner parallel to this discussion of the feeling of respect" (Kleingeld, "The Conative Character of Reason in Kant's Philosophy," 85–86). Yet I have shown that Kant's remarks in "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" can be interpreted so as to provide such an account.

<sup>19</sup> See also: "Through sensation, good feeling, pain – one does not cognize an object" (AK 24:904); and "Feelings can never produce a cognition" (AK 24:730). As Sherman notes, "Kant's own official theory of the emotions leaves out the conceptual connection of emotion with cognition" (Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 178).



ones, etc. Certainty here rests merely on feeling[;] as something gives someone pleasure or displeasure, so accordingly does he accept it or reject it. In this way the human mind is actually subjected to very many illusions and deceptions. (AK 24:198)

When we use feelings in such ways, they produce illusions, unwarranted beliefs, and false cognitions; they give rise to illegitimate epistemic procedures: wishful thinking, unreliable grounds, warped standards, bias, and partiality. They introduce a subjective dimension into what should be wholly objective. For instance, if a belief that is unjustified gives me pleasure and induces me to accept it as true, or if I take a mere hypothesis to be true on the basis that it comes together with a feeling of certainty, I bring non-epistemic concerns to bear onto epistemic ones, thereby leading to unjustified beliefs. Thus feelings should not be used to provide any cognitive content, epistemic standard, cognitive ground, or epistemic guidance.

If this claim is correct, the justification of the regulative use of the ideas of reason now seems even more problematic than Guyer originally thought. For if it operates through what is in effect an affective feedback loop from the pain of reason's need to the pleasure of systematization, it seems to give rise to a vicious circle that turns cognition into a futile exercise of "self-serving delusion."<sup>20</sup> However, I will argue that it does not, since Kant's rejection of the cognitive role of feeling only applies to sensible feelings. The feeling of reason's need, by contrast, is a rational feeling, and as such, it can play a legitimate role in cognition. To support this claim, I will show that, although Kant does not say much about the feeling of reason's need, it should be thought of as belonging to a distinctive category of feeling, rational feeling, modelled on the feeling of respect for the moral law.

### 1.3 Reason's Feelings: The Feeling of Need vs. the Feeling of Respect

There is a vast literature on Kant's account of the feeling of respect, and I cannot even begin to make a dent in it here.<sup>21</sup> However, what is crucial

<sup>20</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 42.

<sup>21</sup> The literature on the feeling of respect for the law is usually divided into two camps: affectivists who argue that the feeling of respect is necessary for dutiful action, and intellectualists who acknowledge it is present, but argue all motivational work is on the part of reason. For the former, see for instance Richard McCarty, "Kantian Moral Motivation and the Feeling of Respect," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31, no. 3 (1993): 421–35. For the latter, see Andrews Reath, "Kant's Theory of Moral Sensibility: Respect for the Moral Law and the Influence of Inclination," *Kant-Studien* 80 (1989): 284–302. What these interpretations have in common is that they fail to appreciate that the feeling of respect belongs to the distinctive category of "rational feeling." As such, on my reading, it

for my present purpose is to note that what makes respect for the moral law a feeling is the following:

- (1) It “is an effect on feeling.” (CPR 76)
- (2) It is a “subjective ground of activity.” (CPR 79)
- (3) It is “the subjective determining ground of the will” (CPR 71) – an incentive (*Triebfeder*).

Yet Kant also points out that the feeling of respect is of “a peculiar kind” (CPR 76):

- (1R) It is a feeling that “is not of empirical origin.” (CPR 73)
- (2R) It is a subjective ground of activity that is “produced solely by reason.” (CPR 76)
- (3R) It is an incentive that “can be cognized a priori.” (CPR 78)

The features that set respect apart from other feelings are meant to avoid a contradiction between, on the one hand, Kant’s rejection of heteronomous forms of motivation based on sensible feelings and, on the other, his need to account for an incentive that impels us to act for the sake of the moral law. For, by contrast with the feeling of respect, other feelings have the following features:

- (1S) They are effects on feelings that are “*received* by means of influence.” (G 401n)
- (2S) They are subjective grounds of activity that are “sensible” and “pathologically effected.” (CPR 75)
- (3S) They are subjective determining grounds of the will that “always belong to the *order of nature*” (MM 377) – inclinations (*Neigungen*).

Notwithstanding their fundamental differences, the feeling of respect and sensible feelings have a feature in common, which Kant repeatedly emphasizes. Namely, both the feeling of respect and sensible feelings generate a “drive”; they have a conative dimension.

[R]espect as consciousness of direct necessitation of the will by the law is hardly an analogue of the feeling of pleasure, although in relation to the faculty of desire *it does the same thing* but from different sources. (CPR 117; emphasis added)<sup>22</sup>

functions neither as an inclination, as affectivists believe, nor as a cognition, as intellectualists believe; rather, it has the unique features of a rational feeling insofar as it manifests the conditions of moral agency.

<sup>22</sup> See also: respect “is something that is regarded as an object neither of inclination nor fear, though it has something analogous to both” (G 401n).

While this analogy emphasizes what the feeling of respect shares with sensible feelings (i.e., its motivational aspect), Kant also draws another analogy, an analogy between theoretical reason's feeling of its need and moral feeling.

[Theoretical reason] does not feel . . . it effects the feeling of a need. It is the same way with moral feeling, which does not cause any moral law, for this arises wholly for reason; rather, it is caused or effected by moral laws, hence by reason, because the active yet free will needs determinate grounds. (OT 139n)

What this analogy suggests is that theoretical reason's feeling of its need and moral feeling share three features that set them apart from all other feelings:

- A. They are both called "feeling" in a sense that needs to be qualified.
  - a. For theoretical reason's feeling, "[r]eason does not feel," and yet there is "a felt *need* of reason." (OT 139)
  - b. Practical reason's feeling is a "singular feeling which cannot be compared to any pathological feeling." (CPR 76)
- B. They are both caused by reason alone.
  - a. Theoretical reason's feeling "arises wholly from reason." (OT 139n)
  - b. Practical reason's feeling is "produced solely by reason." (CPR 76)
- C. They both supply grounds for rational activity.
  - a. Theoretical reason's feeling provides "a subjective ground for . . . *orienting* itself in thinking." (OT 137)
  - b. Practical reason's feeling is a "subjective ground of activity." (CPR 79)

The analogy between the feeling of reason's need and moral feeling is not only apt but remarkably enlightening. For in both cases the notion of feeling has been qualified so that the features that make them feelings are preserved while those that make them sensible are replaced with rational features. Unlike ordinary sensible feelings, the feeling of reason's need and the feeling of respect do not have a sensible cause. As Kant notes repeatedly concerning the feeling of respect, what distinguishes it from all feelings "*received* by means of influence" is that it is "a feeling *self-wrought*" (G 401n). While "every influence on feeling and every feeling in general" is "*pathological*," the feeling of respect is "*practically effected*" rather than "sensibly effected": "the incentive of the moral disposition must be free from any sensible condition . . . on account of its origin, [respect] cannot

be called pathologically effected” (CPR 75). It is because the feeling of reason’s need and the feeling of respect “find their source in reason itself” that they are “specifically different from all feelings of the first kind” (G 401n). They are what we could call ‘autonomous feelings,’ in reference to Kant’s distinction between the autonomous form of motivation, in which the will determines itself through the moral law, and heteronomous forms of motivation, in which the will is determined by sensible feelings and natural impulses.<sup>23</sup> They are autonomously generated as well as rationally determined since they are only conditioned by the agent’s own rational capacities rather than external conditions over which he has little or no control. It is in this sense that they are feelings like no others – rational feelings, caused by reason and thus independent from any sensible cause.

There is thus a crucial difference between reason being motivated by nonrational, sensible feelings, and it being motivated by rational feelings.

[W]e could not allege a need *of reason* if we had not before our eyes a problematic but yet unavoidable concept of reason [i.e., an idea of reason] . . . Without such prior necessary problems there are no *needs*, at least *not of pure reason*; the rest are needs of inclination. (CPR 142)<sup>24</sup>

Only sensible feelings fall prey to Kant’s claim that feelings are not capable of providing epistemic guidance. By contrast, we can legitimately use the ideas of reason regulatively on the basis of theoretical reason’s feeling insofar as it is a *rational* feeling.<sup>25</sup> As a rational feeling, the feeling of reason’s need can be used as a ground for our cognitive activity. Insofar as it originates in reason, it is rationally determined and provides us with a legitimate guide to a cognitive task – an affective response that can play a justificatory role, by contrast with other kinds of affective responses (e.g., wishful thinking, discussed in Section 1.2).

To make sense of the nature of the cognitive function that is thereby vindicated, however, we need to focus on its role as a rational *feeling*. As the following section will show, by applying my account of feeling to the

<sup>23</sup> See G 433.

<sup>24</sup> For a clear and detailed account of the nature of inclinations in Kant’s psychology, see Patrick R. Frierson, *Kant’s Empirical Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. chap. 2.

<sup>25</sup> As Willaschek notes, “even the interest of speculative reason is practical in so far as it is based on a *need* of reason and also in so far as it directs us to *do* something (namely to inquire into a priori principles)” (Marcus Willaschek, “The Primacy of Practical Reason and the Idea of a Practical Postulate,” in *Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide*, ed. Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 185).

case of theoretical reason's feelings, we can determine their function vis-à-vis reason's activity and thereby vindicate reason's regulative use of its ideas. Yet crucially, this vindication is restricted to the sole purpose of enabling cognitive activity.

#### 1.4 The Vindication of the Regulative Use of the Ideas of Reason

On my reading, when we rely on theoretical reason's feelings, we act, to borrow Kant's idiom, for reason's sake, to promote rational agency and its conditions. And in this respect, we do so legitimately. To make sense of this claim, recall that, as spelled out in section 1, without reason's demand for unity through its ideas, the activity of the understanding would have no guidance: "the law of reason to seek unity is necessary, since without it we would have no reason, and without that, no coherent use of the understanding, and, lacking that, no sufficient mark of empirical truth" (A651).<sup>26</sup> The regulative use of the ideas of reason makes it possible for reason to guide the understanding in the ongoing production of systematic knowledge: reason "gives a principle for the progression according to empirical laws, through which the investigation of nature becomes possible" (AK 20:204–5). Reason's feelings, qua feelings, contribute to this ongoing progress by manifesting the conditions of rational agency – a feeling of pleasure when its conditions are fulfilled and rational agency is furthered, and a feeling of pain when its conditions are unfulfilled and rational agency is hindered.

[H]ence we are also delighted (strictly speaking, relieved of a need) when we encounter such a systematic unity among merely empirical laws, just as if it were a happy accident which happened to favor our aim, even though we necessarily had to assume that there is such a unity, yet without having been able to gain insight into it and to prove it. (CJ 184)<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For a similar claim that without the assumption of systematicity the use of the understanding and thus the possibility of experience itself will be undermined, see A653–54. For a discussion of this claim, see Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 35–47. Although I cannot defend this part of the claim here, I would argue that theoretical reason ought to rely on its feelings. Otherwise, it can never progress and realize its ends, as Kant suggests when he writes that "the most common experience would not be possible without it" (CJ 187).

<sup>27</sup> Kant notes that "Conversely, a representation of nature that foretold that even in the most minor investigation of the most common experience we would stumble on a heterogeneity in its laws that would make the unification of its particular laws under universal empirical ones impossible for our understanding would thoroughly displease us; because this would contradict the principle of the subjective-purposive specification of nature in its genera" (CJ 187–88). This feeling of displeasure should be interpreted as the affective effect of our cognitive failure to systematize our cognitions.

Yet crucially for my account, it is not because the regulative use of reason's ideas gives rise to successful systematization that it is justified.

Of course, our ideas as regulative guides do work, and we do feel pleasure from their success. There is thus a sense in which the ongoing empirical realization of the ideas of reason through the unification and systematization of our knowledge of the natural world serves as a retro-active and ongoing confirmation that we were not in the wrong in relying on them.<sup>28</sup> Or to put it slightly differently, if they did not work, we would know it. If cognition was not progressing by doing so, it would not make sense for reason to carry on using its ideas regulatively. Yet it is merely an empirical and incomplete confirmation. The fact that the regulative use of the ideas of reason occasions actual systematized cognition only provides us with grounds for thinking that this use is not obviously illegitimate, but it is not sufficient to justify the regulative use of reason's ideas.

On my reading, the justification of the regulative use of the ideas of reason is grounded on the function of rational feelings. Insofar as they manifest the conditions of rational agency and motivate us to act accordingly, what they justify is the use reason makes of its ideas in order to enable cognitive activity. In this respect, a crucial difference between theoretical and practical reason is that, in the case of the latter, the feeling of its need justifies the belief in the existence of the object of its ideas whereas, in the former, it only justifies our regulative use of the ideas themselves: "the principle that determines our judgment about it, though it is *subjective* as a need, is yet, as the means of promoting what is *objectively* (practically) necessary, the ground of a maxim of assent for moral purposes, that is, a *pure practical rational belief*" (CPR 146). The ultimate justification of our reliance on the ideas of reason is practical, which confirms the fact that it is essentially connected to the needs of rational activity. While this broader claim falls beyond the limits of this chapter, let me make sense of the narrower claim about the justification of the use theoretical reason makes of its ideas by considering what goes on when relying on the feeling of reason's need is not justified, what Kant calls the transcendent use of reason.

In this case, reason's feeling of its need pushes reason beyond the legitimate bounds of experience.

[H]uman reason, without being moved merely by the idle desire for extent and variety of knowledge, proceeds impetuously, driven on by an inward

<sup>28</sup> As Kant writes, "one is thereby neither prescribing a law to nature nor learning one from it by means of observation (although *that principle can be confirmed by the latter*)" (CJ 186; emphasis added).

need, to questions such as cannot be answered by any empirical employment of reason, or by principles thence derived. (B21)<sup>29</sup>

Thereby, reason produces dialectical inferences whose conclusion illegitimately asserts the objective reality of the ideas of reason. When reason addresses its needs by making a transcendent use of its ideas, its mistake is to think that its feelings can contribute to cognition by the mere fact of assigning objective reality to the content of its ideas. The transcendent use of reason is really just reason's wishful thinking for its ideas to generate their own content. By contrast, recall that when reason uses its ideas merely regulatively, their function is not (or at least not directly) to generate content but merely to enable cognitive activity: "reason really has as object only the understanding and its purposive application" (A644). Reason is thus only indirectly conducive to cognition. As Kant repeatedly notes, the purpose of reason's demand for unity is "for the provision of our understanding," "to bring the understanding into thoroughgoing connection with itself" (A305). It is in this sense that reason's ideas are the condition of possibility of cognitive activity.<sup>30</sup> Owing to reason's guidance, the understanding can get on with its activity, which does give rise to knowledge. However, it is the regulative use of the ideas of reason rather than their objective validity (i.e., the fact that they are true of nature itself) that is necessary for the cognitive activity of the understanding.

As a result, to go back to Guyer's original worry, the regulative use of reason's ideas is in some sense "self-serving" insofar as it serves theoretical reason's purpose. However, it is certainly not "a delusion" since it does not entail any belief that nature is systematic.<sup>31</sup> As I have argued, by relying on reason's regulative function on the basis of the feeling of reason's need, what we are committed to is neither the presupposition of nature's systematic unity nor the duty to seek this unity; rather, we are committed to the activity of cognizing, and ultimately, to rational agency and the improvement of its condition. On my reading, this commitment alone is justified, which is all that cognition needs to keep going.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. also our "inextinguishable desire to find firm footing somewhere beyond the limits of experience. Reason has a presentiment of objects which possess a great interest for it" (A796).

<sup>30</sup> To formulate this claim slightly differently, although there is no space to defend it here, the regulative use of the ideas of reason is transcendentally necessary in the sense that it is the condition of possibility of theoretical rational agency. In a similar vein, Sasha Mudd talks about the "transcendental conditions on *how* we know" rather than "*what* we know": "It conditions our cognitive activity without directly conditioning the objects we grasp through our activity" (Mudd, "Rethinking the Priority of Practical Reason in Kant," *European Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 [2016]: 88).

<sup>31</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 42.

## 1.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to shed new light on the notion of reason's need by emphasizing the fact that this need manifests itself as a feeling. As I have argued, the function of the feeling of reason's need allows us to vindicate our reliance on the regulative use of the ideas of reason, although it does so for the sole purpose of enabling our cognitive activity. Of course, a lot more work needs to be done to offer a complete picture of theoretical reason's activity in relation to its ideas. However, what I hope to have shown is that focusing on rational feelings suggests a new way in Kant's account of rational agency and its conditions. Insofar as we can only express our commitment to reason through its activity (theoretically through the attempt to systematize knowledge according to the regulative ideas of reason, and practically through universalizable willing for the sake of the moral law), rational feelings enable us to cognize and will as we ought to. Recall the analogy Kant draws between the feeling of reason's need and moral feeling: just as the feeling of respect plays the role of determining ground for the will, the feeling of reason's need provides a determining ground for our regulative use of the ideas of reason.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, rational feelings reflect the transcendental conditions of agency: they are concerned with the subject as transcendental a priori legislator of nature and freedom.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> OT 139.

<sup>33</sup> For helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter, I would like to thank Yoon Choi and Diane Williamson.