

The Development of Kant's Theory of Moral Feeling

El desarrollo de la teoría kantiana del sentimiento moral

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Abstract

Kant's critical theory on moral feeling can be divided into two stages: early and late. In the early stage, Kant was committed to accepting and transforming the traditional concept of moral feeling, while in the later stage he turned to developing his own unique theory on the topic. His beliefs about moral feeling changed between these two stages, both regarding the basic meaning of moral feeling (from intuitive empirical feelings to *a priori* feelings based on rationality) and the function of moral feeling in moral philosophy (from the basis of moral law to the motivation of moral action). This paper argues that these shifts help clarify the framework of Kant's moral philosophy and introduce a new dimension to Kant's definition of feelings and the relationship between sensibility and intellectuality. Namely, sensibility is not only determined by intellectuality but also has its unique initiative. Through acting on the body, intellectuality generates intellectual feelings, which in turn assist humans in realizing their intellectual purpose as a limited rational being.

Keywords

Kant, moral feeling, moral motivation, intellectual feelings, sensibility, intellectuality

The concept of moral feeling has a long history and an important role in the history of philosophy. The paper focuses on Kant, a philosopher with an atypical position on moral feeling, and studies the significance of his philosophy of moral feeling. The elimination of material sensible inclination through formal moral law and the exclusion of the empirical requirement of happiness through a rational practical subject's will and self-discipline are the important characteristics of Kant's formalist ethics. Thus, his creative usage of the

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concept of moral feeling not only implements *a priori* rational rule in an empirical sensible world and provides a possibility of combining virtue and happiness, but also illuminates implicit and omitted dimensions of Kant's philosophy—namely, an understanding of a limited rational subject's body and feelings and a new relevant definition of the relation between sensibility and rationality.

This paper consists of three parts. The first presents Kant's acceptance, transformation, and criticism of the concept of traditional moral feeling. Section two discusses the meaning and function of moral feeling in Kant's matured moral philosophy. Finally, section three focuses on moral feeling's emotional attribute and reveals the significance of emotional drive for a limited rational being.

1. Kant's Development of Traditional Moral Feeling

The concept of moral feeling (moral sense) played a significant role in Scottish ethics before Kant. According to Shaftesbury, *moral sense* is the capacity to feel second-order affections through self-reflection. Moral sense as a "sense of Right and Wrong" implicates, for Shaftesbury, "a real Antipathy or Aversion to Injustice or Wrong, and [...] a real Affection or Love towards Equity and Right".¹ Francis Hutcheson developed and systematized Shaftesbury's ideas on moral feeling. He defined *moral sense* as an innate capacity "by which we perceive Virtue and Vice, and approve or disapprove them in others".² In contrast to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson believed that the motive for virtuous actions is not the feeling of approval which constitutes the moral sense, but benevolence. According to him the moral sense is the source of "justifying reasons", but not "exciting reasons".³ David Hume also believed that it was feeling, not reason, that is the sole origin of morality. Adam Smith constructed a moral philosophy system using the concept of moral sentiment in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

During this period, Wolff's Universal Practical Philosophy is the mainstream of German traditional ethics. However, through the influence of Scottish academia, some German philosophers, including Herder, Eberhard, and Mendelssohn, began to discuss the concept of moral feeling.⁴ Despite some philosophers' refusal to consider moral feeling—e.g., J. B. Basedow—the question of how and to what extent to incorporate moral feeling gradually became unavoidable. No matter whether Scottish empirical ethics was opposed to the Wolffian metaphysics⁵ so that Germanic philosophers often had to reassess their rationalistic stands, or it, regarded as a perspective worthy of consideration, could be

¹ A. A. C. Shaftesbury (2001), *An inquiry conc. virtue*, in: *Charakteristicks of men, manners, opinions, time*, Liberty Fund, p. 42.

² F. Hutcheson (2004), *An inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue*, Liberty Fund, p. 16.

³ F. Hutcheson (1869), *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, Robert & Andrew Foulis, p. 149f.

⁴ Waltraud Naumann-Beyer (2003), *Anatomie der Sinne. Im Spiegel von Philosophie, Ästhetik, Literatur*, Böhlau, Köln, S. 77-82.

⁵ Refer to the opinion of Henrich. (Dieter Henrich (1994), "The Concept of Moral Insight". tr. Manfred Kuehn. in D. Henrich, *The Unity of Reason: Essay on Kant's Philosophy*, ed. R. Velkley, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp. 55-88.)

converted to the beneficial supplement of Wolffianism and incorporated into a comprehensive Wolffian theory,⁶ it was impossible to ignore the problems. These problems included: the specific function of moral feeling in empirical moral practice which could not be replaced by reason, the relationship between sensibility and reason, and to what extent sensibility can replace reason and become the origin of moral law. It was in this context that Kant began to consider the foundation and origin of morality.

Kant's application of moral feeling can be divided into two periods: before and after the year 1770. In the early period, affected by Scottish moral philosophers like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, Kant tried to extract an original law of morality from the concept of traditional moral feeling. In the later period, Kant changed his position. He explicitly criticized Scottish moral philosophy and denied the concept of moral feeling as the origin of moral law while also incorporating his own revised concept of *a priori* moral feeling into his moral philosophy.

It is necessary to sort out word usage before we approach Kant's understanding of moral feeling. Kant used both the German expression *moralisches Gefühl* and the Latin *sensus moralis* (MS AA6: 387, Baum. AA19: 19, 28, 93)⁷ to refer to moral feeling. Other relevant phrases found in his work include “(*moralische*) sentiment” (AA19: 97, 104, 118, 151, 152), “*Moralischen* instinct” (AA19: 106, 131, 134, 152), “*moralische Empfindung*” (AA2: 219, 267; AA5: 445; AA19: 152; AA20: 64, 127), “*sittliches Gefühl*” (AA2: 222, 231, 256; AA5: 292; AA19: 131; AA20: 49, 135) and “*moralischer Sinn*” (GMS AA4: 442, 443, Baum. AA19: 135, 149). In different contexts, moral feeling was expressed as

⁶ Manfred Kuehn (2001, *Kant: A Biography*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 184.

⁷ Except for quotes *Critique of Pure Reason*, which are taken from the A, B version, other quotations of Kant's works are adopted from the Prussian Academy of Sciences version, namely Kant's *gesammelte Schriften*. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hrsg.). Reimer, später de Gruyter. Berlin, später Berlin und New York 1900 ff.

The abbreviations of quoted works in this paper are shown as follows:

AA: Akademie-Ausgabe von Kants Werken – Kant's *gesammelte Schriften*

Announcement: Announcement of the Organization of his Lectures in the Winter Semester 1765-1766

ApH: Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht

Aufklärung: Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?

Baum.: Erläuterungen Kants zu A. G. Baumgartens *Initia philosophiae practicae primae*

Beob.: Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen

Bemerkungen: Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen

De mundi: *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*

EE: Erste Einleitung in der Kritik der Urteilskraft

Entwürfe: Entwürfe zu dem Colleg über Anthropologie aus den 70er und 80er Jahren

GMS: Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten

HNA: Handschriftlicher Nachlaß Anthropologie

KpV: Kritik der praktischen Vernunft

KrV: Kritik der reinen Vernunft

KU: Kritik der Urteilskraft

Logik: Logik. Ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen

MST: Die Metaphysik der Sitten

RefA.: Reflexionen zur Anthropologie

Träume: Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik

Unter.: Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral

Vorlesungen: Vorlesungen über Moralphilosophie

“*die moralische Lust*” (MS AA6: 391, AA13: 373), “*das moralische Vergnügen*” (Entwürfe AA15: 717, 719, 733; Baum. AA19: 115, 151) and “*der moralische Schmerz*” (Entwürfe AA15: 717, 733). Although Kant's meaning and function of the moral feeling changed greatly through his different developmental epochs, the concept remains closely related to sensibility and morality, whether sensibility is defined as an *a priori* faculty, potential aptitude, or a specific feeling in a specific practical context; whether the feeling is innate and perceived through inner senses or through intellectual consciousness under the function of reason; or whether the feeling is a susceptibility of moral objects or that which promotes us to moral action.

It is hard to find a clear-cut and consistent definition of moral feeling in Kant's early works. Under the influence of both English empiricism and German rationalism, Kant was uncertain about whether rationality or sensibility was the first principle of morality.

According to Herder's class notes in the 1860s, Kant in many lectures described moral feeling as the foundation of morality. He believed that “moral law acts according to your moral nature—my reason may be wrong but not my moral feeling, as long as I am accustomed to following natural feelings” (Vorlesungen AA27: 6).

However, in Kant's writings it seems as if he was more ambivalent about the fundamental function of moral feeling. In his 1764 winning essay, *Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality. In Answer to the Question which the Berlin Royal Academy of Sciences set for the Year 1763*, he titled the second section “The Leading Cause of Morality Doesn't Have Necessary Evidence According to the Current Attribute” (Unter. AA2: 298). In the paper, Kant defined *moral feeling* as the capacity to be susceptible to morality and contrasted it with cognitive ability. He writes, “The capacity of representing truth is cognition, but the capacity of consciousness of good is feeling” (Unter. AA2: 299). In practice, cognitive ability only aimed to explain how the concept of morality originated from its feeling. Kant considered moral feeling as an indissoluble material basic law, which should be directly affiliated with supreme, universal, but empty and formal, laws. However heretofore Kant could not explain how this affiliation happened.

He was only certain that feeling was an indispensable starting point to the basic laws of morality. He admitted that “under the name of moral feeling, Hutcheson and others provided excellent remarks” (Unter. AA2: 300), and that “[t]he attempts of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume, although incomplete and defective, have nonetheless penetrated furthest in the search for the fundamental principles of all morality” (Announcement AA2: 311). On the one hand, therefore, he acknowledged that the theory of moral feeling was insightful; on the other hand, distanced himself from Hutcheson's standpoint. He believed that although moral feeling as “the initial basis of morality” is possible to reach the highest level of philosophical evidentness, “the maximum basic concept of Obligation must firstly be determined more reliably, [...] it should be firstly clarified that if only cognitive faculty or feeling (the initial and inner basis of desire faculty) determines the primary principle of morality” (Unter. AA2: 300) (see also Announcement AA2: 311f).

In 1764, Kant wrote *Observation on the Feeling of Beautiful and Sublime*, which determined that feeling is a principle of virtue:

Thus true virtue can only be grafted up principles, and it will become the more sublime and noble as the more general they are. These principles are not the speculative rules, but the consciousness of a feeling that lives in every human breast and that extends much further than to the special grounds of sympathy and complaisance. (Beob. AA2: 217)

Kant separates virtual disposition (*tugendhafte Gesinnung*) from benign passion (*gutartige Leidenschaft*), using the criterion of universality to differentiate between a weak and blind feeling of sympathy from the universal but indifferent feeling of the sublime. Only true virtue is sublime, he argues, “But the kindly passion is nevertheless weak and is always blind. [...] Now as soon as this feeling is raised to its proper universality, it is sublime, but also colder” (Beob. AA2: 215f.). By dividing the idea of inner sensibility, Kant tries to differentiate a general feeling based on principles from an individual and fortuitous passion. Only an “expanded and noble feeling” as well as an “expanded interest” can drive us to do truly moral deeds.

From 1764–1765, Kant used Baumgarten’s *Initia Philosophiae Practicae Primae Acroamatic* as a textbook in his ethics lessons und writes reflections on the book. In a note written between about 1764 and 1770, Kant writes, “Only by moral motivation can a person be forced in morality, that is, he can be forced by moral feeling. For example, according to ethical or legal requirement, I stimulate a person by presenting others’ suffering to him, or by reminding him of the promises he made, so that I force him in morality.”⁸ The moral feeling serves as a motive for moral action, but its enforcement is triggered by a specific empirical situation.

Between about 1764 and 1765, Kant explains moral feeling’s origin and reason in an empirical way:

However, this feeling originates from human’s nature of heart, through which we can judge what is absolute kind (rather than useful). The judgment is not based on private interest or others’ interest but on putting the same action on [the position] of others. If contradiction and opposition happen, we will feel displeased; if harmony appears, we will be happy.⁹

Here Kant tries to construct moral feeling based on communality and an approach to universality through the collected suffering of others. A similar expression can be found in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* (Träume eines Geisterseher) (1766). *Moral feeling* is there defined as an unselfish disposition that forces an individual to consider others’ welfare and to conform one’s will with the common will (Träume AA2: 334ff).

⁸ Baum. AA19: 28. The original text reads, “cogi non potest moraliter, nisi per motiva moralia qvatenus potest sensu morali. e. g. Cogo aliquem moraliter, si sub conditione vel Ethica vel iuris, e. g. miseriam aliorum alicui sub oculos ponendo vel datam fidem in animum revocando, impellor.”

⁹ Bemerkungen AA20: 156. The original text reads, “Hic sensus autem originem ducit a mentis humanae natura per qvam quid sit bonum categorice (non utile) iudicat non ex privato commodo nec ex alieno sed eandem actionemponendo in aliis si oritur oppositio et contrarietas displicet si harmonia et consensus placet.”

It could be seen that Kant approved of moral feeling's practical function as the ground of judgment and a motive to action; just as the Scottish school of moral sense did, he equipped moral feeling with a universality based in intersubjective empirical principles. But this explanation quickly failed to satisfy Kant. He came to realize that if moral feeling is a confrontation between universal, objective demand and special, subjective inclination, between humanity's universal obligation and private needs, then no confrontation should exist in the concrete contradiction between community (as in the collection of others) and individual, but instead in the abstract contradiction between the ideal integrity and individuality. As an intellectual feeling, moral feeling derives from participation in the ideal entirety. Therefore, Kant criticized Shaftesbury and Hutcheson's ideas of kindness and sympathy, for "only caring [about] the special, though lots of specialties. [They are] placing oneself in others' position rather than in the idea of entirety" (RefA. AA15: 342).

By the end of the 1860s, Kant became more certain that the universality of moral feeling could only be guaranteed through *a priori* and rational origin. Rather than a basic feeling or a feeling directly from sensory stimulation, he believed, moral feeling was derived from rational law: "inner sense, if it refers to the logical law of demonstration, is the secretive nature of moral law; if it is regarded as some soul sense whose nature is totally unknown to us, it is a kind of phenomenon."¹⁰ He also writes:

Moral feeling is not the original feeling. It is based on an inevitable inner law so that it can treat and feel itself from an external perspective. It is the same to the rational personality, for human feels universally in himself and treats his individual as an occasional subject, just as the contingency of universality. (Baum. AA19: 103)

Accordingly, this mindset upgrades the universality of sensibility: here it is not stipulated and adjusted at the empirical level but guaranteed congenitally by setting rational personality as the basis of sensibility. Sensibility is not reflected in the relation between subjects in a specific context, but instead determined by the relation between the inner faculties of a single subject's soul. The "principle" of sensibility, therefore, originates from reason.

In his 1770 inaugural dissertation, *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World* (De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis), Kant writes, "There are adequate reasons to blame Shaftesbury and his followers [...]" (De mundi AA2: 396). According to him, moral law can only come from pure reason and cannot by any means be based on empirical and psychological concepts of moral feeling, which lack the universality and certainty necessary to philosophical argumentation. His critiques are as follows.

1) As a *criterion of judgment*, moral feelings fail to be unified. Empirical principles, such as the particular constitution of human nature and accidental circumstances, cannot grant moral law universality. Moral feelings "naturally differ from one another by an

¹⁰ Bemerkungen AA20: 147. The original text reads, "Sensus internus si allegatur ut principium probandi logicum, legis moralis est qualitas occulta si ut facultas animae cuius ratioignotaur est phaenomenon."

infinity of degrees, so that feelings are not capable of providing a uniform measure of good and evil” (GMS AA4: 442). However, we are pleased with behavior that conforms to obligation and uneasy about behavior that goes against obligation, and these feelings can be regarded as an indication of morality. We should realize that the concepts of morality and obligation go before feeling: “It is, therefore, impossible to feel this satisfaction or dissatisfaction prior to the knowledge of obligation, or to make it the basis of the latter” (KpV AA5: 38). Just as the subjective effect is determined by the objective will of reason, moral feeling is mistaken for the ultimate criterion of moral judgment.

Although Kant does not deny, in his later period, that everyone has an innate and intuitive moral feeling, he tends to classify this faculty of judgment as common sense or reason (GMS AA4: 404). Sometimes he considers this ability moral sense (*moralischer Sinn*) (RefA. AA15: 353). Compared to moral feeling, which is a driving power related to a subject’s action, *moralischer Sinn* is a theoretical concept related to an object and its cognition of affairs.

2) As a material *practical principle*, moral feeling fails to reach universality. If moral feeling stipulates moral law, “the consciousness of virtue is supposed to be directly connected with contentment and pleasure; that of vice, with mental dissatisfaction and pain; thus reducing the whole to the desire of private happiness” (KpV AA5: 38). Moral feeling as a determinant ground is always subjectively effective and purely empirical. Even if it exerts consistent effect on everyone, its consistency is merely occasional. Moreover, it cannot expand its effect to a purely rational being (such as God). Therefore, there is no absolute inevitable universality. True moral law can only be based on the pure practical law of reason.

More importantly, moral feeling should be refused as the origin of moral law because of the opposition between autonomy and heteronomy. The will of a moral subject can only be stipulated by its own legislation, rather than the natural law of causality, and driven by the consciousness of self-determination rather than external stimulation. In 1770, Kant makes a clear-cut differentiation between the functions of reason and sensibility—reason is the active faculty that gives rules while sensibility is the passive faculty that is determined. Their relation in moral philosophy changed from an early understanding of their cooperation, where reason provided the non-content form and sensibility provided the material, to the later ideas of their opposition, where reason offered form (moral law) and sensibility produced material (private desire). As humans are beings with sensible-rational dual attributes, these two attributes should both be reconciled and confront each other.

3) As an *incentive* to action, moral feeling is not durable or certain. From the standpoint of empirical psychology and anthropology, Kant realizes that the “vehemence” (*Heftigkeit*) of all feelings is easily “exhausted” (*verbrausen*) (KpV AA5: 157). Humans’ minds produce vital movement due to stimulation, but then become exhausted and weak. Temporary impulsion does not confer personality any moral value or have a compulsory effect on a subject to make them behave according to moral law.

2. Moral Feeling as Incentive

Kant criticizes the traditional empirical concept of moral feeling as a pathological feeling while simultaneously redefining moral feeling as an *a priori* feeling based on practical reason. In this sense, moral feeling is a unique feeling with objective universality. It is not empirical and variable to different degrees, but generated from the determination of sensibility by rational principle. Kant describes it as, "The former (moral feeling) is that feeling which precedes the representation of the law; the latter (pathological feeling), that which an only follow upon it" (MST AA6: 399, see also KpV AA5: 80). But Kant also admits that *a priori* moral feeling has an empirical application. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* he discusses moral feeling as empirical and concrete, as an effect of moral law on the mind and the receptivity of the mind to concepts of duty in general.

Kant's concept of moral feeling and the attribute of sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) can be divided into three levels: 1) an emotional, natural disposition and ability to feel and perceive; 2) a feeling and emotional state in a specific context; and 3) a customary attribute cultivated by training.¹¹ According to its function, there are two kinds of moral feeling: 1) when the feeling of respect for moral law and personality serves as the motive for moral action and 2) when the feeling is produced by the consciousness of self and others' action, whether or not action follows moral law (seeing KpV AA5: 38f). The relation between feeling and moral action can be differentiated into two kinds: "pre-effect of represented action" and "retro-effect of accomplished action."¹² In terms of specific feelings, moral feeling can be divided into positive and negative feelings, or pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Combining with the former classification, we can first differentiate the feelings generated by the judgment of already existing actions and maxims; we feel satisfaction when we conform to obligation and remorse for violating obligation. We can also divide moral feeling as respect as moral motive prior to action into two aspects: painfulness from rejecting sensible inclinations and from breaking down self-conceit and pleasant feelings—i.e., the satisfaction of self-approval—from the consciousness of our personality and from self-improvement in the sacred moral law.

In order to distinguish between Kant's understandings of moral feeling during his pre-critical and critical times, we must clarify why Kant accepted moral feeling as the source of moral law in his pre-critical period and how he substituted its fundamental function in his later formalized moral philosophy.

1. *Internality* of feeling: Only when moral law is intrinsic to me can I stipulate maxims and actions according to it. I act by myself in accordance with moral feeling as the source of moral law, which is easy to understand. In his later period, Kant's abolishment of moral feeling as the source of moral law in his ethics led to an important issue: how can *a priori* moral law be applied to the rational-sensible being? In other words, the linkage between rationality and sensibility and the *a*

¹¹ Refer to Lee (1994, 212-218).

¹² Lee (1994, 212-218). Although Kant didn't insist on the division, as Li acknowledges, the division helped define the different functions of moral feeling in Kant's ethics.

priori origin of moral law, which transcends time and space, and the *a posteriori* execution of moral law by human beings in the empirical life. A *priority* and a *posteriority* are realized through the creative construction of a *priori* moral feeling and the linkage between rationality and sensibility.

2. Primordially and directness of feeling: Kant says, “The greatest function of moral feeling system lies in dispelling all useful things” (Baum. AA19: 177). Through the moral feeling’s intuitive consciousness, the calculation of interests and consequences is excluded from consideration in moral practice. Henrich also points out that Hutcheson’s unique contribution to Kant’s philosophy lies in the primordially and non-derivativeness of moral feeling. Hutcheson believes this attribute of moral feeling to be fact, while Kant surmounts this factual dimension and “display[s] this rational fact in a wide representation in intellectual world.”¹³ The opposition between moral feeling and subjective inclination in Kant’s pre-critical period is based on the different aspects and grades of sensibility; in Kant’s critical time, this opposition changes to total difference in attribute and origin—rationality and sensibility, apriority and posteriority. If the primordially and directness of moral feeling in his early period are due to an empirical subject’s susceptibility to kindness in moral practice, then the directness and primordially in his later period in the *a priori* consciousness that the moral law is the ground of the determination of will.
3. Kant values the *driving force* of moral feeling both in his pre-critical and critical periods. The difference is that he defines *driving force* in his early concept of moral feeling as the linkage between the cognitive and conative in an empirical subject’s moral faculty: when a human is conscious of morality, this encourages him to do good deeds. After 1770, Kant accounts for the cognitive ground of morality (for judgment) by a nature law of common reason (see “Of the Topic of the Pure Practical Judgment,” KpV AA5: 67ff), and sets the function of moral feeling as the conative part of morality, namely as an incentive of moral action.

Baumgarten introduced the term *incentive* (*Triebfeder*). He translated the Latin “*eltater animi*” into the German “*Triebfeder des Gemüts*” (incentive of soul).¹⁴ Kant considered this to be the subjective ground of desire. Although we can judge the legality of a practical action according to moral law, we can only determine its morality by investigating its incentive; in moral practice, although we can make the right judgment according to moral law, we can only motivate ourselves to action through mental excitement. Moral actions consist of both a cognitive element and a conative element. In this sense, Alison calls the practice of moral law a “principle of judgment” (*principium diiudicationis*) and moral feeling a “principle of execution” (*principium executionis*).¹⁵

¹³ See Henrich (1958, 69).

¹⁴ See Heiner F. Klemme, Manfred Kühn (2006), *Moralische Motivation: Kant und die Alternativen*, Meiner, Hamburg, S. 122.

¹⁵ See Allison (1990, 122). Certainly, moral law could also be an execution principle at the same time, just as Kant calls moral law a moral motivation.

The reason humans need motivating ground is that as sensible-rational beings, they cannot naturally follow moral law; their sensitive inclination always hinders them. As the pure sensible being, on the other hand, animals can only follow instinct (namely, the law of nature, causality); the will of pure rational subject is by itself consistent with moral law. As a susceptibility of moral law and with the power to put it into practice, moral feeling undertakes the linkage between abstract rational law and concrete sensible experience. On the one hand, the rational origin of moral feeling guarantees its universal validity. On the other hand, moral feeling is subjective and sensible. The subjectivity here does not refer to privacy and particularity but the state of mind felt by a subject as the effect of objective moral law. Beck explains that “here ‘subjectivity’ merely means located in and thus in part depending upon the constitution of the subject, without implying that this subjectivity is indicative of dependence upon personal differences in sensuous desires.”¹⁶

There are persistent problems in Kant's moral philosophy: if there are distinctions between the sensible world and the intelligible world, both of which humans belong to, as well as a distinction between high and low faculties of desire, how then can these distinctions be connected? How can reason exercise dominion over sensibility through practical human existence and how can the moral law of pure reason affect rational-sensible humans to enable them to carry out moral action? After all, moral action relates to practical humans, but not pure rational subject (God), and not sensible existence (animals). To solve these problems, we need something that connects the two extremes: something that not only has rational attributes but that is also related to sensibility. The concept of moral feeling fulfills this condition: on the one hand, it is the consciousness of the moral law of reason and, on the other hand, it shows as a psychological result of feeling. If Kant's definition of moral feeling (as *a priori* rational feeling) guarantees the possibility of connection between rationality and sensibility, then understanding of the function of moral feeling (as an incentive of moral action) assures the inevitability of this connection.

4. Emotional Attributes of Moral Feeling

In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant describes the mechanism of the generation and operation of moral feeling. Moral feeling is specified as a feeling of respect, and classified as negative and as positive. The former is a painful feeling coming from rejection of sensible inclinations and is shown in two aspects. First, the breaking of self-love by pure practical reason (*Eigenliebe*); if the subjective interest of self-love contradicts the requirement of reason, it will be restricted to agreement with the law. Second, in order to equip the legislation of morality with unconditional and absolute value, respect completely strikes down self-conceit (*Eigendünkel*), for its moral arrogance damages the authority of moral law. The positive feeling occurs when humans are indulged in the solemn majesty of moral law, and “the soul believes itself elevated in proportion as it sees the holy law elevated above it and its frail nature” (KpV AA5: 77, also see KpV AA5: 143). This

¹⁶ See Beck (1960, 217).

promotional value is demonstrated through a pleasant feeling of self-actualization and self-endorsement related to pure reason: we realize our personality, namely the freedom and independence from our inclinations. As a being belonging at the same time to the sensible world and the intelligible world, humans have the capability to only follow pure practical law. Respect for personality is expressed in the pleasure of self-actualization with the highest determination. This feeling is called self-satisfaction. In a traditional sense, *self-satisfaction* means “a negative pleasure of own existence, in which people realize they have no demand” (KpV AA5: 117f.). In a deeper and positive sense, it is understood to be an intellectual satisfaction coming from the satisfaction of one’s intelligible personality.

The connection between rational and sensible elements of moral feeling are more likely to be transcendental psychological descriptions in *Critique of Practical Reason*, but in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant analyzes the connection from the perspective of subject’s formalized structure and state of mind (*Gemütszustand*) and more sufficiently explains the emotional attribute of moral feeling. Compared to his *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant is unwilling to define respect as a pleasant or unpleasant feeling (KpV AA5: 77, 80), in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, he refers to respect as a kind of pleasant feeling (KU AA5: 222f).

Although there is no special discussion about moral feeling in the third critique, the comparison between this concept and aesthetic feelings (in the judgment of taste as well in the judgment of sublime) clarifies its implication. Kant defines *beauty* as a pleasant feeling originating from reflecting on the harmonious relationship between different faculties of mind without interest. Although the sublime is also an *a priori* feeling obtained from reflection on the power of judgment, it is an indirect pleasant feeling aroused by displeasure. On the one hand, we feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed due to the inappropriateness of an absolutely great and powerful object to our sensible faculty; on the other hand, the inpurposiveness for sensibility arouses our consciousness of internal supersensible faculty and self-determination. Reason initiates the turn from inpurposiveness to purposiveness and makes us realize the independence of our personality transcends natural power, which generates a feeling of pleasure.¹⁷

The connection between the sublime, beauty and moral feeling can be understood as follows. First, none are connected to empirical interest and all exclude external and material factors, determined *a priori* by “formal conditions” (KU AA5: 267) of a subject. Although the first two’s harmony of cognitive faculty is a purposive relation, in the latter it is the relation of lawfulness determined by reason. Next, due to the purity and participation of intellectual faculty, the formal conditions of a subject have universally valid state of mind (*Gemütsstimmung*) and display a purified and thorough disposition (*Gesinnung*). Although the universality of the state of mind in beauty and the sublime is subjective, while the universality of moral feeling is objective (see KU AA5: 256, 266). Next, these universal states of mind have affinity; the judgment of the sublime is based on moral feeling, as is human nature. That is, the inevitability of the purposive harmony between

¹⁷ See Zhouhuang (2017, 67-76).

imagination (sensible abilities of representation) and reason (intellectual faculty) of the sublime is rooted in the overcoming through reason of sensitive obstacles in moral feeling, namely the determinate relation of desire faculty made by reason (KU AA5: 265ff). Finally, the cultivation of moral feeling is accomplished by inner cultivation of aesthetics. Aesthetic activity can strengthen the susceptibility of moral feeling and become a tool to promote morality: since the purified mode of thinking necessary to appreciate beauty—getting rid of subjective inclinations and sensible desire—assists in converting and dispelling the negative feelings generated from rejecting selfish desire in the moral feeling, aesthetic reflection leads one's attention from the dissatisfaction of reality to a pure state of mind where the susceptibility to moral feeling becomes acute. On the other hand, however, the self-sustainable harmonious and subjective universal state of mind, which is easily obtained through the judgment of taste, “can underlie that which can only be sustained itself and is of objectively universally valid” (KU AA5: 230f). This means that spontaneous harmony and consistency between intellectual cognitive faculties and sensitive cognitive faculty in aesthetic judgments (understanding and imagination in judging sublime through taste, reason and imagination) prepares one for the determined harmony and consistency of reason and sensibility in the moral feeling.

However, it should be noted that the harmonious state of mind in the judgment of taste is aesthetically conscious, “through mere inner sense and sensation,” of the reflection of the relation of the cognitive powers (KU AA5: 218) and the pleasant feeling presents itself in contemplation—“maintaining the state of the representation of the mind and occupation of the cognitive powers without a further intention” (KU AA5: 222). The consciousness of our state of mind in the moral feeling is intellectually realized in the determination of faculty of desire by pure practical reason and a mental excitement motivating the implementation of moral action: “The determinability of the subject by means of this idea, and indeed of a subject that can sense in itself obstacles in sensibility but at the same time superiority over them through overcoming them as a modification of its condition, i.e., the moral feeling” (KU AA5: 267, also see KU AA5: 222). In this sense, pleasure must be practical—the faculty of desire of a subject can be determined by reason, and one can thus consciously carry out a self-activity (*Selbsttätigkeit*) in this determination. In this way, we can feel the contemplative state of mind in aesthetic feeling and a movement of the mind (*Gemütsbewegung*) in moral feeling. The sublime, on the other hand, is the alternation, a combination of “movement of the mind [...] aroused with its calmness” (KU AA5: 269). Kant called aesthetic pleasure contemplative or inactive pleasure and called the pleasure of moral feeling practical pleasure (MS AA6: 212). However, the question then becomes whether these two kinds of pleasure in different states declare a joint attribute of pleasure, which can be considered a superordinate concept.

In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant defines *pleasure* as “the idea of the agreement of the object, or the action with the subjective conditions of life, i.e., with the faculty of causality of an idea in respect of the actuality of its object (or with the determination of the forces of the subject to action which produces it)” (KpV AA5: 9). This definition of pleasure is closely related to the realization of desire: either the realistic object can satisfy

my desire, or my action can make a realistic object to satisfy my desire. In *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant extends his definition of pleasure to account for his new discussion on the reflecting power of judgment. He not only relates pleasure to the material attributes (whether a sensible inclination or rational imperative) of a subjective condition, but also argues that it is obtained from the reflection of a subjective formal condition. In the first introduction to *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant defines *pleasure* as “a state of the mind in which a representation is in agreement with itself, as a ground, either merely for preserving this state itself (for the state of the powers of the mind reciprocally promoting each other in a representation preserves itself), or for producing its object” (EE AA20: 230f., also see KU AA5: 220).

Returning to the aesthetic and moral feelings, these two states of the mind are in “agreement with itself”. The former realizes self-maintenance through the free play of understanding (or reason) and imagination, for in this harmonious relation, either imagination is released and understanding is extended (judgment of taste), or imagination has infinite extension and determines super-sensibility while rational attributes are conformed (judgment of sublime). Under these two conditions, understanding (or reason) serves imagination or they serve each other. The feature of imagination, namely a lawless sensitive vitality, is strengthened in the pleasure of contemplation. In the moral feeling, reason’s determination of will and enforcement of sensibility is embodied as an excitement of mind, when moral ideas are represented, and this excitement generates a motive for moral action through the body for the body. Initiative and the freedom of rational vitality are realized not only through the determination of state of mind but also in genuine action (*Tätigkeit*). The terms “agreement with itself” and “self-preservation” in the definition of universality of pleasure can be further explained as consistency with oneself in the sense of self-affirmation, self-reinforcement, and self-actualization of vitality. In aesthetic judgment, cognitive faculties are indulged in free play without further intention, which strengthens the sensible vitality of aesthetic contemplation is strengthened. In moral feeling, the compulsory relation of sensibility made by reason does not remain contemplation of one’s state of mind, but is embodied as excitement due to a moral idea. Meanwhile, the initiative and freedom of rational vitality is realized when the determination of reason is transformed into action. In the 1870s, Kant realizes that “[t]he feelings that promotion of life is pleasure” (RefA AA15: 240, also see KU AA5: 278), thus we can further define the pleasure of aesthetic and moral feelings as the self-affirmation and self-reinforcement of sensible or rational vitality and the agreement with oneself during self-actualization.

From this perspective, Kant attributes moral feeling to another seemingly self-contradictory concept—intellectual feeling (*intellektuelles Gefühl*) (intellectual pleasure [*intellektuelle Lust*]). At the turn of the 1760s and ’70s, when Kant began to draw the line between sensibility and intellectuality, fuzzy demarcation appeared between the two—the pleasure of intellectuality. Sensibility and intellectuality are two opposite faculties—low and high, passive and active—and each has its own corresponding aspect in the three

faculties of the mind. Knowledge can be divided into sensible and intellectual knowledge, faculty of desire can be divided into sensible desire and intellectual desire, and feeling can be divided into sensuous feeling and intellectual feeling (RefA AA15: 78f., 85ff., 239). Although Kant confirms that the pleasure of sensibility is private and subjective, while the pleasure of intellectuality is universal, but he never determined how to explain and construct the concept concretely. On top of this, he was never sure whether this contradictory concept was valid (Entwürfe AA 15: 733f., RefA AA15: 237ff.).

Some of Kant's works, written in the 1790s, along with their related reflections,¹⁸ more definitely demonstrate what he means by the pleasure of intellectuality. The pleasure of intellectuality can be divided into two types in two groups—subjective and objective types, as well as the types demonstrated by concept of understanding and idea of reason. In terms of the type demonstrated by concept of understanding, a subjective pleasure in demonstration comes from promoting the faculty of understanding and an objective pleasure comes from the causality of understanding referring to its object. In terms of the type demonstrated by idea of reason, the subjective pleasure of self-activity comes from promoting the faculty of practical reason and objective pleasure originates from the causality of reason with regard to its object (freedom). These two conditions correspond to the pleasure of knowledge and moral feeling, respectively. Aesthetic pleasure, therefore, is referred to as partially intellectual and partially sensuous, due to the participation of the intellectual faculty.

Obviously, intellectual pleasure cannot be part of transcendental philosophy, since it is related to individual feelings and experiences. It cannot, therefore, explain the how can taste, cognition, and moral *a priori* are possible, but can explain how humans, as rational-sensible beings, can perceive and accept the *a priori* laws of understanding and reason and practice these intellectual activities during acceptance. Through the comparison between finite rational beings and pure rational beings, we see that although sensibility is why the former is restricted and imperfect, it is also the vitality source of the former. In taste, the constant self-maintenance of one's free play of cognitive abilities accomplishes judgment by identifying feelings that define an object as beautiful. On the other hand, pure rational beings will fail to experience aesthetic pleasure. In theoretical cognition, the pleasure obtained through rational inference can promote a cognitive subject to employ their intellectuality to gain new knowledge constantly, while a pure rational being will calmly remain in the intellectual intuition. In moral practice, moral feeling encourages a moral subject to do good deeds and gain satisfaction, while the will of a pure rational being is already conformed to rational law and so that there is no self-satisfaction or pleasure.

In the above example, intellectual feelings play an active role in promoting intellectual judgment and moral action. Undoubtedly, the spontaneity of feelings comes from determination by the intellectuality, but intellectual ability can only arouse the excitement of one's inner state of mind, not have any direct effect on the body. However, feelings play

¹⁸ See Wolfgang G. Bayerer (1968), Bemerkungen zu einer vergessenen Reflexion Kants über das „Gefühl der Lust und Unlust“, in *Kant-Studien* 59, S.267-272. Benno Erdmann (Hrsg.) (1882), *Reflexionen Kants zur kritischen Philosophie*. Aus Kants handschriftlichen Aufzeichnungen, Fues, Leipzig, S. 148-149.

a role in implementing the intellectual spontaneity necessary for practical action and judgment. After all, moral action and intellectual judgment cannot exist without the body's actions and it is these feelings that are closest to the body:

Whether they originate from the imagination or *even from representations of the understanding*: because life without the feeling of the corporeal organ is merely consciousness of one's existence, but not a feeling of well- or ill-being, i.e., the promotion or inhibition of the powers of life; because the mind for itself is entirely life (the principle of life itself), and hindrances or promotions must be sought outside it, though in the human being himself, hence in combination with his body. (KU AA5: 277f, emphasis mine)

In this way, the secret function of sensibility in Kant's philosophy is found in intellectual pleasure. Kant generally divides intellectuality and sensibility based on the difference between spontaneity and passiveness. However he also defines feelings as the susceptibility of intellectual concepts and rational ideas, and believed the spontaneity of intellectuality to be an excitement of the mind that further incentivized the body. This was especially evident in his practical discussion of pure philosophy and empirical anthropology. Only through the practice of the body can rational intentions be realized by the sensible-rational being. In this way, the relation between sensibility and intellectuality is recomposed.

Pure rational beings have intellectual intuition and act according to the moral law; due to their complete intellectual nature they are self-sufficient without sensibility. However, human beings, finite as they are, are always *limited* and *obstructed* in their bodily sensibility—*limitation* refers to constructive and positive function of sensibility in cognition and moral practice, while *obstruction* refers to its destructive and negative function. On the one hand, the finite rational cognitive subject can only obtain material from the limited dimension of its sensitive existence; on the other hand, the influence on reason by sensibility results in error, which results in the subject getting lost and losing courage. In either of these two situations we need intellectual pleasure: either it drives body to find more material or gives us courage and motivation to go forth and turn away from intellectual darkness. The limited practical subject needs to practice rational law in action by experiencing moral feeling as incentive. However, he/she ignores conscience due to sensible inclination or loses interest in performing good deeds when seeing kind people suffering more hardships without getting corresponding returns. In both situations we need moral feeling: either it drives us to practice rational law or at least gives us pleasure, similar to bliss, to stimulate us to preserve our belief when we fail to obtain the supreme good in this life and fail or to gain proportionate happiness according to our virtue (see KpV AA5: 119).

In intellectual feeling, the spontaneity of intellectuality is transformed its vitality force into body. In concrete cognitive and practical situations, intellectual feeling maintains the constitutive function of sensibility. Meanwhile, it stimulates a limited being to approach the ideas of truth and the supreme good within human society and historical development.

As Kant says, implanting a moral disposition in us is a wisdom of nature, “in order to handle the reins provisionally, until reason has achieved the necessary strength; that is to say, for the purpose of enlivening us, nature has added the incentive of pathological (sensible) impulse to the moral incentives for the good, as a temporary surrogate of reason” (ApH AA7: 253). In this way, the subject of Kant's philosophy is not a metaphysical being stripped of flesh and blood, pleasure and passion, but a kind of dignified sensitive-rational being: he solemnly guards his “hedonic” bottom line and principle and gains driving power from pure intellectual pleasure. He fights against the disturbance and obstruction of sensibility and, at the same time, gains firmer fighting will from sensibility and realizes his finite rational life step by step.

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