

## **Towards a Transcendental Critique of Feeling (A Response to Grenberg)**

### ***Hacia una crítica transcendental del sentimiento (Respuesta a Grenberg)***

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“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17)

“Passions are cancerous sores for pure practical reason, and for the most part they are incurable because the sick person does not want to be cured and flees from the dominion of principles, by which alone a cure could occur.” (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, 7:266)

#### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on responding to Jeanine Grenberg’s claim that my discussion of Kant’s feeling of respect leaves no meaningful room for investigating feeling first-personally. I first make clear that I do think that feelings can be investigated first-personally, both in that they can be prospective reasons for action and in that – at least in Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* – there are feelings that we should have (for aesthetic reasons). I then show that at the time of writing the “Incentives” chapter of the second *Critique*, Kant had not yet determined an a priori basis for aesthetic (or affective) normativity. On this basis, I argue that the “Incentives” chapter provides a sort of consolation prize for not (yet) having an transcendental account of feeling. In that sense,

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it's a properly transcendental analysis of feeling in which Kant examines feeling from within and a priori to show that there are good (moral) reasons to have certain feelings. I end by acknowledging the extent to which, on this reading, I agree with Grenberg that Kant is doing a transcendently significant form of phenomenology here, while I also highlight some remaining areas of disagreement.

### **Keywords**

Kant; Phenomenology; Moral Feeling; Empirical Psychology

### **Resumen**

Este artículo se centra en responder la tesis de Jeanine Grenberg según la cual mi planteamiento del sentimiento kantiano de respeto no deja un espacio significativo para investigar el sentimiento en primera persona. En primer lugar, aclaro que pienso que los sentimientos pueden ser estudiados en clave de primera persona, así como que puede haber razones prospectivas para la acción y que, al menos en la *Crítica del Juicio* de Kant, hay sentimientos que deberíamos tener (por razones estéticas). A partir de ahí muestro que al escribir el capítulo sobre los “motores” de la segunda *Crítica*, Kant no había determinado aún una base *a priori* para la normatividad estética (o afectiva). Sobre esta base, sostengo que el capítulo de los “motores” provee una especie de premio de consolación por el hecho de que no haya (aún) una exposición trascendental del sentimiento. En este sentido, se trata propiamente de un análisis trascendental del sentimiento en el que Kant examina el sentimiento desde dentro y *a priori* para mostrar que hay buenas razones (morales) para tener ciertos sentimientos. Finalizo reconociendo el alcance de mi acuerdo en esta lectura con Grenberg, a propósito de que Kant está haciendo una forma significativa trascendentalmente de fenomenología aquí, mientras que subrayo algunas áreas restantes de desacuerdo.

### **Palabras clave**

Kant; fenomenología; sentimiento moral, psicología empírica

I thank Jeanine Grenberg for her excellent and detailed comments on my paper. There is much with which I could engage in those comments, but here I focus only on two sentences, which reflect a reasonable inference from the paper I presented today, and from my book, but that deeply diverge from my actual view. This will help show how far Grenberg misunderstood my position, but also how far she got my view right. It will also give me a chance to revise my reading of the “Incentives” section of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the section that was the focus of my paper. In the light of Grenberg’s paper, I now see this chapter in a new way. I now think that neither my empirical-psychological reading nor my attempted phenomenological reading get at what Kant was primarily up to in this chapter of the second *Critique*. Instead, I think he was up to something that I would call transcendental philosophy, and hence doing a kind of phenomenology much closer to what Grenberg thinks he’s interested in there. But, alas, I still have Korsgaard’s Krankheit (or Paton’s Problem, or following Kant’s claim above about passions, perhaps “Paton’s Passion”), so I still emphasize the space of reasons.

On Grenberg's reading of my view,

«we can give only a third-personal scientific account of the role of feeling in events ...; but we can allow absolutely no room for feeling from the transcendental “from within” space of giving reasons for actions ... What is notable here is that we find *no* meaningful room for the exploration of feeling first-personally». (Greberg, this volume, p. 2)

This is a reasonable view to come away from my paper with, but it's not a view I hold *at all*. Even in my original essay, I noted that “There are also second-order (and even a priori) transcendental judgments for feeling,” and while I bracketed discussion of that point (see especially note 1), I pointed to my recently published essay arguing precisely that there *is* meaningful room for discussing feeling first personally (see note 11). In that essay (in Cohen 2014), I explicitly said that “feelings can be ‘wrong’ in that they are epistemically unjustified or don't fit the world and ‘wrong’ in that they are states for which one can be held accountable and on the basis of which one can be judged prudentially foolish or morally blamable,” and I went even further, arguing against those who think that these two roles for feeling might “seem to [provide] a sufficiently rich normative account of feeling to make sense of our complex emotional lives.” Instead, I said, “For Kant, however, our emotional life is richer and more complicated than that. In particular, emotions not only inform and motivate, but also involve feelings susceptible of their own kind of normativity.” So I think that there *is* room for the exploration of feeling first-personally (that is, for me, within the space of reasons), and even that feelings can even give reasons – sometimes good, and sometimes bad – for actions.

But, as the passages from my “Affective Normativity” paper suggest, I see feeling as capable of being investigated first-personally precisely because I see it as falling into the space of reasons, and it falls into that space in (at least) two very different ways. First, feelings can *be reasons for action*. The fact that I feel nervous about speaking in public can be a reason for me not to speak in public. The fact that I expect to enjoy learning something new can be a reason to engage in a public debate. And the fact that I feel pleasure in thinking of myself as autonomous, or that I will feel pleasure when I perform a morally good action, can be a reason for me to act in accordance with the moral law. In all of these cases, feelings – either experienced or anticipated – are directly reasons for choosing to perform various actions. And none of these are third-personal, causal stories.<sup>1</sup>

Importantly, however, on my account none of the examples in the previous paragraph are examples of acting from respect for the moral law. The last cases, where I act in accordance with moral law, are classic instances of the danger, against which «one must be on guard” that through a subreption of reason, we will “demean and deform the

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<sup>1</sup> It may well turn out, for instance, that the *cause* of my refusal to speak is a nervousness about speaking in public (evidenced, say, by fMRI data) while my *reason* for refusing to speak is that I think that the public reception will be negative and undermine the goal of the speech. This is quite a different case from the one where my *reason* is my nervousness. (And even in that case, someone might even be able to show that in fact, whether I speak or not is better predicted by certain situational variables that don't correlate with nervousness, so that as an empirical matter, the nervousness was not the determining factor.)

real and genuine incentive, the law itself ... by such spurious praise of the moral determining ground as incentive as would base it on feelings of particular joys (which are nevertheless only results)» (5:117). These feeling-based motives for doing what the moral law requires are sophisticated versions of what Kant wants to reject when he explains that «If the determination of the will takes place ... by means of a feeling, of whatever kind, that has to be presupposed in order for the law to become a sufficient determining ground of the will ..., then the action will contain *legality* indeed but not *morality*» (5:71). As I read Kant, *morally motivated* action is unique precisely in that in *its* case, and in no other, feeling is *not* a reason for action.<sup>2</sup> So Grenberg is wrong that my cutting up of the pie is why I claim that feeling just doesn't "show up as a reason" anywhere within moral deliberation. But she's right that I don't think feelings can provide reasons to act out of respect for the moral law. So much for the first way that feelings fall into the space of reasons.

<sup>2</sup> In a crucial passage in Grenberg's book (Grenberg 2013) that she and I read quite differently, Kant writes, [T]he justification of moral principles as principles of pure reason could also be carried out very well and with sufficient certainty by a mere appeal to the judgment of common human understanding, because anything empirical that might slip into our maxims as a determining ground of the will *makes itself known* at once by the feeling of gratification or pain that necessarily attaches to it insofar as it arouses desire, whereas pure practical reason *opposes* taking this feeling into its principle as a condition. The dissimilarity of determining grounds (empirical and rational) is made known by this resistance of a practically lawgiving reason to every meddling inclination, by a special kind of *feeling*, which, however, does not precede the lawgiving of practical reason but is instead produced only by it and indeed as a constraint, namely, through the feeling of a respect such as no human being has for inclinations of whatever kind but does have for the law; and it is made known so saliently and so prominently that no one, not even the most common human understanding, can fail to see at once, in an example presented to him, that he can indeed be advised by empirical grounds of volition to follow their charms but that he can never be expected to *obey* anything but the pure practical law of reason alone. (5:91-2)

On Grenberg's reading of this passage (see Grenberg 2013), what Kant is saying here is that any human being, even the most common, can feel the conflict between inclinations and duty by virtue of a feeling. By careful attention to this feeling, we recognize a moral obligation that is different from all inclinations, worthy of respect, and thus a principle of pure practical reason. Moral principles are justified by means of a feeling that reveals their mysterious (noumenal-rational) source.

As I read it, Kant is saying something quite different. There are *two* feelings discussed in the passage, and they play very different roles in his overall argument. First, there are feelings of gratification or pain, but *these* do not "make known" the moral law. Rather, they make known the empirical source of inclinations, since every inclination "attaches itself to desire" only by means of such feelings. That is, we can immediately recognize an inclination as an inclination because, when we consider why we should pursue (or avoid) its object, the answer always appeals to some feeling (of gratification or pain). And *thus* we can recognize that the moral law is *not* an inclination because it does *not* attach itself to desire by means of a feeling. Unlike in the case of inclinations, feelings do not function as reasons to obey the moral law. Moreover, being able to recognize this contrast depends upon *already having* a consciousness of the moral law as an incentive, one we can contrast with the sensible incentives revealed as such by their concomitant feelings. So we don't need any special feeling to get epistemic access to the moral law. But then, *given* the recognized force of the moral law, we come to have another "special" feeling. Thus, in the part of the passage the Grenberg consistently elides in her book – even when quoting nearly all the rest of it on p. 166 – Kant says that the "special feeling" for the moral law "does not precede the lawgiving of practical reason but is instead produced only by it." To me, the most natural reading of the passage is that common human understanding has an immediate awareness of the moral law as an incentive for the will and can see that this incentive differs from others because it does *not* depend upon feeling, and this recognition gives rise to a subsequent feeling of respect.

Now, secondly, feelings fall into the space of reasons in that feelings are subject to normativity; there are feelings that we *should* have. Thus Grenberg quotes a passage from a footnote in an earlier version of my paper, where I say, «*one might think*» [emphasis newly added] that «we cannot ‘get a grip’ on feeling first personally» (quoted in Grenberg, this volume, p. 3). But there I immediately added, «For Kant, however, *this* is not the problem with seeing first-order reflection as specifically phenomenological, because Kant does think that there is a way to reflect on feeling that is from-within, normative, and not (necessarily) reducible to cognitive or volitional norms». That is, there can be good reasons *for* feelings. This is a point I emphasized in my “Affective Normativity” article (in Cohen 2014). And it’s a point I’ve been thinking about a lot lately. And it’s an area where Kant’s own attitudes changed rather dramatically during his Critical period. And somehow, despite all that, it took Grenberg’s comments for me to see the relevance of this for the “Incentives” chapter of the second *Critique*.

I now read the “Incentives” chapter in the light of Kant’s interest in developing a normative account of feeling, but to flesh out that reading, I need to turn to some further details of Grenberg’s criticisms of my paper. She rightly pushes hard on the “awkward positions in relation to Kant’s texts” that I have been forced to take in earlier work. She specifically cites two texts that have pestered me for a while: his claim that respect is a feeling that “can be cognized a priori” (5:78) and his claim that respect for the law is morality “subjectively considered as an incentive.” She rightly notes that it’s odd to say of such a feeling that it can be known only empirically (which seems the opposite of a priori) and as an object (seemingly the opposite of subjectively).

In the past, I’ve reconciled these passages with my empirical-psychological story as follows. First, my claim about the first, a priori, claim, involved distinguishing the epistemic *source* (or *justification*) of our knowledge from the *nature* of the *content* of that knowledge. (This is what I do at the end of §4 of my paper.) Here an analogy with the postulates (of God and immortality) seems to me helpful, though I don’t want to get into a discussion of my reading of the postulates. For the sake of the analogy, let’s assume what I’ll call a naïve reading of them. On that reading, the contents of the postulates are metaphysical claims – that there is a God, and that the soul is immortal – but the justification for them is practical. So I want to say about respect for the moral law that the content of the claim – that humans are capable of being motivated by respect for the law – is an empirical-psychological claim, that is, one that posits an empirical capacity (a predisposition, in fact) in human nature; but the justification for the claim is practical (and a priori).

Regarding the second, “subjectively considered” claim, I reconciled it with my earlier reading (in Frierson 2014) by seeing “subjective” as a contrast not to “objective” in the sense of the first *Critique* (as in, referring to “objects” in the empirical world) but rather in contrast to «that which gives authority to the law» (5:76). Put another way, I used Kant’s distinction from the beginning of the second *Critique* – where what’s “objective” is

practical laws while what's "subjective" are maxims holding only for one's will – and combined this with his claim that the "Incentives" doesn't study the «[first-personal] ground from which the moral law supplies an incentive but rather what it effects ... in in the [observable] mind insofar as it is an incentive» (5:72, highly contentious claims inserted in square brackets). Based on this, I read "subjective" as delimiting an appeal to the individual psychology by which a particular person comes to obey the moral law, rather than the "objective" force of that law itself. That's how I've dealt in the past with my "awkward" position vis-à-vis the texts, and I still think there's something to these responses. But Grenberg's pressure on them has led me to think I was basically wrong, at least about what's going on in this particular chapter of the second *Critique*.

Before explaining what I think is going on in this section, I first want to skip ahead to the third *Critique*, where Kant also takes up "feeling" first-personally, or from-within, and also sees feeling as lying within something like a space of reasons (at least in the sense of a normative space). There he insists that «since in the analysis of the faculties of the mind in general a feeling of pleasure which is independent of the determination of the faculty of desire ... is incontrovertibly given, the connection ... with the other two faculties in a system ... requires that this feeling of pleasure, like the other two faculties, not rest on merely empirical ground but also on a priori principles», so «a **critique of feeling**» is both required and possible (20:207). Feeling is susceptible of transcendental critique in just the same way as cognition (first *Critique*) and volition (second *Critique*). And it will have its own normativity, its own space of reasons. Of course, in the case of feeling, the reasons will not be determinate and articulable, since they are grounded in a principle of judgment rather than reason or the understanding, but it's a normative space nonetheless.

Kant is quite confident about this *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* when he writes the first introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in 1790, but he did not always think that feeling was susceptible of transcendental treatment. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he describes as a "failed hope" the desire of "bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason and elevating its rules to a science," contrasting this with what he took (then) to be the case, which is that «the putative rules or criteria are merely empirical as far as their sources are concerned, and can therefore never serve as a priori rules according to which our judgment of taste must be directed» (A21/B35-6). At the time of the first *Critique*, Kant had not yet considered the possibility of an a priori transcendental critique of *judgment* that would be neither empirical nor subsumed under reason, and thus he despaired of any transcendental analysis of the feeling of the beautiful. Moreover, as he makes clear in a letter to Reinhold in 1787, this concern that it would be "impossible" to find a priori principles covered the entire "faculty of feeling" (10:514).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> When Kant writes to Reinhold near the end of 1787, announcing his intention to write a "Critique of Taste" (10:515), he emphasizes that "there are three faculties of the mind: ... cognition...feeling...and desire," notes

Moreover, Kant echoes the concerns of the first *Critique* in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In the first Introduction, he notes that «The connection between the cognition of an object and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure in its existence, or the determination of the faculty of desire to produce it, is certainly empirically knowable; but since this interconnection is not grounded in any principle *a priori*, to this extent the powers of the mind constitute only an **aggregate** and not a system» (20:207). And later in the *Critique* proper, he explains, «One says of someone who knows how to entertain his guests with agreeable things (of enjoyment through the senses), so that they are all pleased, that he has taste. But here the universality is understood only comparatively, and in this case there are only **general** rules (like all empirical rules are), not **universal** ones, the latter of which the judgment taste about the beautiful ventures or claims» (5:213). In both of these cases, Kant distinguishes empirical<sup>4</sup> rules of feeling from true transcendental principles and insists that *aesthetic* pleasure, unlike mere feelings of agreeableness, is susceptible of transcendental principles. Feelings for the agreeable are not subject to a priori principles; they aren't in a normatively governed space of reasons. One likes what one likes, and there's nothing more to it. But whereas Kant formerly thought this also about aesthetic pleasure (and indeed, about feeling as such), he now sees an a priori principle (of judgment) governing those pleasures. They are in a normative space of reasons; one can get aesthetic pleasure *wrong*.

But in both of these contexts (and elsewhere), Kant *also* adds a third category of feeling:

«With regard to the good, to be sure, judgments also rightly lay claim to validity for everyone; but the good is represented as an object of a universal satisfaction only **through a concept**, which is not the case either with the agreeable or with the beautiful». (5:213)

Or, as he says in illuminating detail in the First Introduction,

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that “in the Critique of Pure Reason I found a priori principles for the first of these, and in the Critique of Practical Reason, a priori principles for the third.” He then goes on, “I tried to find them for the second as well, and though I thought it impossible to find such principles, the analysis of the previously mentioned faculties of the human mind allowed me to discover a systematicity, giving me ample material at which to marvel and if possible to explore, material sufficient to last me for the rest of my life” (10:514). Three features of this letter are noteworthy. First, at this stage, Kant is extremely *interested* in laying out a priori principles of feeling. Second, he admits his conviction (likely now past) that any such project would be impossible. But finally, he now sees hope in various “elucidations I had not expected” arising from “the general picture of the elements of knowledge and of the mental powers pertaining to them,” hope that leads him to think he may “have discovered a new sort of a priori principles” (10:514). A couple years later, he would complete the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in which he maps a taxonomy of powers of cognition onto his general taxonomy of mental faculties to show the a priori (transcendental) bases of cognition, desire, and feeling.

<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on the fact that these rules are “empirical” is potentially confusing in the context of my overall account of empirical vs. transcendental perspectives. On my view, one might have from-within consciousness of what Kant is here calling empirical rules. There is certainly a from-within perspective on, say, enjoying a cup of tea. For the sake of the present discussion, however, I don't want to enter into this particular terminological issue.

«Now it is surely enough to produce a connection *a priori* between the feeling of pleasure and the other two faculties if we connect a cognition *a priori*, namely the rational concept of freedom, with the faculty of desire as its determining ground, at the same time subjectively finding in this objective determination a feeling of pleasure contained in the determination of the will. But in this way the faculty of cognition is not combined with the faculty of desire **by means of** the pleasure or displeasure, for this does not precede the latter faculty, but either first succeeds the determination of it, or else is perhaps nothing other than the sensation of the determinability of the will through reason itself, thus not a special feeling and distinctive receptivity that requires a special section under the properties of the mind». (20:206-7)

Here Kant describes his own account of respect for the moral law as an *a priori* connection of feeling with desire based on the rational concept of freedom, but he emphasizes that while this *seems* to provide for a normatively required feeling, it doesn't constitute the sought for "special section," the basis for a true *Critique* of the principles of feeling. Respect for the moral law comes close, but because the normativity of feeling is grounded in the normativity of (practical) reason for the will; it's not truly *affective* normativity.

During the mid-to-late 1780s, then, Kant was thinking hard about the extent to which one can develop *a priori* principles that would govern the faculty of feeling. In 1781, he despaired of any such principles. By 1787, he thought he had a promising way forward. And by 1790, he had determined that the power of judgment could provide an *a priori* reflective principle of aesthetic judgment. But in the meantime, he also worked on an indirect sort of a *a priori* principle. If the determination of the faculty of desire by the moral law gives rise to a feeling, and if we are obligated to govern our faculty of desire by the moral law, then there is an *a priori* principle (the moral law) that directs us to have a particular feeling. So feeling is governed by an *a priori* principle, albeit only by virtue of the fact that desire is so governed. This isn't *genuine* affective normativity, since there is no *a priori* principle for feeling *as such*. But it does provide at least one way to put feeling solidly within a space of reasons.

And now *that* is how I read the "Incentives" chapter of the second *Critique*. I see this chapter as something like a first draft of a consolation prize for not (yet) being able to write a third *Critique*. In that sense, it's a properly transcendental analysis of feeling. Kant is examining feeling from within. He's thinking about how the moral law shows up subjectively (from within, and in feeling). He's developing an *a priori* basis for insisting that humans must or should have this sort of feeling. Not *all* feelings are merely agreeable, merely empirical. There are feelings – or rather, *a* feeling – that there are good (moral) reasons to have. In that sense, my empirical psychological reading of this chapter gets it wrong. And my attempted phenomenological reading of it as mere description, rather than prescribing a feeling we should have, is also wrong. And Grenberg's insistence on taking feeling more seriously, and on seeing this chapter as a phenomenology of feeling that is a sort of transcendental philosophy, is correct. And I thank her for helping me finally see this.

We still have some very serious disagreements, however, and I want to just mention three here. First, I still have Korsgaard's *Krankheit/Paton's Problem*, or, since I don't want to be cured of it, «*Paton's Passion*» (see 7:266). I still fundamentally see the from-within transcendental perspective as a normatively governed space of reasons. Second, while I now read the "Incentives" chapter as about feeling and as a from-within move in transcendental philosophy, I see it as Kant's attempt to give an indirect transcendental principle for feeling by means of a moral principle, rather than to develop an a priori account of that moral principle by means of a phenomenology of feeling. Put another way, I really do think that the "Incentives," in terms of the project of the second *Critique*, is an afterthought. This isn't because it's not important. I suspect that at the time he wrote it, Kant thought that this was the closest he was going to get to a transcendental philosophy of feeling, so it's the most important part of a treatise on reasons for feelings. But it's not that important as a *Critique of Practical Reason*, since it relates only to the aftereffects of reason determining desire. And finally, and relatedly, I still don't think that, from-within or phenomenologically or transcendently, the feeling of respect, or the philosophical analysis of it, or reflection on it, contribute to justifying the authority of the moral law, nor even to enabling us to recognize that the moral law is justifying.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I take these as feelings that one experiences only insofar as one already recognizes the legitimacy of moral demands.

I could put these last two points another way, one that I think nicely highlights the difference that remains between Grenberg and I on this section. She asks «why Patrick wants to insist that engaging seriously with what is given could not lead to better choice and action». I *do* think that that engaging seriously with what is given *can* lead to better choice and action, but for me, the relevant "given" is the moral law, or particular moral demands, which I take to be given in moments of choice (this is how I read the fact of reason). And for me, the given moral law can lead not only to better choice and action but also (as "Incentives" shows) to *better feelings*. For Grenberg, however, engaging seriously with the feelings that are given will lead to a better understanding, appreciation of, and commitment to the moral law, which will lead to better choice and action. So we both see feeling as important, even in the second *Critique*, but I see it important as an *end* of appreciating the importance of the moral law, while she sees it as an important *means* to understanding that importance.

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<sup>5</sup> I should note here that in conversations with Grenberg after our session, she helped me see how phenomenological reflection could, in some cases, serve a valuable instrumental role in combatting certain kinds of self-deception. Even insofar as I concede this possibility of phenomenology as one strategy within a broader moral ascetic, however, I can't yet see my way to agreeing with her about its *fundamental* and systematic importance.

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