

# Authentic moral commitment – Kant's phenomenology of respect

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This paper addresses Kant's complex arguments about the main kind of moral feeling. In Part I, I shall outline the structure of Kant's arguments concerning respect as they are presented in Book One, Chapter III of the second *Critique*. In Part II, I shall go on to criticise the claims to *a priori* status which Kant makes for respect; and in Part III will disentangle his major insights concerning it from this surrounding narrative of transcendental idealist epistemology. Finally, In Part IV, I shall develop these insights and thence restate the theory of respect in a way that is both consistent with Kant's ethical theory as a whole, and of more general significance.

## *Part I*

Kant's general pattern of argument in Chapter III (Book One) of the second *Critique* is a relatively straightforward one. After his introductory comments, he proceeds to outline the negative and positive aspects of respect in turn, and then repeats this sequence some four or five times – with occasional detours wherein respect's broader social and theological significance is considered. What makes Kant's argument so difficult to grasp, however, is the fact that in each of his repetitions he tends to introduce new emphases and new points of detail – in a way which sometimes conflicts with his position as previously outlined. Rather than trace this extended development in detail, I will attempt to condense Kant's exposition and focus on the logical progression of his arguments.

First, Kant holds that whilst a finite rational being cannot hope to explain *why* the moral law is able to determine the will, it is nevertheless possible to describe its effects. In order to show how the incentive for morality is provided, then, Kant proposes to carefully describe the *effect* of the moral law's determination of the will upon the faculty of desire. In essence, this effect is negative. As Kant puts it

*»... all inclination and every sensuous impulse is based on feeling, and the negative effect on feeling (through the check on the inclinations) is itself feeling. Consequently, we can see a priori that the moral law as a ground of*

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*determination of the will, by thwarting all our inclinations, must produce a feeling which can be called pain.*<sup>1</sup>

On these terms, then, to make a moral decision involves the restraining of contrary impulses. Since this restraint involves a modification of feeling it »must« itself be experienced as a feeling – of a negative sort. Kant then offers us a complex analysis of this affective state. On the one hand it temporarily »checks« inclinations to »self-love« or »selfishness«. The reason why this checking is not total is that these sorts of inclinations are natural and active in us, and can be enjoyed with impunity to the degree that they do not lead us to neglect our moral duties. On the other hand, the will's determination by the moral law altogether strikes down or »humiliates« inclinations towards »self-conceit«. Now Kant gives – without remarking upon it – two rather different accounts of what constitutes »self-conceit«. His first full account occurs well on into Chapter III as follows. We are told that the propensity to

*»... make the subjective determining ground's of one's choice into an objective determination of the will in general can be called self-love; when it makes itself legislative and an unconditional practical principle, it can be called self-conceit.*<sup>2</sup>

Hence, when we act in a spontaneous way from motives founded on purely personal interest we exemplify self-love; but if we make this sort of motivation into a supreme principle of conduct i.e. adopt some kind of egoist sense of self or world-view, then we exemplify self-conceit. It is this self-conceit which the moral law totally »humiliates«. (The reason for this humiliation is not fully spelt out by Kant, and I shall return to it at the end of this section.) Now the second interpretation of self-conceit is most fully stated even further on in Chapter III. It occurs in the context of one of Kant's detours into the broader social signification of respect. He remarks as follows.

*»... to a humble plain man in whom I perceive righteousness, my mind bows whether I choose or not ... Why? His example holds before me a law which strikes down my self-conceit when I compare my own conduct with it; that it is a law which can be obeyed, and consequently is one that can actually be put into practice, is proved before my eyes by the act.*<sup>3</sup>

Kant's point, then, is that exemplars of moral rectitude and (one presumes) one's own awareness of the exacting standards set by the moral law, humiliate self-conceit in the sense of shattering our moral complacency. They illuminate just how far in practice we fall short of such standards.

Given, therefore, this now complete outline of the negative dimension of respect – in terms of the checking of selfish inclination, the humiliation of

1. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, (Translated by A. W. Beck), University Press of Chicago, Chicago 1949, p. 182.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

egoism and the shattering of moral complacency, we are now in a position to consider the positive aspects of the feeling. These are first introduced by Kant in the following passage.

*»Since /the moral/ law ... is in itself positive, being the form of an intellectual causality, i.e. the form of freedom, it is at the same time an object of respect, since, in conflict with its subjective antagonists (our inclinations), it weakens self-conceit... /hence/ it is an object of the greatest respect and thus of a positive feeling which is not of empirical origin.«<sup>4</sup>*

This awkwardly constructed passage is entirely typical of Kant's general style of expounding the positive dimension of respect. It suggests that there are two somewhat different aspects to this dimension – one based on the moral law's positive status as the exemplar of free rational agency; and other based on its causal efficacy in the humiliation of self conceit. That this apparent twofold aspect is not simply a function of Kant's awkwardness of presentation is demonstrated by the fact that at other points in Chapter III he discusses the two elements completely independently of one another. I shall now consider them in turn, beginning with the more difficult notion of the moral law's causal efficacy. The clearest exposition of this is to be found in the following passage.

*»Since the idea of the moral law deprives self-love of its influence and self conceit of its delusion, it lessens the obstacle to pure practical reason and produces the idea of the superiority of its objective law to the impulses of sensibility; it increases the weight of the moral law by removing, in the judgement of reason, the counterweight to the moral law which bears on a will affected by the sensibility.«<sup>5</sup>*

Kant's point here, I would suggest, is that by checking selfishness and humiliating self-conceit, the moral law produces a negative feeling which itself helps remove the obstacles to morality's determination of the will. This is because (one presumes) the *felt* checking and humiliation of contrary impulses will make us less susceptible to them in the future. Now this felt removal is subjectively experienced as a kind of increase of being for the moral law. The sheer impact of its negative effect on feeling enhances our sense of its efficient power and authority, and thus gives rise to a more positive kind of feeling.

Now (as noted earlier) there is a further aspect to this positive dimension. Kant's clearest statement of it is as follows.

*»As submission to a law, i.e. as a command (which constrains the sensuously affected subject, it /i.e. respect/ contains, therefore, no pleasure but rather displeasure proportionate to this constraint. On the other hand, since this constraint is exercised only through the legislation of one's own reason, it also*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

*contains something elevating, and the subjective effect on feeling can be called self-approbation with reference to pure practical reason.»<sup>6</sup>*

In this case, then, the impact of the negative feeling brings home to us the fact that it does not arise through the impositions of some alien power, but is rather effected by the legislative power of our own reason. Our sense of possessing free rational agency, in other words, is enhanced and becomes a positive feeling through a kind of *resonation* from the moral law's negative effects upon inclination.

Let me now draw the main threads of Kant's argument together. When the moral law determines the will, it inhibits contrary impulses – namely our inclinations towards selfishness, egoism, and moral complacency. In so doing, it necessarily produces a negative feeling. Insofar, however, as this negative feeling also enhances both our sense of the moral law's causal efficacy and its origins in our own rational being, it must be accompanied by a positive feeling of elevation. On these terms, in other words, the positive dimension is causally dependent on the negative one. It is this whole complex sequence of affects which constitute the feeling of respect.

Given this account, then, Kant is able to make two major claims. First, that respect is the authentic incentive to morality. This is because through it, the moral law

*»... has an influence on the sensibility of the subject and effects a feeling which promotes the influence of the law upon the will.«<sup>7</sup>*

Kant's second claim is that this authentic incentive to morality is the moral law »itself«

*»... so far as it lets us perceive the sublimity of our own supersensuous existence and subjectively effects respect in men who are /otherwise only/ conscious of their sensuous existence.«<sup>8</sup>*

On these terms, then, respect, not only provides an incentive which assists the moral law's capacity to determine the will, but also enables it to amplify into metaphysical awareness of our ultimate vocation – to be free rational legislators in a supersensible order of existence.

With this account of Kant's major points of argument concerning respect before us, we can now subject them to more critical scrutiny.

## *Part II*

Let me first address the elements involved in the negative dimension of respect. The most important of these is Kant's claim that the moral law's determination of the will entails the checking of contrary selfish impulses. This

6. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 188.



is a valid claim. It raises, however, a crucial problem – namely that of whether our inclinations must always be selfish and in conflict with the law. If, in principle, they need not be, then Kant has no right to assert that the moral law's determination of the will necessarily issues in a negative feeling i.e. he cannot claim *a priori* status for respect. The most obvious examples which might be cited against Kant, here, are of course, inclinations to love or sympathy. Admittedly, if these are the sole motives for an action, then that action will not count as a moral one. But we must, nevertheless, surely allow that the existence of such inclinations are counterbalances to selfishness, and that their presence will, therefore, indirectly assist the moral law's determination of the will. Now Kant suggests that it is a »risky« business to even allow non-moral motives to co-operate with the moral law. At best their presence makes it difficult to know whether our motive is genuinely a moral one; at worst they surreptitiously displace moral motivation. However, even if we admit these risks, and even if we concede that empirically speaking it may never be possible to discern our true motives, it is nevertheless in principle possible that on some occasions at least the moral law may determine the will in a context where selfish inclinations have been balanced out by other-regarding ones. In such a context, therefore, the moral law's determination of the will need not necessarily involve a felt checking of selfish inclinations. Now there is another, rather more complex argument with rather more interesting ramifications which leads to a similar conclusion. It centres on the distinction which Kant makes between »acting according to duty« (»legality«) and »acting from duty« (»morality«).

*»The former, (legality), is possible even if inclinations alone are the determining grounds of the will, but the latter, morality or moral worth can be conceded only where the action occurs from duty, i.e. merely for the sake of the law.«<sup>9</sup>*

Now the way Kant goes on to develop these remarks makes it clear that the »inclinations« which he has in mind in this passage are love and the desire for happiness. Let us suppose, however, that a person honours an obligation purely on the basis of motives of this sensuous sort. Now it is crucial to note that the very fact that the act is in »accord« with duty entails that it is one over which morality has proper jurisdiction i.e. is one which demands a moral motive irrespective of whatever else one might happen to feel. (In the strict terms of Kant's general ethical theory »can accord with duty« entails »ought to accord with duty«.) If, however, the act is carried out solely on the basis of sensuous motives, then the agent is infringing the moral law by allowing pathological elements to usurp its rightful function. Kant would have expressed the relation of such acts to duty in a more accurate way if he has described them as having *pseudo-accord* or *pseudo-legality*. Now the reason why Kant highlights these

9. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

sorts of sensuously motivated acts and is then so lax in applying the strictures of his broader ethical position to them, is bound up with a strategy directed towards rival moral sense or hedonist theories of moral feeling. Rather than *just* dismiss such widely accepted alternative theories to his own, Kant prefers to assimilate and neutralise them under the rubric of »mere legality«. Unfortunately this strategy not only leads him into the above inconsistency, it also blurs his recognition of what is really at stake in the distinction between acting according to, and acting from duty. This blurred recognition just above focuses in the following passage.

*»... the moral law itself in its solemn majesty is exposed to /an/ endeavour to keep oneself from yielding respect to it. Can it be thought that there is any reason why we like to degrade it to the level of our familiar inclination and why we chose to make it the precept of our well-understood interest, other than the fact that we want to be free of the awesome respect?«<sup>10</sup>*

I would suggest that Kant is here implicitly offering an alternative formulation of the distinction between acting according to, and acting from duty. The former involves following the law (or at least striving to do so) on the basis of »familiar« (i.e. settled) inclination. Whereas the latter involves acting on the basis of an occurrent feeling of respect for the law. Now it is crucial to note that in Kantian terms *both* these patterns of action are genuinely moral, insofar as they both involve acting for the sake of the law rather than on the basis of purely sensuous motivation. The difference between them consists in the fact that the former emphasises the following of the law *qua* law. We have accustomed ourselves to its objective demands through training and practice, and have made them the governing factor in our lives. This I would suggest, can aptly be described as acting according to duty – a life of moral legality. Such legality is not simply an unthinking conformity to the law, produced by indoctrination. It is, rather a sober commitment to the law arising from mature reflection – as Kant puts it »the precept of our well-understood interest«. Now it might be objected that it is entirely inappropriate to describe this mode of commitment to the law as »moral legality« – given the connotation of mere correctness or conformity which the term »legality« invites. Yet it is precisely these connotations which Kant himself exploits in the foregoing passage in order to separate this settled inclination for morality from the more dramatic mode of moral existence that is founded on the occurrent feeling of respect. Indeed he presents what I am calling »moral legality« as an actual *evasion* of respect. I would argue, then, that Kant implicitly offers an alternative version of the distinction between acting according to duty, and acting from duty, on the basis of a contrast between moral legality founded on a settled inclination and moral decision founded on respect. I will develop the full ramifications of this important distinction in Part III. For the present, however, it suffices to

10. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 183.

point out that whilst this distinction is meant to stress the importance and significance of the occurrent feeling of respect, it does so at the cost of further undermining respect's claim to *a priori* status. For the very fact that within the sphere of genuine moral action Kant himself distinguishes respect from another mode of motivation shows, of itself, that the moral law's determination of the will need not *always* involve respect. Respect's claim to *a priori* status, in other words, again proves problematic.

Let me now address the second aspect of the negative dimension of respect, namely the »humiliation« of »self-conceit« – in the form egoistic world-views or moral complacency. Kant is slightly ambivalent as to the relation between this and both the other negative aspects of respect *and* the positive dimension. At some points, for example,<sup>11</sup> he talks as though the humiliation of self-conceit, is the exclusive and direct effect of the moral law's determination of the will – upon which the positive dimension is causally dependent. This, however, cannot be the case, for as Kant understands it the notion of self-conceit – in either of its senses – is logically somewhat complex. For example, suppose we feel humiliated in comparing our former hedonistic lifestyle to our current acceptance of the moral law in its solemn majesty. This is not simply a case of recognising the law's authority. It implies rather, that we have thought the concept of morality through and are aware that it springs from a »real« self which is not a mere subject of mechanistic determination, but one grounded in free rational agency. The humiliation of egoism, is not in other words a simple negative effect of accepting the demands of the moral law. It embodies rather the kind of sophisticated appraisal and response in terms of which Kant characterises the positive dimension of respect. Similar considerations apply to self-conceit in the form of moral complacency. For to grasp the moral law as an exacting ultimate standard against which all claims to self-esteem must be measured, presupposes a full understanding of free rational agency and of the complex nature of the obstacles to it. On these terms, then, the humiliation of self-conceit is not a direct and simple negative effect of the moral law's determination of the will, upon which the positive dimension is causally dependent. Indeed, it actually presupposes the kind of complex appraisals in terms of which Kant characterises that dimension.

One must also query, of course, the role of self-conceit's humiliation in relation to respect's claim to *a priori* status. For even if we accepted the claim that the moral law's determination of the will necessarily involved a felt negative response to the checking of our inclinations, this fact of itself does not entail (as Kant suggests) that we will *also* necessarily experience a humiliation of our egos or of our tendencies to complacency. A person of insight and moral sensitivity might think through the broad implication of morality in relation to egoism and complacency and feel the requisite

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

humiliation, but the simple moral soul might not. He or she, however, could still follow the moral law for its own sake – in a kind of pure and unquestioning way. I am suggesting, in other words, that the humiliation of self-conceit in either of its senses is contingent on the depth of moral awareness possessed by the individual moral agent. It cannot, therefore, be seen *a priori* as a necessary outcome of the moral law's determination of the will.

Now in relation to the positive dimension of respect, something of its logical complexity has already been shown. In particular, we have seen that far from being causally dependent on the humiliation of self-conceit, the appraisals and responses which characterise the positive dimension, are actually presupposed by such humiliation. What we must now critically consider, then, is the relation which holds between the moral law's negative effect upon selfish impulses as such, and the positive aspects of respect. The first of these relations is that which arises when the negative effect upon the inclinations serves to exemplify and enhance our sense of the moral law's effectiveness – a sense which in turn leads us to experience a positive feeling of its authority. Now this sequence of appraisals and affective responses is certainly a possible one. For if we feel the effects of the moral law's determination of the will – as opposed, say, to simply doing our duty in a settled and legalistic way – then this might in turn lead us to respond affectively to the law's power, in a way that the legalistic approach might not. Again, however, whilst this sequence might take place, Kant has no grounds for claiming – as he does – that it is a necessary outcome of the will's determination by the moral law. It will, rather, be contingent upon the individual moral agent's particular level of susceptibility and insight. Similar considerations apply in relation to the other positive aspect of respect, namely our awareness of the moral law as the embodiment of our own free rational agency. An insight of this sort accompanied by a positive affective response, may well follow on from the moral law's felt constraint upon our inclinations. But there is no necessity in the sequence. Again, therefore, Kant's attempt to articulate respect in terms of *a priori* causality proves problematic.

Kant's description of respect, then, presents it as a complex sequence of insights and negative and positive responses. The content of this sequence is illuminating and exemplifies something of Kant's depth of sensitivity as to the nuances of moral awareness in the finite rational being. The sequence as a whole, however, does not originate or hang together with the *a priori* necessity which Kant claims for it. Indeed, one might argue that it is his preoccupation with this latter possibility which prevents him from doing full justice to his phenomenological insights. In the next section of this paper, therefore, I will try to rescue Kant's phenomenology from the constraints imposed on it by his



transcendental idealist epistemology, in order to prepare us for a more plausible restatement of his theory of respect in Part IV.

### Part III

Let me begin by outlining what I take to be the three key insights in Kant's discussion. The first of these is the distinction between acting according to duty and acting from duty. Now as we saw in the last section, Kant is ambiguous about this distinction. His official exposition tends to articulate it in terms of an opposition between fulfilling a moral obligation on the basis of non-moral inclinations such as love or the desire for happiness, and fulfilling such an obligation on the basis of respect. However, I pointed out that in the former case the accord with the moral law is only an appearance of accord. In Kant's own strict terms, we actually have a conflict with duty in such cases. I went on to argue that the terms in which he should have drawn the distinction are actually visible in his text, albeit opaquely. These terms are: on the one hand acting according to duty in the sense of acting from a settled inclination or striving to fulfill the moral law, and, on the other hand, acting from duty in the sense of being motivated by an occurrent feeling of respect. What makes this way of drawing the distinction do fruitful is the crucial tension which it highlights, and the resolution of this tension which it points towards. To understand what is at issue here, we must recall that Chapter III of the second *Critique* is explicitly addressed to the search for an »incentive« to morality. Now in the distinction under consideration Kant seems to have picked out an »incentive« to morality – insofar as it involves a settled inclination to make the moral law the object of our »well-understood interest«. However, he not only distinguishes this from the feeling of respect, but even compares it unfavourably with that feeling. Yet earlier on (we will recall) he also explicitly *identifies* the »incentive« to morality *with* the feeling of respect. What explains that tension? I would suggest that it is due to the fact that Kant conflates two different approaches to respect. The first sees it as an *a priori* effect of the moral law's determination of the will, and is the direct outcome of his transcendental idealist epistemology being applied to the workings of the faculty of desire. However, as well as facing all the difficulties noted in Part II of this study, this approach fails to account for how an *occurrent* feeling – respect, can be equated with an »incentive« – i.e. a settled disposition to pursue the law. The second approach, however, by-passes these difficulties insofar as it is orientated not towards questions of *a priori* causality, but rather towards showing the way in which a settled inclination to morality requires experience of the feeling of respect. It seeks to show (in terms of the above distinction) that acting in accordance with duty is empirically dependent on acting from duty. Now whilst this second approach is an indirect accompaniment to the main narrative concerning *a priori* causality, it is the

very *core* of all this is worthwhile in Kant's theory of respect. In order to develop it, however, we must now consider Kant's second major insight. It hinges on a psychological issue. At the heart of it is Kant's clear awareness that for a sensuously affected rational being, rational judgements carry more existential weight if they issue in some sort of affective response. In such a case our sensible nature, as it were, resonates with what we have recognised at the rational level. In this way, in other words, the rational judgement permeates our being in its entirety. Now bearing this in mind, let us consider the following passage from late on in the second *Critique* where Kant informs us that if moral concepts are to become »subjectively practical« they

»... must not remain objective laws of morality which we merely admire and esteem in relation to mankind in general. Rather we must see the relation of them to man as an individual, for then the law appears in a form which indeed deserves of high respect though not as pleasing as if it belonged to the element to which he is naturally accustomed; on the contrary, it often compels him to leave this element, not without self-denial, and to give himself over to a higher element in which he can maintain himself only with effort...«<sup>12</sup>

As I read him here, Kant's point is that full moral existence demands not only the intellectual recognition of the moral law's objective validity, but also its internalisation at the level of concrete personal existence. Hence the difficulties and struggles it involves us in, and, in particular, the affective responses it generates, will be signs of the existential gravity with which we invest morality in our own lives. The coupling of moral decision with affective response, in other words, bespeaks a commitment of our whole being. We embrace morality at the level of both rational universality, *and* concrete sensuous particularity.

I turn now to Kant's third major insight. For him, whilst respect is founded on logically complex negative and positive appraisals of our relation to the moral law, he presents it, nevertheless, as being experienced in terms of a phenomenologically *singular* feeling. At the level of logical analysis, in other words, we can separate its components, but at the level of concrete moral decision and action these are felt only as a single feeling of respect. Now one presumes that Kant's justification for this view is based on the fact that since the links between the negative and positive dimensions have an *a priori* foundation, it is only to be expected that we experience this linkage as a phenomenological continuum i.e. as a single feeling. Given, however, the objections which I have rehearsed against Kant's *a priori* narrative, his assertion of respect's phenomenologically singular status clearly requires some other justification. What this justification might look like will be a major consideration in Part IV of this paper.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

To prepare the ground for Part IV, then, let me now summarise what I take to be Kant's three major insights. These are i) the distinction (within morality itself) between acting according to duty, and acting from duty; ii) Kant's realisation that occurrent affective responses exemplify the seriousness of our commitment to morality; and iii) that such responses, whilst being logically complex, are experienced, nevertheless, as phenomenologically singular. Now I would suggest that, freed from the narrative of *a priori* causality, insights ii) and iii) can be used to clarify the distinction at issue in insight i) – and, in particular, to establish the fact that acting according to duty is *dependent* on acting from duty. By effecting this clarification, Kant's theory of respect will be restated in a form which is both consistent with his broader ethical theory, and with claim to more general significance. It is to this task I now turn.

#### Part IV

Let me begin by reinterpreting the negative aspect of respect. In Kantian terms, to obey the moral law requires that we suppress contrary inclinations founded on selfish considerations. Now we might learn to do this purely on the basis of instruction and indoctrination. A child, for example, originally learns to keep promises and refrain from telling lies in the context of threats and rewards; but then (hopefully, as it matures) simply does so for its own sake. Now an immature moral agent of this sort satisfied the minimum condition of Kantian morality, insofar as he or she here follows the law without ulterior motive. It is an unthought through following – but a following all the same. Suppose, however, that on occasion fulfilling a moral obligation creates a situation that is personally inconvenient and inspires negative feelings. Now the very fact that we here do our duty despite the bad feelings suggests that we have gone beyond childlike following of the law, and have engaged with it at a level of more personal commitment. Acting according to duty may embody some commitment, but it is only when we fulfill our obligations in a context of *felt* cost, that we have an unmistakable criterion of commitment.

Now the level of moral awareness in many people may not reach far beyond this. But there is clearly scope here for further cultivation. We might, for example, come to learn not only what the law demands of us, but also something of why its demands should be acknowledged as binding on us. This, of course, centres on the thinking through of the structure and significance of our rational autonomy. On the one hand we grasp that the very essence of morality is grounded on rational principles of reciprocity with other persons – and thence exemplifies what is distinctive to humanity as a species. On the other hand, since such rational principles lead us to check our natural inclinations, we are also able to intuit our freedom – the fact that we are higher than nature and its framework of mechanistic causality. Now to think through morality in this way might be done in a purely intellectual manner.

But if we are *moved* by such thoughts about how extraordinary morality shows humanity to be, then this is a manifestation of the fact that morality is engaging us at a personal as well as objective level.

I am arguing, then, that the negative and positive aspects of respect are criteria of the seriousness of our commitment to morality. Now the question arises as to why we should regard the conjunction of these aspects as anything more than a conjunction. Why, in other words, is it possible to feel them as phenomenologically unified i.e. as *a* feeling of respect rather than as two separate – albeit sometimes successive – responses? There are perhaps several reasons here. First, there is a kind of easy knock-on effect between respect's negative and positive dimensions – in that one seems to invite and reinforce the other. The element of felt constraint, for example, brings home the fact that morality is not simply what we want it to be, but at the same time *qua* felt effect also makes the fact and force of rational autonomy more vivid. We feel ourselves to be higher than nature. Indeed the rewards of this positive feeling will enable us to cope all the better with the phenomenon of felt constraint when next it arises. Now these connections do not have the kind of *a priori* strength which Kant assigns to them, but the ease of progression from one to another, and their mutually re-inforcing relation certainly explains how we are able to experience them as phenomenologically cohesive – as forming a complex but unified feeling. This justification of respect can also be supplemented in terms of an argument with much broader ramifications. Suppose, for example, that a person only ever experienced *one* of the ingredients of respect – say, the negative one. He or she would be committed to morality but would only experience it affectively in terms of thwarted or frustrated impulse. The accumulation of such responses, however, would, in the long run, tend either to actually turn morality into an object of aversion, or to generate a kind of fanatical asceticism, wherein even the legitimate claims of rational self-interest were denied. In either case, we would have a state of mind that was, in general terms, highly inimical to morality. Now suppose, on the other hand, that we only ever experienced the positive sort of affective response to morality. In such a case the danger is that the moral law would gradually become a mere object for marvelling at. Aesthetic motives might begin to displace moral ones, leading us to become, in time, mere admiring spectators of morality, rather than active practitioners of it. These cases suggest, then, that the experience of one but not the other element in the feeling of respect, leads at best to an unsettled and fragile moral existence, and at worst, to the long term decay of such existence. Similar considerations apply if, within one person's life, the negative and positive aspects of respect were always experienced in isolation from each other. The agent would become a kind of unhappy consciousness veering from aversion or ascetic intensity to detached contemplation, with real moral existence torn apart somewhere in



between. Now the fact is, of course, that most people who respond affectively to morality also manage to lead fairly settled moral lives. This suggests, therefore, that in them, the negative and positive aspects are experienced together in a logically complex but phenomenologically cohesive feeling. One suppose that the reason why these elements tend to cohere, is because through their phenomenological conjunction we are able to achieve a balancing out and stabilisation of the different demands which morality makes on us as both rational *and* sensuously affected beings. Our need for moral stability, in other words, *compels* the conjunction.

Given, then, these arguments concerning both respect's exemplification of our *personal* commitment to morality, *and* its phenomenological cohesiveness, we can now draw some conclusions which will clarify the relation between acting in accord with duty i.e. from settled inclination, and acting from duty, on the basis of the feeling of respect. Put simply, it amounts to this. If we did not – at least sometimes in our lives – act out of respect for the law, it is difficult to see how we could develop a settled inclination to make our decisions according to morality's demands. If we simply *recognised* its authority in terms of childlike obedience or purely intellectual judgement, then this would mean that morality had not taken root in the sphere of our personal existence. Any inclination for morality would be at best fragile. By not feeling the moral law's force at the affective level, in other words, we would be correspondingly more likely to deviate from it when its demands proved inconvenient. Difficulties would also arise (as we have seen) if our affective responses to the law were one sidedly negative or positive. Here our inclinations for morality would be rendered fragile, unsettled, and even placed under threat of long term decay. One might say, then, that a settled inclination to act in accordance with duty is, in an empirical sense, dependent on experiencing that balanced conjunction of rational judgement and negative and positive affective response, which is embodied in the feeling of respect. Respect also plays a second crucial role. For once a settled inclination for morality has been attained, it is constantly threatened by a kind of reification – by the possibility of decaying into a mere mindless striving for conformity. In such a state the sensuous element – the settled inclination itself – begins to dull our awareness of the reasons why the moral law demands, and is worthy of, our commitment in the first place. The exercise of pur rational autonomy is thence rigidified and begins to appear – dare one say it – *mechanical*. The occurrence of the feeling of respect, however, is a felt renewal of our awareness of both the moral law's demands and origins. It re-presents morality as both a problem and solution to life, as well as the basis of a path through it. The immediate effects of such a feeling may be existentially uncomfortable. Indeed, as Kant so shrewdly relates, we may even wish to evade it. However, because it is a *balanced* response with a positive as well as a negative dimension, we can expect the feeling to restore and invigorate, as well as unsettle.

I am arguing, then, that to act according to duty is dependent on acting from duty in two senses. First, the feeling of respect facilitates a settled inclination for duty; and second, it prevents that inclination from degenerating into a blind quasi-mechanical striving for conformity to the moral law. Now this dependency is empirical rather than *a priori*, but this by no means diminishes its philosophical significance. For as a *universal* code of conduct, morality's »ought« implies »can« in something more than the strictly logical sense of presupposing free agency. Specifically, it implies that human beings can, as it were, *be at home with morality*,<sup>13</sup> and make it a rule for life in the fullest sense. It must, in other words, be a source of existential *fulfillment*, as well as a law to be recognised and obeyed. Without this former possibility, we could still, indeed, be moral beings, but the moral law would appear so alien to our sensuous dimension, as to seem almost impossible to realise in any systematic way. The moral law's instantiation in finite rational being would, thereby, be rendered, in effect, self-defeating. Now Kant's theory of respect – once freed from the narrative of *a priori* causality – deals squarely with this problem. It shows how morality is able to make itself at home in finite rational being. Respect is a mode of existential self-fulfillment that is more complex and ambiguous than mere satisfaction or happiness. By constantly shaking up yet at the same time consolidating our commitment to morality, it is the basis of moral existence in the *fullest* sense for a finite being. One might say that, for Kant, the logic of the categorical imperative yields the essential skeletal structure of morality, but that it is the feeling of respect which gives it *flesh*.<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, it is worth very briefly sketching out a rather broader sphere of application for Kant's theory of respect. For to act in the terms of *any* moral code, surely presupposes a capacity to restrict at least some selfish impulses on the basis of rational principles of conduct. It also presupposes, of course, that we have the freedom to do so. Now to act on the basis of such a discourse of restraint and rational autonomy, can be done in a settled and familiar way, and become a life of moral legality. However, at the heart of such existence is an economy of lost selfish gratification, and positive rational fulfillment. To experience this economy in terms of a complex but phenomenologically cohesive feeling, is to experience morality as having a sort of existential »bite«. It is to *live* morality in a balanced way, and to emphatically affirm both its

13. In a sense Kant's underlying strategy in *The Critique of Judgement* is to establish how our aesthetic engagement with nature makes us »at home« in the world, in a way that is conducive to morality. For a fuller discussion of this see Chapter Three of my *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to art*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.

14. I have dealt with other aspects of this »fleshy« phenomenological significance of Kant's thought in Part II of »The Claims of Perfection: A Revisionary Defense of Kant's Theory of Dependent Beauty«, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, March 1986, pp. 61-74; and in »Fundamental Ontology and Transcendent Beauty: An Approach to Kant's Aesthetics«, *Kant Studien*, Vol. 76, No. 1, 1985, pp. 55-71.

demands and its rational basis. Without such a feeling to focus the reality of our commitment, our inclination to accord with the demands of morality would be rendered fragile, or become rigidified and mechanical. In the most general terms, then, if our commitment to a moral code is to be renewed and revived – if we wish to sustain an *authentic* moral commitment – as opposed to mere conformity, then we must be able to experience that code in terms of complete moral feeling. It is this generally valid claim and the structure of phenomenological insights which sustain it, that form the *real* core of Kant's theory of respect. Kant's theory, in other words, provides the basis of a model for distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic moral commitment *as such*.

