

## **Response to Frierson’s “Kantian Feeling: Empirical Psychology, Transcendental Critique and Phenomenology”**

### ***Respuesta a “Sentimiento kantiano: psicología empírica, crítica transcendental y fenomenología” de Frierson***

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#### **Abstract**

In this paper, I reject Frierson’s interpretation of Kantian reductionist phenomenology. I diagnose his failure to articulate a more robust notion of phenomenology in Kant as traceable to a misguided effort to protect pure reason from the undue influence of sensibility. But in fact Kant himself relies regularly on a phenomenological and felt first personal perspective in his practical philosophy. Once we think more broadly about what Frierson calls “the space of reasons,” we must admit a robust role for attentive reflection upon felt, phenomenological experience at the center of Kantian practical deliberation.

#### **Keywords**

Phenomenology; Attention; Moral Feeling of Respect; First-Personal

#### **Resumen**

En este artículo, rechazo la interpretación de Frierson de la fenomenología reduccionista de Kant. Diagnostico su fracaso para articular una noción de fenomenología más robusta en Kant como huella de un esfuerzo desorientado para proteger a la razón pura de la indeseable influencia de la sensibilidad. Pero, en efecto, Kant mismo depende regularmente en su filosofía práctica de la dimensión fenomenológica y de la perspectiva que siente la primera persona. Si pensamos más

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ampliamente sobre lo que Frierson denomina “el espacio de la razón”, tenemos que admitir en el centro de la deliberación práctica kantiana una función fuerte para la reflexión atenta sobre la experiencia sentida, sobre la experiencia fenomenológica.

### **Palabras clave**

Fenomenología; atención; sentimiento moral de respeto; primera persona

In his paper, Patrick argues that there are three perspectives from which one can assess feeling—and especially the moral feeling of respect—for Kant's philosophy: empirical psychology, transcendental critique and phenomenology. Patrick argues that because transcendental critique is the space of reasons, there is no room for respect to do anything meaningful there. Instead, the significant discussions Kant provides of the moral feeling of respect are best understood as part of a third-personal empirical psychological study. Phenomenology—the poor child in the family—ends up being possible, but unimportant, allowing first-personal access to “what it is like” to experience things, including respect. But because this perspective is radically subjective, one gains no objective cognition, theoretical or practical, from phenomenology. Phenomenology is also radically inert, offering no assistance to the deliberating practical agent.

Although Patrick occasionally associates me with phenomenology thusly construed, I need strenuously to assert that this is not at all the brand of phenomenology I defend, or find in Kant. Patrick is, however, generally successful in distinguishing his phenomenology from mine when he suggests (PF18) that, for me, the Gallows Man “starts” with his feelings of respect and that, for Patrick, feeling enters “later” in the process. In this response, I seek to understand how Patrick found his way to phenomenology thus construed, diagnosing the illness that prevents him from grasping a more robust, practically meaningful conception of phenomenology. Along the way, I defend my own account of Kant as a phenomenologist.

### **1. The diagnosis**

So, when Patrick made his initial distinction between transcendental critique and empirical psychology in his recent book, he relied heavily upon HJ Paton's conception of distinguishing these two realms. Here are some excerpts from Paton, which Patrick himself quoted:

«[W]e regard actions from two different points of view...First of all we can take an external and scientific view of action...But...we have also a very different point of view, the point of view of the agent acting, a point of view which sees the action from within, not from without...Hence it may be the case from an external or psychological point of view our motive is the feeling of [respect], whereas from the internal or practical point of view our motive is simply the moral law, the law of our own free and rational will, without the intervention of any kind of feeling. We may perhaps say that from one point of view

[respect] is the cause of our action, but from another point of view the moral law is its ground.’» (Paton 1947: 67)<sup>1</sup>

This is essentially a summary not only of Paton’s but also Patrick’s distinction between empirical psychological and transcendental critical points of view. Note here the way that feeling is handled in these two perspectives: we can give only a third-personal scientific account of the role of feeling in events (it seems we cannot speak of “actions” as such from this external, scientific perspective); but we allow absolutely no room for feeling from the transcendental “from within” space of giving reasons for actions. So: reject feeling as undermining the pursuits of pure reason, but instead investigate it scientifically and third-personally.

What is notable here is that we find *no* meaningful room for the exploration of feeling first-personally. It shouldn’t surprise us, then, when Patrick turns to investigating the import of the phenomenological “feel” of things in Kant’s practical philosophy, that he concludes there really isn’t one. The meaninglessness of first-personally accessed feeling follows almost tautologically from this initial cutting up of the transcendental/empirical pie. If feeling has no import transcendently, then exploration of it is at best a footnote to Kant’s practical philosophy.

Cutting up the pie in this way does, however, put Patrick in some awkward positions in relation to Kant’s texts. It is, for example, odd that a feeling Kant describes as the only feeling that “can be *cognized* a priori” (5:78/67, emphasis added) is now to be *cognized* only empirically, or *cognized* a priori but with no essential import or meaning. This oddity increases when we discover, as Patrick argues in his book, that the question of moral *motivation* is something to be explored only by empirical psychology, since one operating from a transcendental point of view cannot even make sense of the very *question* of moral motivation<sup>2</sup> Curiously, then, despite Patrick’s commitment to making sense of respect—and despite his sensitive account of psychological points about moral feeling within his ‘empirical psychological’ account—when it comes to *transcendental* analysis of the moral feeling of respect, we must place Patrick within the camp of “intellectualists” not “affectionists” (to use McCarty’s terminology which Patrick picks up on – PF5). For all the import of respect in Frierson’s objective, quasi-scientific empirical psychological account of moral motivation, when we look at all this from the perspective of transcendental critique, it disappears. There is essentially no feeling in transcendental practical philosophy. Although “we can infer a priori that moral reasons will show up to us in a particular way, as “imperatives” that prompt “respect.” (PF18), it is nonetheless the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Frierson, Patrick. *Kant’s Empirical Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Page 121. Later references to this book will be noted as “Frierson,” followed by the page number.

<sup>2</sup> “[T]he question of what moves one to act barely makes sense from the practical point of view,” PF7; cf Frierson, 146.

case that when “this Fact of moral obligation shows up to us in a particular way – via respect – [it] is not essential to Kant’s argument. (PF19).<sup>3</sup>

I call this exclusion of feeling from transcendental analysis Patrick’s “Paton Problem.” One might update the terminology a little and call it his “Korsgaard Krankheit.” The problem, or disease, is this: in a misguided effort to protect pure reason from the undue influence of sensibility, the genuine role for feeling in Kant’s practical transcendental philosophy is rejected.

But in fact Kant himself relies regularly on the felt first personal perspective) in his practical philosophy. As I have argued, his assessment of practical matters third personally mostly occurs early in his corpus, in conjunction with theoretical work (as for example the malicious lie example in the Third Antinomy). His practical works though—and especially the second *Critique*—regularly appeal to the first person perspective of the practical agent seeking to make sense of her own reasons, feelings and moral state.

Given my own (argued) interpretive perspective, I was interested to see, both in his book and today, that Patrick relies on the incentives section of the second *Critique* to bolster his *third* personal empirical psychological perspective. And I was downright perplexed when I heard his defense for doing so: viz, that Kant speaks of things in this section from a “subjective” perspective! (I have questions about how a subjective perspective would be the objective perspective of empirical psychology, but will set them aside for the sake of time)

How, then, can an affectionist convinced of the central moral epistemological role for feeling in Kant’s transcendental practical philosophy respond? Interestingly, once Patrick got through the earlier parts of his paper in which he described empirical psychological and then transcendental analysis, I realized it didn’t really matter what he said afterwards about phenomenology because the horse was already let out of the barn: by Paton-esquely defining transcendental analysis to exclude any room for feeling and then studying feeling only third-personally in empirical psychology, Patrick guarantees that there will be no meaningful room for first-personally felt experience anywhere in Kant’s practical philosophy.

I will therefore focus my comments not upon how Patrick defines phenomenology, but more upon his reasons for excluding phenomenology and feeling from transcendental analysis. I will first argue that one cannot exclude feeling from practical transcendental

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps one question I have underlying these concerns is where exactly Patrick would place empirical psychology *vis à vis* Kant’s practical philosophy. It seems to me that Patrick wants to utilize the lessons of empirical psychology to inform our practical deliberative process. But because we are taking a third personal non-transcendental point of view when we investigate empirical psychology, it seems that empirical psychology is not at all practical in the strict sense of practical philosophy. When we are empirical psychologists, we are investigating events, not actions. But Patrick places much of what I would call practical philosophy—moral motivation, education, catechism—into the category of empirical psychology; and he clearly wants the results of empirical psychological investigations to have an effect on our ability to understand and fulfill moral demands. So it seems that he would want to grant empirical psychology a sort of apartment within the house of practical philosophy. But it is hard to make sense of how scientific investigations could have practical effects (that is, how to make sense of scientific information as informing his deliberative point of view concerned only with reasons).

analysis. I will then reflect on Patrick's worries that phenomenological experience is not to be trusted.

## 2. Rejecting PF's reductionist phenomenology

First, Patrick argues there is no room for the moral feeling of respect in practical transcendental judgments, either first or second order. These arguments are important because it is on their basis that Patrick concludes that "respect might be limited to a mere empirical feature of human psychology." (PF10) Although he goes on later to suggest there is a phenomenological moment for respect, we've already seen that this moment is not needed for Kant's argument for the Fact of Reason. (PF19)

Patrick says no feeling can be involved in *first* order judgments, because such appeal here would be equivalent to accepting feeling as the ground or reason for action. I agree with Patrick that, if feeling were to play this role, we would indeed fall into the "subreption" against which Kant warns us. It would also make Kant a moral sense theorist, which he is not. Note, though, that Frierson assumes feeling would *have* to play a *justificatory* role in grounding moral reasons. But I've already argued in my book that one must distinguish between justificatory (or what I call "*evidential*") and epistemically *enabling* roles for feeling in judgment. Patrick is right that the fact that I feel respect is not the reason I am morally obligated. But "knowing" my moral obligations authentically requires that I both *experience* and *attend* to my experience of the moral feeling of respect. That is: respect plays an epistemically *enabling* role in *getting* me to those reasons that justify moral obligations.

I anticipate Patrick's response here: one needs *only* reason to know moral demands. For Patrick, although we can know a priori that we will feel respect, we don't need to attend to feelings, or indeed even feel anything at all, in order to *recognize reasons* for action: "respect...is not essential to Kant's argument. If the phenomenology of Gallows Man were more like God's – or like Luther's "Here I stand; I can do no other" – such that there were no felt humiliation, or if it were warped to prevent the sense of self-esteem arising from it, showing up merely as a duty for which I gain no worth, the argument would still work. From the Fact that Gallows Man recognizes that he ought to do X, he knows that he can." (PF19)<sup>4</sup>

That Patrick believes this is, I think, at the heart of our disagreement about the role of phenomenology in Kant's practical philosophy. Patrick believes first order moral judgments are pretty straightforward and that we need no thicker "psychological" account of how moral reason-giving is achieved. But I find this appeal to recognition of reasons an

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick's underlying commitment here to reason narrowly construed is revealed in notes he made but did not read today: "As long as we *recognize* that the wrongness of falsely testifying gives us a *reason* not to falsely testify, we don't need to be reflective about the phenomenology in order to know what we ought to do, why we ought to do it, the nature of the demand, the metaphysics of freedom." (PF28n46, emphasis added)

overly thin interpretation of Kant's discussions of how one comes to recognize the grip that moral reasons have upon us. To appreciate my point, let's visit *Groundwork I*.

In *Groundwork I* Kant does initially say it *is* easy to know what reason demands: "common human reason...knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty." (4:404/16) But there is a big caveat that immediately follows: all this is simple "*if*...we only, as did Socrates, make [reason] *attentive* to its own principle." (4:404/16, emphases added) So, it is simple to affirm the grip reason has upon you IF you are as wise and attentive as Socrates! Kant then describes all of us humans as particularly *non*-Socratic and *inattentive*: it is part of human nature to deceive ourselves about the "strictness" of moral demands, and calls this tendency a "natural dialectic," a phrase which calls to mind first *Critique* references to dialectical confusions within human reason itself that are "unavoidable".<sup>5</sup> (4:405/18)

Essentially, what Kant later describes as "the dear self" (and even later as "radical evil") intrudes upon the would-be simple, clear functioning of practical reasoning. In its natural dialectic, an inextirpable tendency amongst sensibly affected rational beings, reason succumbs to rationalizations which challenge the strictness of moral reasons, rationalizations, that is, which place happiness and self above morality. So: as long as we are as wise as Socrates, reason alone can easily guide us in moral judgments; but none of us are as wise as Socrates. Instead, we have an unavoidable tendency to undermine our natural Socratic wisdom with rationalizations.

If all of this were not the case, Patrick would be right that "reason" is all one needs for first order deliberative judgments. But because one must learn, beyond the "reason" of the matter, also to *attend honestly* to what is presented as a reason in one's moral consciousness (that is, because one needs to develop techniques to counteract our natural dialectic of rationalization), a phenomenological moment of attentiveness to one's felt experience is *required* even to make *first* order moral judgments. In my book, I argue that attending to one's first personal experience of the moral feeling of respect allows us to overcome the dear self and thus succeed in seeing moral reasons clearly for what they are. It is a story of how feeling plays an essential epistemically enabling role in getting to first order judgments *without* falling into the illicit justificatory role for feeling about which Patrick worries. The quote Patrick provided from my book in which I interpret the Gallows Man as having to attend to his feelings in order for the moral law to make itself known is a central part of that argument. There *is* an important role for the moral feeling of respect in coming to what Patrick calls first order practical judgments. And no "subreption" occurs here.

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<sup>5</sup> [T]here is a natural and unavoidable dialectic of pure reason, not one in which a bungler might be entangled through lack of acquaintance, or one that some sophist has artfully invented in order to confuse rational people, but *one that irremediably attaches to human reason, so that even after we have exposed the mirage it will still not cease to lead our reason on with false hopes, continually propelling it into momentary aberrations that always need to be removed.* (A298/B354, emphasis added)

Let's turn to Patrick's second order judgments. According to him, although the "[f]act of moral obligation shows up to us in a particular way – via respect," (PF19) we have no need to appeal to this respect as a condition for the possibility of first order judgments. But even at this level, as I have argued, respect *does* play an epistemically enabling role in confirming those conditions that undergird first order moral judgments. For example: another tool against self-deception (beyond attending to moral reasons) would be to be attentive to the *source* of these categorical demands (as stemming from our own noumenal rational nature). I think Patrick would agree with me that this is one of the conditions that must be sought in second order practical reflection. But to know our noumenal rational natures is beyond the limits of reason. Hence feeling becomes important in *enabling* us to have limited practical cognition of our noumenal selves. In my book, I argue that first-personally felt feeling, precisely because it is subjective and not a part of the construction of objects of empirical experience, plays a role that nothing else could in pointing us toward traces of our noumenal selves, for practical purposes.

It is not that one could not, in the abstract, understand the difference between categorical and hypothetical imperatives upon the will; but when *I* am trying to make that distinction be important for *me, here and now*, I have to do work with my feelings to avoid the inevitable human tendency toward rationalization and self-deception about the strictness of precise moral demands. Further, although I can know in the abstract the nature of a categorical demand, I cannot through simple reasoning know its source (since that is beyond finite human theoretical reason). Again, it needs to be through attentive first personal engaged reflection that I gain confidence and limited practical cognition of the other-worldly source of categorical demands.

So, I hope my first point is clear: although feeling cannot play a justificatory role in the grounding of moral reasons, and although it is not itself a direct condition for the possibility of the authority of those reasons, it does nonetheless play a crucial moral epistemic role in helping us gain access to those things which do act as justifications and conditions. As such, the attentive, felt phenomenological reflection in which one must engage to get to our moral rational selves is not that inert, non-agential phenomenology of which Patrick spoke (and which he tried to attribute to me!),<sup>6</sup> but is instead a phenomenology deeply implicated in Kant's *us* we must reject what I would now call Patrick's "reductionist" conception of phenomenology.

### 3. We can trust phenomenology?

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<sup>6</sup> "[W]e are not making a causal judgment about inner states. We are not taking them as *objects of empirical* experience. Rather we are attending to the lived, felt experience of time in the trip (or life, or memory of trip/life), not as an object of study but as an aspect of our subjective engagement with the world. This sort of *phenomenological* attention neither looks agentially at reasons for belief/action nor treats mental states as given objects of experience, but rather – as Grenberg nicely puts it in her book – "an activity of being receptive to what is present" (185)." PF12

I would like to conclude by reflecting directly on Patrick's worries that phenomenological experience cannot even give us a *starting point* for transcendental reflection. For Frierson, "[t]he starting point of [e.g., the second] analogy is that I have an *experience* of the boat moving downstream, where an experience is a *justified* empirical cognition." (PF14, emphasis added) But, for Patrick, phenomenology does not provide "*justified* empirical cognitions" and thus tells us nothing about what "actually exists" in our experience.

A few reactions to this. First, it seems odd to suggest that transcendental argument *begins* with "*justified* empirical cognition." The whole point of the argument is to seek that condition which "justifies" the ordering of experience as we encounter it. So our experience of the ship is *not* "justified" until we arrive at the pure concept of causality (what Patrick would understand as a *second* order transcendental claim).

Patrick is right that we couldn't get to that conclusion if we started with a rainbow or a hallucination. We need to start with an *authentic*, reliable empirical experience. Or, to transfer to the practical realm, we'd need an *authentic*, reliable moral consciousness, not something that has been corrupted by our desire for happiness. How can we gain such confidence in the starting point without assuming the justificatory work of the transcendental deduction itself?

We need to begin practical transcendental arguments from an authentic, reliable experience: a phenomenological experience that has survived the scrutiny of attentiveness. When Kant tells us we need to "attend" to the way the moral law imposes itself upon us, he also reminds us that to do so we need to turn away from the distractions of the empirical world. Like the man of *Groundwork I*, we are tempted to start our arguments with the way the moral law seems to us through the corrupting lenses of happiness. Such rationalizations are not the proper starting point of a transcendental argument. But once I honestly attend to my experience of how the moral law presses itself upon me via moral feeling, I have an authentic starting point for my argument. We have, through attentiveness, arrived at a self-authenticating experience, one which we know not to be an illusion or corrupted by self-deception. This initial authenticity of the experience is thus found not in something outside of it (some condition that justifies it) but rather internal to the experience itself in the mode via which we have this experience: this felt experience is had "attentively" (instead of distractedly, absent-mindedly or through the rose-colored glasses of various sorts inspired by selfish inclinations). Whereas, for Patrick, phenomenological experience cannot be wrong or right, on my account, the distinction between felt experience attended to or not attended to does introduce a weaker notion of "wrong" or "right" within phenomenological experience itself. I do not get things "wrong" in the sense of falling short of what is in fact empirically true; I get things wrong when my felt experience has been corrupted by self-deception.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion: reductionist phenomenology is what must result given Patrick's commitments to practical transcendental inquiry without appeal to feeling. But once we



think more broadly about the space of reasons, we must admit a robust role for attentive reflection upon felt, phenomenological experience at the center of our practical deliberation and as a precursor to successful, honest choices. We must also admit it as an important—and trustworthy—epistemic aid in transcendental argument emerging from practical deliberation.

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