

Kant and the Puzzle of Respect: A Volitional Account of Achtung

Angelo Rigolli
Università di Parma ✉ 

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The feeling of Respect, or simply *Achtung*, in Kant's work is a very difficult and ambitious topic of discussion. Moreover, if the attempt to explain it were to focus not only on Kant's moral or practical philosophy, but also to put on the table the whole Kantian 'system', even if Kant would not accept this word, the aim of the research could appear even more intricate. This way of analysing *Achtung* could be the only possible way to explain the concept properly, because Kant has left hints and definitions of Respect all over his work, from *Critique of Pure Reason* to *Religion*. Furthermore, Respect, intended as a systematic and hybrid concept, could resolve one of the central problems of all Kantian philosophy, which, put simply, is: how is it possible that the understanding, which is a pure intellectual faculty, through judgments can motivate our will and our action in the empirical world? *Achtung* could be a possible answer to this question; it could be the «philosopher's stone» which Kant talks about in his *Lectures on Ethics* (27:1225). Briefly, the issue of rational moral motivation is the issue which is put on the table in *Kant on Respect (Achtung)* by Jorg Nöller.

The author starts from this problem and explains it properly using two quotes, one from *Critique of Practical Reason* and another from the *Lectures on Ethics*. In doing so, the research method is immediately clear: for understanding Kantian Respect properly, we must look at Kant's *opera omnia*, without limiting our point of view to a few books. In fact, Nöller, searching in all the places where Kant talks about *Achtung*, summarizes seven characteristics of Respect, and he refers to them with the term "theses". They are:

- i. Rationality Thesis: It has a purely rational origin
- ii. Singularity Thesis: It is considered the sole moral incentive
- iii. Emotion Thesis: It is both positive and negative as concerns its emotional content
- iv. Freedom Thesis: When the human self feels respect, it is bound and free at the same time
- v. Subjectivity Thesis: *Achtung* is morality itself, subjectively considered as an incentive
- vi. Intentionality Thesis: It primarily refers to an abstract "law"
- vii. Normativity Thesis: It is not a moral duty, but it plays the role of *Grund* for moral duties, and we have the duty to cultivate it and show it to other persons

In the second chapter, Nöller wants to define what type of entity Respect is. It is not an easy aim, due to its particular status, which ranges across different Kantian works with different topics. *Achtung* is often understood as a moral feeling, a representation or a judgment, or a moral incentive; therefore, from this basis, the author distinguishes three different possible approaches, which are the feeling approach, the judgment approach, and the motivation approach. In analysing the feeling approach, Nöller gives an account of the special status of the so-called feeling of respect, especially due to its origin, which is purely intellectual; more precisely, it is caused by the moral law, but it also affects, as a cause, the subjective will. In this respect, the author introduces another thesis, which is added to the other seven: the Causality Thesis, which says that respect is without doubt the effect of the moral law, but is also, at the same time, a subjective determination of the will. Kant calls this cause the "causality of freedom". There is a tension between these two poles of causality, and the tension lies in the fact that the moral law determines the will objectively and respect does the same thing, but subjectively. This peculiar aspect cannot be explained with a single notion of cause; therefore, the author decides to use the notions of formal cause and efficient cause, within a framework recurring to Maimon. The argument moves forward with an analysis of the different interpretations of the Causality Thesis, which has led some Kantian interpreters, for instance McCarty, to understand Respect in a

completely different way. For these so-called “intellectualists”, respect is not a feeling but a rational attitude or a judgment. But the author maintains that respect cannot be identified with purely rational activities, and he gives numerous quotes where Kant writes that. So, respect is not only a simple feeling, and it is neither a judgment nor a rational attitude, at least not only. What remains, from the three human faculties, is to identify respect with a moral incentive, which leads to a further discussion between an internalist or externalist account of moral motivation. In this respect, Nöller chooses a sort of hybrid internalism, and according to this interpretation, Respect is morality itself considered as an incentive and does not need to be understood as an immediate motivation to action, but rather in terms of reflection, and this reflection implies a choice. Therefore, the author focuses his inquiry on two possible ways to understand how and whether moral respect leads to moral action. Here, with another careful and complete report of secondary literature on Kant, Nöller locates two different approaches: determinists and electivists. The former affirm that moral respect is both necessary and sufficient to cause a moral action, while the latter support the idea that moral respect is only necessary, because even if respect determines our will, it does not determine our faculty of choice. The author completely rejects determinism about moral respect and chooses a middle way between two electivist theories, which have as representatives Allison, for intellectual electivism, and Timmerman’s theory of moral failure, which implies responsibility and accountability of an action, leading to a volitional electivism. With this theory, Nöller wants to affirm that we are responsible for our actions both from respect for the moral law and from self-conceit. Intending, in a volitional electivist way, the relation between moral respect and action makes it possible to unify both objective and subjective aspects of respect’s causality. In conclusion of this chapter, the author has shown that respect cannot be exclusively a feeling, judgment, or incentive, but that all these three aspects must be integrated into a more complex notion of respect, which is the volitional account of moral respect. In this framework, Respect is intended as an emotion, following the interpretation of Scarantino and Sousa. Hence, Nöller can give an account of all the different aspects of *Achtung*, which are typical of every faculty. Respect as an emotion allows one to properly talk of its cognitive basis and its intentional and moral implications. This account, which is supported by Kant’s quotes wisely chosen by Nöller, can link and hold together all three aspects of the faculties of the mind, because the moral feeling of respect is constituted *a priori* by the interaction of all these three faculties. Therefore, at the end of the chapter, we can say that *Achtung* is a multifaceted phenomenon, identified with an emotion, which is unified due to its origin in its *a priori* constitution in the faculty of the mind.

In the third chapter, Nöller wants to define Respect more properly in contrast to other types of concepts such as moral sense, and feelings such as compassion and love. In doing so, the author uses the Singularity Thesis about Respect, which says that *Achtung* is the one and only moral incentive. Nöller starts by comparing Kantian thought in its historical context with two of the most popular theories at the time, which are focused on moral sense. These theories are formulated by Shaftesbury (1711) and Hutcheson (1725) and are focused on moral sense, a concept which Kant cannot accept because of its total lack of rational dependence and rationality in general. Another point about moral sense that Kant did not accept is the lack of volitional dependence. Briefly, moral sense, as explained by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, is a pre-volitional and pre-rational concept; it is an immediate and pure moral perception. What Kant is trying to do, on the contrary, is to delineate *Achtung* in a rational and volitional account; therefore, Respect is not the moral sense. After this issue, Nöller wants to differentiate, from a Kantian point of view, *Achtung* from moral feelings such as compassion and love. Keeping in mind the Singularity Thesis, it is impossible for feelings like love and compassion to be primary moral attitudes because of the lack of principle; in fact, they are derived from experience. They cannot be shown *a priori*, but only through experience, and what experience shows us is not necessary but always accidental; therefore, it does not provide us with any moral necessity. These objections also apply to the discussion about moral sense. However, the main objection about moral feelings, which Nöller provides, concerns the object of those feelings in comparison with the object of *Achtung*. The objects of love and compassion are always others, while the object of Respect is always directed to a set of rational and moral features one shares with the person one respects, and because of that, *Achtung* is grounded not in feeling or other contingent faculties, but in reason itself; only in this way can Respect be considered objective.

In my opinion, the fourth chapter is the most important of the book, because what the author tries to achieve here is a coherent and justified grounding of Respect. After having told us what *Achtung* is not, the author now begins the positive part of the theory; thus, this chapter is called “Grounding Respect: Beyond Affectivism and Intellectualism”. Furthermore, what is also shown in this chapter is the importance of Respect in its systematic role in the Kantian framework; in fact, the two main functions of respect are enumerated at the beginning. First, moral respect objectively serves the causality of freedom and, consequently, it is needed to realize the autonomy of pure practical reason; second, subjectively, *Achtung* allows us to perform actions for the sake of the Moral Law itself and not only in conformity with it. These two functions represent two conditions: the former is the causality condition, the latter is the moral condition. Put together, these two conditions form the autonomy of the will; both will be used by the author in the attempt to resolve the relation between intellect and feeling with respect to the Rationality Thesis. Put simply, in this chapter Nöller wants to clarify the causal relation between the intelligible and feeling in terms of rational and normative grounding. Another significant aspect of this chapter is the method, which brings into play not only the second and third *Critiques*, but also the first, to underscore how Respect is a concept strictly bound to all aspects of Kant’s system. In this case, the key aspect is the notion of causality, and particularly the causality of freedom. The author remarks once again that moral respect is not caused by something in sensibility that has an influence on the will, but directly by the causality of freedom, therefore by moral autonomy. Hence, *Achtung* is different from other feelings, such as love and compassion, which are grounded in sensibility. At the same time,

another important remark lies in the fact that *Achtung* is not an intellectual feeling because it is not caused by an intellectual intuition, which is impossible in the Kantian system. Once again, moral respect is caused only by the Moral Law and nothing else, and it has an effect on the will. Nöller wants to link *Achtung* with the will, which is rational and also has effects on our actions, in this way addressing the initial question about the possible effects of the intellectual on the material and on moral action. Concerning this double status of Respect, between rationality and feeling, the author uses McCarty's distinction between intellectualism and affectivism about *Achtung*. On the one hand, intellectualists think that respect for the moral law is a purely intellectual recognition of the supreme authority of the law and that it is sufficient to produce actions in the subject; on the other hand, affectivists hold that moral motivation for action is a peculiar moral feeling of respect for the law, which cannot be identified with a sort of pure recognition of the law. Nöller, between these two approaches, decides to go in a direction that integrates both intellectualism and affectivism and can guarantee the possibility of being included in a broader conception of Kantian autonomy. To do so, the author turns to the volitional account. In this way, one of the most problematic aspects of respect (and of the whole Kantian philosophy) can be resolved: the transition from the noumenal to the empirical. From a volitional point of view, namely through the will, light is shed on the passage from the noumenal to the empirical realms, because it happens within the faculty of the mind. Furthermore, the volitional account of respect brings with it another claim, which is not restricted to practical and moral philosophy, but also has effects on, on the one hand, the two-world ontological interpretation of Kantian philosophy and, on the other hand, the epistemological two-standpoints view, because the volitional account of respect yields the reality of freedom by demonstrating its unity. In this way, respect is a practical cognition that implicates epistemological, phenomenological, and motivational dimensions. To do this, Nöller uses an internalist account, claiming that *Achtung* is a special kind of self-reflective "volitional structure of a rational being morally motivated by a moral judgment". In conclusion, the author explains that the volitional account of Respect can unify the two different causalities in Kantian philosophy: the causality of reason and the causality of nature. Moreover, this conception of respect can also accommodate both the affectivist and intellectualist views, because it allows us to understand respect in terms of both feeling and intelligible cause at the same time.

Nöller, after grounding moral respect beyond intellectualism and affectivism, in the fifth chapter wants to focus his argumentation on respect as self-consciousness of moral autonomy. In order to explain this point, the author appeals to the intentionality of respect, which can shed light on another aspect of it, in addition to the objectivity of grounding, namely what is subjectively given from a first-person perspective.

Now it is explained that respect is generated by the law, through the will. In a volitional account of respect, Nöller must demonstrate how, subjectively and thus intentionally, respect affects moral subjects. The only object of respect is the law, or, using Kant's words, "simply the law"; but the law is not only the cause of our will, but also a product of our self-reflective autonomy, insofar as we bring it about. Quoting Kant, Nöller describes three possible intentional objects of respect: persons who constitute a moral example, the moral law, and ourselves as moral persons. With these three objects, the author argues that it is self-respect itself that allows us to understand the unity of respect (with regard to intentionality) in terms of moral autonomy. In this volitional framework, the will recognizes the moral law as its own law and, due to this, authorizes its volition. This means underlining the active role of the will, which is not only determined and passive, but plays a central function as far as respect is concerned, in this case self-respect, as the one and only moral incentive (Singularity Thesis). This is a key point not only for the intentionality but also for the autonomy of respect. To analyse this point, Nöller refers to the two types of causality once again: the causality of reason, or the causality of freedom, and natural causality. The causality of freedom is the causality proper to the moral law and, unlike natural causality, affects the will from within and not from without; this is freedom and, linked to it, autonomy. It is the will that gives the law to itself, or its own law, and in doing so it is free and therefore rational, because, as Nöller has earlier demonstrated, the moral law is rational and grounded in reason. In the last paragraph, the author gives an account of the whole complexity of this chapter, and he does so by talking about the logic of respect. In the second critique, Kant moves from principles to concepts and arrives at sensibility in the end, unlike what he did in the First Critique. After saying this, Nöller maintains the necessity, in order to explain and understand *Achtung*, of looking at all the faculties, making a comparison between the Analytic and the syllogism. Moral respect is a process of moral formation; in this process all three faculties are involved. Moreover, moral formation can also be understood as moral self-consciousness and moral autonomy; and this entire process is described by Kant in terms of a syllogism of pure practical reason.

After two chapters in which Nöller has positively built the concept of respect, in the sixth chapter he switches to a negative approach to the explanation, that is, what respect is not and what it should never be understood as. Put simply, Nöller wants to differentiate *Achtung* from self-conceit in light of everything he has already explained. The author adopts this strategy because it is now clear that respect is not a static concept, but a dynamic, self-referential, volitional process of moral autonomy, which can be understood as a feeling. Furthermore, according to the intentionality thesis, the self is not something singular or empirical, but rather a universal moral self called "humanity." At this point, there is no room for merely empirical and individual action, but Nöller wants to detach the argumentation from the classic Kantian dualism of appearances and things in themselves. Human beings are both: they are sensible and rational, and they need something that can motivate them to moral action, and this is *Achtung*, which, when understood as a feeling, has the role of a rational moral incentive that turns legality into morality. We can notice here, once again, that the entire Kantian framework is employed to resolve the puzzle of respect. Moreover, to achieve this conclusion, respect must be distinguished from self-conceit. Even if a human being can perform an action, it does not mean that that action is moral; to be moral, it has to be motivated by respect, and not, for instance, by

self-conceit. For this reason, Nöller continues by discussing choice, which is, once again, linked to autonomy. In light of this, respect has the effect of enabling the process that moves from mere legality to morality through an intentionality described as moral self-recognition.

In the last two chapters, the seventh and eighth, the author concludes the argumentation by connecting it with two main themes that were left aside in the previous discussion. The first is aesthetics and the power of judgment; the second is the education and cultivation of morality. Starting with aesthetics and referring to the third Critique, the author deals with judgment, because, among other things, *Achtung* is also a judgment, which is not only theoretical but also volitional. Once again, the key point here is the twofold nature of the human being, which stands between reason and sensibility; because of this, respect can also be understood from two perspectives: one is the perspective of the objectivity of the moral law, which Nöller calls the third-person perspective, and the second is from the agency of the subject, the first-person perspective. What the author wants to stress is the self-reflective will, which can guarantee the embodiment of the moral law in the subject because it mediates between sensibility and reason. Here aesthetics comes into play, because the feeling of the sublime is also a form of self-recognition in our judgments; however, the main difference is that it is not a volitional account. At the end of the book, in the eighth chapter, Nöller aims to explain the normativity thesis in connection with the concept of education and the duty of respect. Since *Achtung* is not a static concept that always remains the same, but rather a dynamic process, we, as rational human beings, must act to cultivate it and educate ourselves and others toward respect. This cultivation of respect, according to the normativity thesis, is the ground of moral duty, even if it is not a moral duty in itself. Moreover, this new dimension of respect allows us to understand it not only as a relation of a person with themselves, but also as a relation between persons through education and the moral duty of cultivating *Achtung*.

In conclusion, the book offers a highly intricate and well-argued account of respect in all its various facets. The attempt to reconcile the many nuanced Kantian aspects of *Achtung* is both noteworthy and successfully accomplished, particularly given that no part of Kant's corpus is overlooked. From the *Critique of Pure Reason* to his political and ethical writings, respect is presented as a complex and dynamic process with a volitional foundation, central to understanding both the book as a whole and Kant's thought more broadly. *Achtung* can be understood as a kind of philosopher's stone that allows us to reconcile and explain the classic Kantian duality namely, objectivity and subjectivity, by virtue of its distinctive relation to two kinds of causality. The "Puzzle of Respect," as articulated by the author, is thus resolved, and the debate surrounding Kantian *Achtung* is now provided with a new vantage point from which future discussions can begin.

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