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Moral Motivation

A HISTORY

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Contents

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Kant and Moral Motivation

THE VALUE OF FREE RATIONAL WILLING

Jennifer Uleman

This chapter is shaped by a kind of incredulity. For Kant, I was taught, a conception of right, or law, or duty—which one depended on who was teaching—comes before any conception of the good. A conception of the good did not drive Kantian morality. There was, of course, text to underwrite the claim. In the 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes: "instead of the concept of the good as an object determining and making possible the moral law, it is on the contrary the moral law that first determines and makes possible the concept of the good" (KpV 5:64).[1] In the 1785 *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of*

Morals, Kant urges "the renunciation of all interest" in moral willing, that is, "in volition from duty" (G 4:431). Kant, the argument seemed to be, carves out a space for rightness, or lawfulness, or moral obligation, or "volition from duty," that is independent of a story about goodness. Kant is concerned with formal principles, not conceptions of the good life; or, Kant requires a kind of rule-governed reasoning, not a determinate outcome; or, most extremely, for Kant, morality just consists in volition from duty, for its own sake.

This picture, in any of its versions, did not make sense. Why would we want to do right, or be in the right, or be principled, or lawful, or do our duty, or pursue morality at all, however you put it, unless the right, or the law, or duty, or morality, were somehow *good*? Whatever else was the case, it seemed to me, *will* could only be expected to engage, could only be motivated, when it took something to be good. This last thought is, of course, present in the first line of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and is endorsed by the many after him who, like me, are persuaded on the conceptual point—we make things objects of our wills if and only if they seem to us in some way good. The thought that a morally proper will was precisely one that eschewed attention to the good seemed to me impossible.

A/B   *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781/1787) [Ak 3, B ed.].
     Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Paul Guyer and Allan Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
G   *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) [Ak 4].
     Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
KpV   *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788) [Ak 5].
     Critique of Practical Reason, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
KU   *Kritik der Urtheilskraft* (1790) [Ak 5].
     Critique of the Power of Judgment, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
MS   *Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797) [Ak 6].
     Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
R   *Reflexionen (handschriftliche Nachlaß)* (1750–1790s) [Ak. 14–19].
     Notes and Fragments, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. C. Bowman, P. Guyer, and F. Rauscher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
ZeF   "Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf" (1795) [Ak 8].
     "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).

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1 References to Kant's works are by title initials (from the German originals, listed here) with volume and page number from the standard Akademie edition: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlichen Preußischen [later Deutschen] Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer [later Walter de Gruyter], 1900–). The exceptions are citations to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which give page numbers for both the A (1781) and B (1787) editions, e.g., A301/B358 (where a passage occurs in only one edition, only one is given, e.g., B131), and to Reflexionen, which include Reflexion numbers. Translations are from the English editions listed here unless otherwise noted. The square-bracketed number following the publication date here is the Akademie volume number.

I understood the nonconsequentialist claim, that is, the claim that for Kant aim matters more than actual results in determining moral worth. But I could not understand the claim that moral worth depends somehow on a form of reasoning that *had no aim*. But yes, no, I was given to believe, it is so with Kant—we must pursue duty *for its own sake*, not because of some ulterior motive, like a mere feeling that the demands of duty are good. Eyebrows up, internally, anyway. It seemed, incredibly and as Bernard Williams has put it, that for Kant, "there can be no reason for being moral, and morality itself presents itself as an unmediated demand, a categorical imperative."[2]

The possibility that this was Kant's view also worried many of his friends. Schiller's 1794 *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* sought to make clearer to a skeptical public wherein the ennobling power and appeal of Kant's moral view lay.[3] At present, thanks significantly to work by Barbara Herman and Paul Guyer, characterizations of Kant's work as purely formal are out of favor. The moral law *has* an end, a value that grounds it, their work has insisted.[4] The account I offer here

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2 Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 55.

3 Friedrich Schiller's 1794 *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* sought to do this even as Schiller authored this famous satirical verse, which mocks the Kantian moralist:

Gewissensskrupel

Gerne dien' ich den Freunden, doch tu' ich es leider mit Neigung.
Und so wurmt es mir oft, daß ich nicht tugendhaft bin.
Decisum
Da ist kein anderer Rat, du mußt suchen, sie zu verachten,
Und mit Abscheu alsdann tun, wie die Pflicht dir gebeut.

[Scruple of Conscience]
Gladly I serve my friends, but alas I do it with pleasure.
Hence I am plagued with doubt that I am not a virtuous person.

[Ruling]
Surely, your only resource is to try to despise them entirely,
And then with aversion to do what your duty enjoins you.

Friedrich Schiller, *Xenien* (1797), collected in Goethe, *Werke I*, edited by Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1949), 221; this translation (apart from English headings, which I've added) appears in H. J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1947).

4 See Barbara Herman, "Leaving Deontology Behind," in Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 208–240. See Paul Guyer, "Kant's Morality of Law and Morality of Freedom," in Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness* (Cambridge:

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builds on this work and also, thereby, seeks to address the worry that Kantian moral subjects are motivationally opaque, if not, as some have also charged, perverse.[5]

This chapter has two sections. The first defends a claim that, for Kant, moral attitudes and actions are precisely those motivated by respect for and commitment to actively promote the activity of free rational willing itself. The second addresses the question that lingers even once this has been established, namely, what motivates this respect and commitment? What, in other words, motivates the moral Kantian? Here, I seek to make explicit those aspects of free rational willing that motivate moral subjects to respect and actively promote free rational willing; free rational willing promises release from the mechanism of nature and from both interpersonal and inner turmoil, forms of intellectual and moral self-sufficiency, and experiences of self and others as universal, necessary, infinite, and creative (among other things). Many of these echo merits advertised by other moral theories, though in Kant they find distinctive derivation and expression. Noticing them, I claim, not only begins to answer critics who worry that there is no reason to be Kantian, but may also remind us of the power and appeal of Kant's view.

I. KANT ON MORAL MOTIVATION

This section sketches Kant's basic view of moral motivation. It begins by asking what is distinctive about that view, indicating why characterizations of the view as "nonconsequentialist" and "deontological" both fail to adequately capture it. The section then turns to the mechanics of Kantian willing itself, articulating both "bare" and "full" senses of the will's

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Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129–171. Herman characterizes the end of morality as rational nature; Guyer characterizes it as freedom. I prefer "the activity of free rational willing," for reasons that will become clear. My view is initially worked out in Jennifer Uleman, *An Introduction to Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). This chapter extends that work.

5 See Schiller's satirical verse; see also, for instance, Ermanno Bencivenga, "Kant's Sadism," *Philosophy and Literature* 20:1 (1996): 39–46.

freedom and rationality. Understanding these distinct senses will be important for understanding the motives available to a Kantian will. The section ends by showing that the specifically moral Kantian will is one motivated by a respect for and commitment to actively promote fully free rational willing itself. This sets the stage for section 2, where I ask the further question of what might motivate such respect or commitment.

What Is Distinctive about Kant's View of Moral Motivation?

Everyone knows part of the answer here: for Kant, the will's motives, and not its effects, are decisive in determining whether an agent has acted in a way that is morally worthy. This is Kant's well-known "nonconsequentialism," his refusal to locate a story about moral worth in the effects or consequences of willing, the way a Humean or a utilitarian would. Here, as he knew, Kant has commonsense on his side. Familiar forms of moral judgment and moral practice are focused on motive and intent, on what an agent wills and why, and they assess responsibility and award moral (as well as legal) praise and blame on these bases. For Kant, motives and intentions are what matter,[6] morally speaking, and truly good ones pave the road not to hell but to perpetual peace.

But nonconsequentialism for its own sake is not driving Kant. Kant seriously does want worldwide perpetual peace and thinks the moral law will help us achieve it.[7] His 1797 *Metaphysics of Morals* lays out the basic principles for a morally successful human society, including principles of external (political, legal) governance and of internal (psychological, self) governance. Kant's commitment to finding bases for human *hope,*

6 I here run roughshod over technical distinctions between motives (*Bewegungsgrunde*), incentives (*Treibfedern*), aims or intentions (*Absichten*), and interests (*Interesse*), distinctions Kant and his commentators sometimes find it very helpful to make. For my purposes here, these distinctions are less important than the fact that all name reasons or grounds (*Grunde*) for acting. I take the question about motive in this volume to be an overarching question about what can move us to action.

7 See Kant's essay "Perpetual Peace" (ZeF). Also see Kate Moran, *Community and Progress in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2012). Moran makes an important case for the roles played in Kant's moral thought by ideals of progress and of realizable moral community. See also David Cummisky, *Kantian Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

that is, grounds for optimism that the arrangements of the world will increasingly conduce to human well-being, makes clear that he is not Stoically indifferent to consequences, nor does he think the rest of us could, should, or will be (see, for instance, A805/B833; KpV 5:129–130; ZeF). So while there is something right, there is also something inadequate in the claim that Kant is a nonconsequentialist.

Similarly, there is something right but also something inadequate in the claim that Kant is a deontologist, that is, that he understands morality to consist just in conformity with a set of rules or roster of duties. It is true that the surest way to find one's moral footing, for Kant, is to consult the "fundamental law of pure practical reason" (KpV 5:30), which serves as "the canon of moral appraisal of action in general" (G 4:424). But this law is not, like one of the Ten Commandments, handed us from on high or otherwise simply given, something to be adhered to without rationale. The Kantian moral law is something we give ourselves, and (presumably) we give it to ourselves because we value and respect what it promotes. It is also true, as those calling Kant a deontologist will note, that Kant confines moral worth to actions undertaken *out of duty* (G 4:397–398). An action that conforms, externally, to moral requirements but is performed for "non-dutiful," that is, base or anyway ulterior, motives deserves no special moral praise. But it is misleading to characterize Kant's view as ultimately about duty for its own sake, leaving matters there; this characterization muzzles itself on the question of why we would be motivated to act out of duty, that is, on the moral law. It seems to insist that we do the right thing just because it is right, where rightness is arbitrary and opaque.

Kant opens the first section of the *Groundwork* by announcing: "it is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a *good will*" (G 4:393; Kant's emphasis). Kant there proceeds to unfold an account of the thing that, in us, is subject to motivation—the will—and of those motives that alone can make it morally good, indeed the only unconditionally good thing "in the world, or indeed even beyond it"

(G 4:393). Kant's moral philosophy, I now turn to argue, revolves around this good. Yes, intentions matter more than consequences for Kant; and yes, morally worthy actions are morally worthy in virtue of their accord with a particular kind of law. But there is more to be said than nonconsequentialism or deontology can say about what makes the unconditionally good will so good. I turn now to the mechanics of Kantian willing, asking what that will is, explaining its freedom and rationality, and describing the motives available to it.

What Is the Will, That Is, What Is the Thing That Is Motivated, for Kant?

For Kant all living things (even plants, it seems) have a faculty of desire.[8] This faculty, as Kant carefully puts it, is "a being's faculty to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations" (KpV 5:9n). A faculty of desire, in other words, is a capacity to turn ideas into realities, thoughts into things, or at least to try to (success is not guaranteed). To have this capacity is precisely to be able to want something and act toward its realization.

A faculty of desire is, as Kant's careful definition makes clear, a form of causality.[9] As a form of causality, a faculty of desire is always both a source of effects and something that works according to a principle.[10] These features will become important shortly.

In human beings, the faculty of desire has a special name, the *will*.[11] Will is distinct from other faculties of desire (e.g., those in

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8 The capacity for desire is, for Kant, characteristic of life itself. We routinely think of plants as living, but it is hard to tell from Kant's comments whether he really means to extend the capacity for desire to plants as well as animals. Insofar as a plant pursues ends (sunlight, water) and "senses" the environment, it may perhaps be said to "act in accordance with its representations," which capacity, Kant writes, "is called life" (MS 6:211; see also KpV 5:9n).

9 Specifically, a *teleological* or *final* form of causality (see G 4:436n; KU 5:359–360 and 369–370).

10 Readers who imagine they can desire without effect should consult Kant's discussion of how even mere *wishing* makes the blood rush and the heart pound at KU 5:177–178n; see also MS 6:356–357.

11 Attentive readers of Kant, and of the Kant literature, will know that Kant uses two relevant cognate terms: *Wille* (usually translated "will") and *willkür* (usually translated "capacity for choice"). Here, I understand by "will" what Kant understands by *Wille*, namely the whole faculty of practical reasoning, including the specifically human faculty of desire with its power or capacity for (free) choice.

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animals) in being both rational and free. Crucially, it is rational and free, for Kant, in two importantly different senses. In the first, bare senses, any human will is always already rational and free; its rationality and freedom are inevitable and thoroughgoing, not something we can avoid even if we want to. In the second, full senses, rationality and freedom are achievements of a will, achievements that are far from inevitable, that admit of more and less, and that can be forfeited all too easily. To make better sense of this, let us look at rationality and freedom each in turn.

In a first, bare sense, rationality is an inevitable and thoroughgoing feature not only of human will but of human mental life in general. Rationality here comprises our use of concepts to determine objects and their relations and to compare what is given to standards; rationality in this minimal, bare sense is employed whenever we make judgments of any kind, however routine or unconscious. Specifically practical reason—the species of reason proper to will—also has a minimal or bare version. Whenever I will, I will for reasons (however bad, of whatever origin, however unconsciously endorsed). Where I am *not* willing for reasons, the things I do are not properly *actions* or willed at all but mere physical events that take place in or with my body: driving to Brooklyn is a willed action; digesting my lunch is not. My will is thus rational in a bare sense whenever I make any prudential or means/ends calculations, whatever the end, whatever the source or moral status of the end, whatever the wisdom of the course or of my calculations. In this minimal sense, then, the will's rationality is inevitable and thoroughgoing.

In the second, full sense, the will's rationality is an achievement. Will is fully rational only when its reasons for willing are endorsed by reason qua reason—that is, only when its reasons are *not* serving as prudential Humean slaves to the passions but are serving reason on its own behalf, as it were. As I will show, the only reasons that reason qua reason can endorse are reasons of its own, that is, reasons for willing that have their origin not in sensuous desires or inclinations but in the interests of reason itself. The will is thus rational in this second, full

sense only when it is moved by reasons of reason's own. It is moved by reasons of reason's own only through effort and commitment, and only the will that is rational in this second sense is fully moral.

In the same way, there are two senses in which will can be free. The first, bare sense picks out something inevitable and thoroughgoing, and the other sense picks out a precarious, morally praiseworthy achievement. For Kant, all freedom consists in not being determined by something external, whether that external thing is nature, God, or another's will; freedom is self-determination. In the first, bare, inevitable, and thoroughgoing sense, will is free insofar as it is not, like a cog in a machine, forcibly sprung into organism-galvanizing action by sensuous desires. There is a gap, always, between the desires I have as a sensuous creature and my choice of whether to be determined, that is, moved to action, by them. This distinguishes human will from the faculties of desire in plants and animals; they just go whenever a relevant inclination or stimulus is present.

We are free in this first, bare sense whenever we choose what to will, whether we choose willing determined by nature, God, another's will, or ourselves. We are thus *always* free in this sense, because we always do *choose*. Thus does Kant hold that we can be held responsible for all our actions (though not of course for all the motions of our bodies, some of which, as I have shown, are not actions). We always have the capacity to choose what reason for acting will move us, and so we are always responsible for the actions we undertake. The metaphysics required for this claim will need to be left for another time; the upshot here is that there is a first, bare sense in which the Kantian will is always free, in a way that is inevitable and thoroughgoing.

In the second, full sense, will is free for Kant when it chooses to will in a way that sustains its own freedom. It does this whenever it chooses to will on a reason that is fully its own—not one given by nature, or God, or another's will. A reason that is reason's own is one that belongs to reason qua reason. Only when will chooses in favor of such a reason is it *fully* self-determined—only thus are both the *choice* of reason and

the *reason* itself fully its own—and so only here is the will's freedom sustained throughout determination. Full freedom, like full rationality, cannot be taken for granted but is an achievement; and, like full rationality, it is a precarious one.

Now, because will is always and inevitably rational and free in the bare senses, it always wills on a principle, or maxim. "Maxim" is the term Kant uses for the "subjective" or local and actually operative principle adopted by an individual will. To adopt a maxim is to represent it to oneself (however unconsciously) and to choose (again, however unconsciously) to be guided by it. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant discusses a case in which I have "made it my maxim to increase my wealth by every safe means" (KpV 5:27). Earlier in the *Critique*, Kant considered the maxim "Let no insult pass unavenged" (KpV 5:19). These maxims, like the maxims considered and rejected in the four famous *Groundwork* examples,[12] turn out to be morally problematic, but Kant elsewhere offers examples of maxims that are morally sound. One can make "pursuit of morality itself" one's maxim (MS 6:392), along with, "love of one's neighbor in general," "love of one's parents" (MS 6:390), and "the happiness of others" (MS 6:393). Maxims thus come in many syntactic shapes and sizes and vary widely in specificity. What they have in common is that they are the local laws or principles that govern or determine actual wills, and that do so just in virtue of having been chosen by the subject.

Why choose one maxim rather than another? Maxims also have in common that they all advert to an end or ground, that is, to an ultimate reason for acting. This end or ground constitutes the reason the

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12 The maxims are: (1) "From self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when its longer duration threatens more troubles than it promises agreeableness" (G 4:422), (2) "When I believe myself to be in need of money I shall borrow money and promise to repay it, even though I know that this will never happen" (G 4:422), and (3) "Let each be as happy as heaven wills or as he can make himself; I shall take nothing from him nor even envy him; only I do not care to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in need!" (G 4:423). Kant, in his fourth example, does not formulate the subject's maxim as such, but we can reconstruct it as (4) "because I prefer to give myself up to pleasure, I will not trouble myself with enlarging and improving my talents" (G 4:422).

principle is chosen or adopted.[13] Maxims, in other words, advert to possible motives.

What Kinds of Motives Are There, for Kant?

For Kant, there are two fundamental motives: in a given case, we opt to will in accord with nature or to will in accord with reason. Each of these two motives is contained in a corresponding kind of maxim.

We opt to will in accord with nature when we choose to act on a maxim that is grounded in self-preservation, sensuous pleasure, or some combination of both (they often coincide) whether the terms of these are set by the organism, God, or another's will. We pursue self-preservation and pleasure by pursuing particular local ends or states of affairs, of course, but the idea here is that, for this set of maxims, the underlying motive is provided by nature via the inclinations of the organism. Kant describes all such willing as willing on the principle or law of self-love. The precise content of a maxim grounded in this law, depending as it will on the given natural constitution and situation of the organism in question, will always be empirical. But, whatever the local content, whenever I choose to will in ways grounded in the law of self-love, I choose to let my will be determined by a law that is given from without and to which I am passively subject. I am motivated by self-love, not by reason. Willing on maxims grounded in self-love, though free and rational in the bare senses described earlier, is thus neither fully free nor fully rational. Such willing does not sustain my freedom through determination, nor does its motive reside within reason itself.

In contrast, when we choose to will on a motive that resides within reason itself, we achieve both full rationality and full freedom. Reason as such is not motivated by self-preservation or sensuous pleasure (though it may be instrumentally interested in these, insofar as they serve its purposes). If we can, for Kant, identify a purely rational motive and the principle grounded in it, and if we choose determination by

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13 For a more fine-grained account, see Uleman, *An Introduction to Kant's Moral Philosophy*, 41–48.

that principle, then we choose to will in a way that is fully free and fully rational. We accomplish fully free rational willing.

What, Then, Is the Purely Rational Motive?

How are we to identify a purely rational motive, something in which reason as such has an interest? There are several ways to go here. I could just cite text where Kant tells what such a motive would be: "Now I say that the human being and in general every rational being *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as a means* to be used by this or that will at its discretion; instead he must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or also to other rational beings, always be regarded *at the same time as an end*" (G 4:428; italics in original). All rational beings as such are, for Kant, ends in themselves (G 4:431). How does this constitute a purely rational motive? "All objects of the inclinations have only conditional worth," Kant writes, but rational beings as such have unconditional or "absolute" worth (G 4:428). Rational beings are characterized by what Kant calls "rational nature" or, in us, "humanity" (G 4:428–431), that is, the capacity to will in ways that are at once inherently free and rational in the bare senses described earlier, and potentially free and rational in the full senses. Kant's claim in the passages just cited is that we must take an interest in this; rational being constitutes a necessary end, one we must embrace independent of sensuous inclination. My explication could end here: will can and should, for Kant, be moved by reason itself to make free rational willing as such always an end, and so to adopt maxims that serve this end.

But it may be more helpful to get to this claim the way Kant does. Kant looks at the kind of thing that determines a will, namely a principle, and asks what principle there could be that abstracts from all empirical, inclination-based, natural motives. This is the strategy that inspires Kant's detractors, as well as those sympathizers who characterize him as nonconsequentialist and deontological, so it is worth working though.

Kant offers an argument from elimination, asking us to imagine a practical, or action-guiding, law that abstracts from all empirical content, that is, from all sensuous ends. When we do so, we are left just with *features of the form of law itself*, namely, with universality and necessity themselves. How does this get us to a practical law, to a rule for willing? It does so by revealing the demand that we must will *in a universalizable way*, that is, on universalizable maxims and, what will amount to the same thing, that we must will in a way that serves a necessary, nonempirical end.

This is a neat trick, but it is not just a trick. In moving from the fact that any law, as a law, must be universal to the demand that we freely adopt a law that itself demands universalizable maxims, Kant accomplishes something profound. If I restrict myself to willing on universalizable maxims, I make willing in ways that others could endorse a priority. I privilege, in other words, free rational willing (my own and others') itself over any particular empirical end. Kant is no fool when it comes to either human conflict or the diversity of human desires, commitments, and forms of life, but he is guardedly optimistic that human beings can, if we try, find a common framework for leading lives that, broadly speaking, cooperate. Willing only on universalizable maxims pledges allegiance to that ideal by pledging allegiance to a framework that is grounded not in this or that contingent and possibly idiosyncratic empirical end but in a form of willing that is in principle respectful of everyone else's willing.

A universal law not only holds necessarily but also, if it is a practical law, is grounded in a necessary end. Focus on the form of law reveals reason's demand for an end or ground it can regard as unconditioned or necessary. Self-love only ever proposes conditioned, contingent ends. But a practical system that is not grounded in an unconditioned good or necessary end can never give final answers about what matters (G 4:428); willing, in the absence of such answers, risks perpetual idiosyncrasy and ultimate pointlessness. Kant, by looking just at the form of law, has discovered a demand for universalizability that itself serves

a necessary end by demanding respect for and promotion of free rational willing itself. Kant gets from the form of law to its content.[14]

Why should we care about this content? As subjects with free rational wills, we are interested not only in satisfying inclinations but also in free rational willing as such, and in sustaining our freedom and rationally by willing in ways that are fully free and rational. At work is a kind of "self-interest" that is not that of the natural organism but of the free rational self itself, the same self that is potential creator, sustainer, and respected member of a moral order. Kant thinks we will recognize this self and its capacities for free rational willing as both intrinsically and supremely valuable. We are free to make the mistake of thinking that pleasure, or self-preservation, or anything other than free rational willing, is the ultimate end after which we should strive. But it would be a mistake. The ultimate good in line with which all our ends should fall is precisely a kind of volitional activity, the kind that is free and rational and that sets and pursues ends consistent with free rational willing itself. Hegel thus aptly captures the structure of Kant's moral philosophy when he describes it as a system based in "the free will which wills the free will."[15] We might recall the opening of the *Groundwork* and rephrase Hegel's remark, describing Kant's as a system in which the good will wills the good will. To unpack a bit more: a will, for Kant, is unconditionally good when it is fully free and fully rational, and it is fully free and rational when it is moved to respect and promote free rational willing, and it is moved to respect and promote free rational willing when it is motivated by the unconditional goodness of the good will.

In the next section, I consider why a Kantian subject might be motivated thus. The question is pressing because Kantian subjects face a

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14 A much more detailed version of this account can be found in Uleman, *An Introduction to Kant's Moral Philosophy*, especially chaps. 3 and 6 (39–61 and 111–143).

15 Or in Hegel's German, "der freie Wille, der den freien Willen will." G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (*Werke* 7) (1821) (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), sec. 27; translation from *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, edited by Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 57.

choice. Nature appeals to us to make ends of objects that promise pleasure, self-preservation, or both, whether or not they respect or promote free rational willing. The reasons to adopt these ends are no mystery and the appeals are clear. It is more puzzling, on the face of it anyway, that we should pursue the end given by pure practical reason, the end of free rational willing itself, especially as it will often enough demand that we sacrifice pleasure and sometimes even self-preservation.[16] Why would we be motivated to it?

2. WHAT MOTIVATES THE KANTIAN?

I look here at aspects of free rational willing that might help explain why Kant thinks we are motivated to respect, promote, and otherwise aim to both serve and instantiate it. I look at aspects, in other words, that help address the question of what motivates the Kantian. The aspects that I think elicit respect for and commitment to actively promote fully free rational willing include release from the mechanism of nature, release from both interpersonal and inner turmoil, forms of intellectual and moral self-sufficiency, and experiences of self and others as universal, necessary, infinite, and creative. None of these is a separable *consequence* of fully free rational willing; in being motivated by these, one is not motivated to use morality, so to speak, as an instrument to their attainment. Rather, being motivated by these is just part of what it is to respect and want to actively promote fully free rational willing. Making them explicit begins to break the grip of the prejudice that Kantian moral agents are motivationally opaque or perverse and shows the limitations of deontological and nonconsequentialist characterizations of Kant. It also shows how a Kantian can satisfy the Aristotelian demand that there *be* a good animating the will.

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16 See Kant's famous *Critique of Practical Reason* example of the man commanded by his sovereign to bear false witness against an innocent man on pain of death. Morality demands he refuse and face death (KpV 5:30).

Making these aspects explicit also connects Kantian morality to other traditions. The aspects just mentioned should sound familiar. Kant is not the first or last to think that we value release from the mechanism of nature as well as from turmoil, that we long to transcend particularly, contingency, and limitation, or that we value the coherence, harmony, and consistency that come from rational self-control. Nor is he unique in privileging forms of intellectual and moral self-sufficiency. The Stoics of course come to mind, among many others. Kant is not alone in imagining we deeply admire universality, necessity, infinity and creativity; all, after all, are traditional perfections of God. But this is as it should be. Kant understands his innovation to lie in the metaphysics and the account of practical reasoning that allow us to securely access moral truth—he thinks he has finally got the philosophy right. He does not understand himself to be challenging the basic moral truths and strivings people have pursued all along.

So what motivates a Kantian? To begin, fully free and rational Kantian willing elevates a person above the natural or sensible world. This may not sit well with contemporary naturalism, but comments to this effect are everywhere in Kant's texts. Duty's root or origin, Kant writes in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, "can be nothing less than what elevates a human being above himself (as a part of the sensible world), what connects him with an order of things that only the understanding can think and that at the same time has under it the whole sensible world and with it the empirically determinable existence of human beings in time" (KpV 5:86–87). This root of duty, Kant goes on to say, must be *"personality,* that is, freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature" (KpV 5:87; italics in original). What Kant here calls "personality" is precisely our capacity for fully free rational willing, that is, our capacity for fully free rational self-determination. The sensible world, "and with it the empirically determinable existence of human beings in time" (KpV 5:86–87), is the Kantian world of appearances or phenomena. Moral willing allows us to leave this world.

What is so attractive about leaving this world? Why should we sign on to a project that promises this? Kant's detractors as well as some of his naturalistically inclined friends claim precisely that this supposed deliverance from nature is neither wonderful nor coherent. But to leave the sensible world is, most generally, to leave a shape of existence and self-understanding in which we are mere cogs, animated by forces beyond our control. Physical laws push our bodies around. We are pulled internally by inclinations, which represent our constantly changing, contingent reactions to what is in front of us. Even our considered judgments, if we do not ground them in something that transcends nature, are just complex slaves to our sensuous inclinations. This can leave us feeling out of control. Moreover, inclinations form a necessarily incoherent and contradictory set, as they come from diverse natural sources and aim at diverse natural ends. Unless we attach to a good and a principle of action not beholden to inclinations, they are liable to pull us in contrary directions, leaving us at war with ourselves. In a dramatic passage about the burdensome confusion of even pleasant feelings (a passage often seized on by Kant's critics), Kant writes: "Even [the] feeling of compassion and tender sympathy, if it precedes consideration of what is duty and becomes the determining ground, is itself burdensome to right-thinking persons, brings their considered maxims into confusion, and produces the wish to be freed from them and subject to lawgiving reason alone" (KpV 5:118).

The moral law that formalizes respect for free rational willing is clear about what trumps what, and tames our "propensity to rationalize" (G 4:405). "Common human reason," Kant writes, is impelled to step into moral philosophy not only in order to learn the "source" and "correct determination" of the principle of duty but also "that it may escape from its predicament about claims" (G 4:405). Adherence to the moral law "is the sole condition under which a will can never be in conflict with itself" (G 4:437). Thus, moral willing brings not only transcendence but also peace.

Willing in service to the nonsensuous good of free rational willing is also the only way to deal with the competing claims made by different people. The claims of the sensible world, by themselves, can only result in "a harmony like that which a certain satirical poem depicts in the unanimity between a married couple bent on going to ruin: '*O marvelous harmony, what he wants she wants too*' and so forth, or like what is said of the pledge of King Francis I to the Emperor Charles V: 'What my brother Charles would have (Milan), that I would also have'" (KpV 5:28). The only source of peace—or "omnilateral concord" (KpV 5:28)—is respect for a good that has the capacity to subordinate inclination-based claims.

Release from the controlling, tumultuous, and competing demands of the sensible world is thus accomplished by committing our wills to the good respected and promoted in and by the moral law. Commitment to this good and this law also constitutes us as members of a supersensible world, a world of Kantian intelligibilities or noumena or, to put it in a way that may frighten fewer, a world structured by and understood in terms of active respect for fully free rational willing. In this world, as *personalities*, forms of intellectual and moral self-sufficiency, as well as experiences of self and others as universal, necessary, infinite, and creative, are made available.

Take self-sufficiency first. For Kant, practical reason acts independently of sensibility's input in framing fundamental principles and in forming the "practical elementary concepts" of good and evil, which "have as their basis the *form of a pure will* as given within reason and therefore within the thinking faculty itself" (KpV 5:65–6; italics in original). We do not need to rely on external resources to come to know good and evil or the law that tells us how to pursue the first and avoid the second. Practical reason, in drawing up its basic policies, is intellectually self-sufficient. Fully free rational willing also promises *moral* self-sufficiency: agents who choose to will in ways that are fully free and rational are self-sufficient in their moral worth. "To satisfy the categorical command of morality is within everyone's power at all

times" (KpV 5:36–7). Even a person, Kant famously claims, whose efforts are stymied "by a special disfavor of fortune" can be morally good, since goodness is a question not of his effects but of the quality of his will, which is his, not fortune's, to control (G 4:394). Indeed, in acting on the moral law, we *are good wills*; this goodness is something we can effect without the cooperation of nature or anything else in the external world.[17] Free rational willing makes us self-sufficient both in authoring moral concepts and laws and in realizing moral goodness itself, saving us from the vagaries of moral luck.

What about universality and necessity? Recall that when I will in a way that is fully free and rational I will with or through the moral law, which, qua law, is a principle that carries with it universality and necessity. When I opt to will in a way that is fully free and rational, I thus will "with universality and necessity" in several senses. I will on universalizable maxims, and so am willing in a universal, because universalizable, way; I will on maxims that could hold universally. I am "necessitated" or obligated to will as I do because such willing is directed at a necessary end, free rational willing itself; my interest in willing on the law, though sometimes inadequate to motivate me, is not contingent. Finally, insofar as I am *author* of the moral law, my connection to the world structured by the moral law is "not merely contingent...but universal and necessary" (KpV 5:162). In legislating a universal and necessary law, I participate in the space of universal reason and contribute activity that is necessary if there is to be moral law, and hence a morally structured realm, at all.

Why or how might such involvement with universality and necessity contribute to motivating the Kantian? The moral law that the fully free and rational will makes is the same law all would make; it would be universally endorsed, as would any maxim that can be universalized. For this reason, the fully free and rational will legislates universally. It

is entitled to this because the faculty it uses, reason, and the perspective it adopts in using it are both universal; the legislation is not justified in terms of private, idiosyncratic interests. What is motivating about this? Willing this way allows us to abandon a view of ourselves as mere accidents of self-interest, positionality, or personal preference and experience ourselves as "bigger" than all that. In being "universal"—that is, fully rational—I am also, for Kant, simultaneously my "proper self" (G 4:458) and the self most connected to, most "in common with," others. Goods we might call those of communicability and community are made available here.[18]

What about necessity? As I have shown, the moral law carries necessity; in Kant's expression, it "necessitates," it unconditionally demands our allegiance, because it is grounded in a necessary end for us. Beyond this, it is necessary *that the law be*—without it, there would be no specifically moral realm, no way of thinking about the world in terms of any but contingent values. This renders our lawmaking activity *itself* necessary. Why should this motivate? We are here assured not only that moral willing pursues something of unqualified worth but also that our own activity as morally motivated wills itself *instantiates* this worth and is itself crucial to constituting the fiber of the moral world. We can see ourselves, in these regards, as necessary, and therefore as significantly more significant than we could if we could only conceive of ourselves as contingent comings-together of passive atoms in an impersonal Newtonian void.

Perhaps even more grandly, fully free rational willing implicates us in *infinity*. The moral law, Kant writes, "begins from my invisible self,

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17 Anyone in possession of practical wisdom "can suffer no loss by chance or fate, since he is in possession of himself and the virtuous man cannot lose his virtue" (MS 6:405).

18 Paul Guyer, "Kant on the Theory and Practice of Autonomy," in Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131, brought the following note from the *Reflexionen* (probably 1776–1778) to my attention: "Freedom is the original life and in its connection the condition of the coherence of all life; hence that which promotes the feeling of universal life or the feeling of the promotion of universal life causes a pleasure. Do we feel good in universal life? The universality makes all our feelings agree with one another, although prior to this universality there is no special kind of sensation. It is a form of *consensus*" (R 6862, 19:183). Although strange in many ways, the note is certainly suggestive that we feel motivated to universality/universalization. For further discussion see Guyer, "Kant on the Theory and Practice of Autonomy," 115–145.

my personality, and presents me in a world which has true infinity" (KpV 5:162). This view of myself, Kant continues, "infinitely raises my worth as an *intelligence* by my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world, at least so far as this may be inferred from the purposive determination of my existence by this law, a determination not restricted to the conditions and boundaries of this life but reaching into the infinite" (KpV 5:162). As fully free rational wills, we are unbounded, "not restricted to the conditions and boundaries of this life" (KpV 5:162). This is enormously significant; it means that as long and insofar as we are moral wills, we are not limited by space or time, by foreign desires, or by empirical facts. What I, as a natural being, can actually do in the world of space and time is of course limited, but my will itself, insofar as it is free and rational, is not. We can see ourselves as (thus) unlimited and can aim at whatever we can imagine, setting ends and designing projects that go beyond what exists in the world.

A final motive to Kantian morality, creativity, is intimately implicated in and dependent on many of the motives mentioned already. The claim that the free rational Kantian will is creative seems to me uncontroversial but is nonetheless rarely made as such.[19] This is especially surprising as it is perhaps the most characteristic and radically Kantian reason to be Kantian, that is, the most radically Kantian aspect of what makes fully free rational will the ultimate good for Kant.

By "creativity," I have in mind the human activity of intentionally introducing new aspects and arrangements into the world. Artistic creation is a species of this activity but not the only species. New ways of building roads, or treating anxiety, or sentencing misdemeanors, or

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19 Friedrich Schiller is one thinker who made this connection explicitly (Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*). More recently, the point has been made by Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Arendt's discussion of "natality" and the unique newness each person's birth promises resonates deeply, I think, with what I am calling Kantian creativity. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958).

cooking trout are all creative. Random mutation is not creative, but sudden, as well as hard-won, solutions to problems on which one has been working are: creativity is doing or making something in a way that is new and different on purpose.

For Kant, we are creative, that is, we intentionally introduce new aspects and arrangements into the world, precisely insofar as we will and act freely and rationally. Kant writes in many places about the natural world gaining "intelligible" or "supersensible" form through the free rational activity of moral agents (see, e.g., KpV 5:43–48, G 4:438). This is true both when our actions are aimed at specifically moral ends and when they are simply aimed at innovation. The natural world is rationally "informed" or reshaped whenever we can say of something that it was produced by us under the guidance of reason rather than nature or instinct. Under reason's guidance, we have created not just the many physical artifacts that are peculiarly human products but also the institutions and relationships within which much of what matters in our lives takes place. We have created and will continue to create a world full of and informed by ideas and meanings that are not from nature, as Kant understands it.

This capacity for rationally informing nature—for devising plans and carrying them out, for aspiring to things we make up, and for continually reinventing our empirical selves and the world around us—is truly creative. We do not create "the raw material" (whatever it is) of the phenomenal world, nor do we control the ways our cognitive faculties intuit and categorize it. But artifacts are ours, and, more important, the entire world of moral value is a creature under our control, and profoundly so: the laws of freedom, and the objects and concepts that derive from them, are the inventions of reason, acting independently of nature, that is, are the inventions of free rational will. This places us, as free wills and as rational cognizers, at the authorial center of a very important universe, namely the moral one. If Copernicus's Copernican revolution dislodged us, as inhabitants of earth, from the center of the physical universe, Kantian moral philosophy returns us to its moral

center. This distinguishes Kant's view from any that locate the source of moral value outside of reason itself. It also makes Kant's methodological innovation evident, explaining his insistence that we get to know the moral law before we go looking for the good. Free rational willing, as the good motivating morality, is not something we can understand independently of understanding the activity of free rational willing itself. It is a good the possibility of which we create through the activity of free rational willing itself. No view places our creative activity so squarely at the heart of morality as Kant's.

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF FREE RATIONAL WILLING

Bearing creativity in mind may put Kant's thought back on the table for some who have otherwise written it off. Kant is frequently dismissed by thinkers who see in his commitments only the punishing rationality of a hyperactive superego or guarantees of a formal, barren freedom. Kant himself sows the seeds for this picture, of course. But the picture is nonetheless partial. Reason grounds community, making us legible to each other, giving us something in common; freedom opens possibility, letting us get outside what is given about ourselves. Focus on the goods of free rational willing, and especially on its creativity, can remind us of these aspects.[20]

Thinking about creativity can also, as just noted, help us focus on what makes Kant's view Kantian. Characterizations of his view as "deontological" and "nonconsequentialist" still circulate widely, and while they contain grains of truth, they obscure that moral willing for Kant is very much for the sake of something we can understand and contributes to states of

20 In an earlier extended discussion of creativity, I look at phenomenologies of creativity provided by Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse*, sec. 3 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981) and *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), and Adrian Piper, in *Out of Order, Out of Sight* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), xxxiv. I suggest that many of the stranger aspects of free rational willing discussed here, such as being universal, necessary, and infinite, seem less strange in the contexts they provide. Uleman, *An Introduction to Kant's Moral Philosophy*, 167–171.

affairs that are good (for instance, the state of world peace Kant hopes we will attain).[21] My aim here has been to challenge those readings by showing that the ultimate moral motive for Kant is found in the good of free rational willing as such. True, this good is not realized when we create this or that specifiable-in-advance state of affairs; rather, it is realized when we engage in the continuously creative activity of fully free, fully rationally guided striving, whatever we create. It is realized whenever we will whatever universal reason, apart from contingent inclinations, would demand in the case at hand, which is the same as willing a course of action that will respect, instantiate, and promote free rational willing.

There are many things a chapter on Kantian moral motivation might have done. It might have carefully distinguished my reading from the readings of leading commentators. It might have spent more time on species of nonconsequentialism and deontology. It might have given a fuller picture of what, exactly, fully free rational willing is, of the kinds of things it does and why, of what it is like, compared with other forms of willing. All of these would have been worthwhile, but I have opted instead to do the two things that seem most pressing and that together address the charge that Kantian moral subjects are fundamentally motivationally opaque, if not perverse. The first thing was to begin to establish that Kantian morality is grounded in free rational willing's interest in its own self-preservation, that is, in willing in ways and toward arrangements that instantiate and promote fully free rational willing itself. The second was to show that free rational willing's interest in this is not just an abstract form of self-interest but an interest in a host of aspects that cannot be separated from fully free rational willing itself.

There are things we might wish were different in Kant's moral theory. But one thing we need not lament is a lack of plausible motivation to endorse and act on Kant's moral law—the motivation to be moral, as Kant understands morality, is there. It is a serious mistake to

21 Again, see Moran, *Community and Progress*.

think Kant wanted us to be moral for no reason, or for no reason other than that being so is moral, according to Kant. It is a mistake, in other words, to think that the motive to Kantian morality cannot be scrutinized and unpacked, and of course critiqued. A full account of what motivates the Kantian needs to go beyond abstract recognition of the rationality and freedom built into Kant's moral law and begin to look to the host of reasons the complex activity that is fully free rational willing has a motivating hold on us.

CHAPTER NINE

Moral Motivation in Post-Kantian Philosophy

FICHTE AND HEGEL

Angelica Nuzzo

My topic in this essay is the discussion that shapes the notion of "motive" in German post-Kantian philosophy—in Fichte and Hegel in particular. Since the concept is not yet terminologically fixed and does not display a specific technical meaning in these authors, I bring to the forefront the conceptual constellation covered by the problem of the motive for action: the terms *Absicht, Bestimmung, Trieb, Triebfeder, Vorsatz, Motiv* all coalesce around this issue.[1] My analysis is framed by the central challenge that the post-Kantian discussion inherits from Kant's practical philosophy. This concerns the way post-Kantian philosophy makes the concept of motive functional to the solution of what is perceived as a fundamental flaw of Kant's position, thereby accomplishing the shift from the notion of motive as determination of the

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1   Thus, I use "motive" in a general sense, as referring to all these German terms; when I indicate, more specifically, one or the other German concepts (*Absicht, Bestimmung, Triebfeder, Vorsicht*) I make it explicit.

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