

Autonomy and Moral Emotion

— A Response to the Conciliatory Proposition of Kant's Morality

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Abstract: German philosopher Kant, in his moral philosophy, made a clear distinction between categorical imperative and hypothetical imperative. Under his three propositions of morality, Kant argued that only actions motivated by maxims (or moral principles) rather than any other emotional feelings could produce moral worth. Since then, the criticism from Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and a series of reconciling propositions from other later scholars such as Paten, Henson towards such Kantian dichotomy have never ended. This sets the main focus of my article. The article is divided into three parts: the first part expounds the content and ethical basis of Kantian philosophy by explaining the epistemological gap between noumenon and phenomenon. The second part focuses on four different reconciling propositions proposed by Paton, Henson, Herman, and Allison as well as their shared issue: they all try to revise the conclusion within Kantian philosophy in a theory of motivation outside the Kantian philosophy. By tracing back to the three propositions and the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy, the last part offers the article's own argument: though Kant denies emotion as a motivation to produce moral worth, he does not exclude it from the inevitable concomitant from phenomena.

Keywords: moral philosophy, duty, kantianism, moral value

1. Introduction

As a versatile expert in mathematics, astronomy, physics, philosophy, and other fields, Kant reconciled the contradiction between European rationalism and British empiricism with his dichotomy in the field of noumenon and phenomenon, and his transcendental idealism also bid farewell to the naive ontology that the latter relied on. In ethics and moral philosophy, Kant's contribution and influence are also far-reaching. In the *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morality*, he pointed out that action out of duty is the condition for the establishment of good will. Meanwhile, acting out of duty requires not only that the action itself be the purpose but also that the code of conduct be based on obligation rather than desire. Moreover, the moral value conferred by the good will is "unconditional," meaning that it serves its own purpose and that its moral value is not affected by any external conditions. (In the table below, only the situation described in the first row meets Kant's definition of the first proposition of duty).

Table 1: Four cases of duty and motivation.

		Scenario Case	Features
With duty	Acts motivated by duty	Saving lives out of a duty to save lives	With an aim of saving lives and the rule of duty
With duty	Acts motivated by direct inclination	Saving lives out of a desire to save lives	With an aim of saving lives and the rule of desires
With duty	Acts motivated by indirect inclination	Saving lives for other purposes such as fame	Without an aim of saving lives and with the rule of duty
Have no Duty	Acts violating duty	Seeing the dead without helping	Morally wrong

However, this dichotomy between duty and emotion has been questioned and opposed by various philosophers since it was proposed. The most direct challenge came from Schiller, Schopenhauer, and others. In one of his poems, Schiller satirized Kant’s proposition as being at odds with universal human intuition. For example, even when we act morally virtuously in accordance with our obligations, the positive emotions that result are difficult to let go of. On the contrary, when we perform an obligatory act without a trace of emotion, the act may also have little moral value. Since then, criticism against this theory of Kant has continued: from a perspective of utilitarianism, expressions of emotion such as “friendship, compassion, and love” seem to be more acceptable in terms of moral value than obligations [1]. Other scholars have pointed out that the true meaning of human emotions is deeper and more complex than the “pathological emotions” defined by Kant; therefore, emotions that are motivated by the human pursuit of goodness have more moral value [2]. Some have even argued that hypothetical imperatives containing emotions have more moral value by deconstructing the “categorical imperative,” which is the cornerstone of Kant’s ethics [3].

In the face of many questions and criticisms, the voices defending or reinterpreting Kant’s views are also opposed to him and put forward “reconcilable propositions”: Paton’s “isolation approach [4],” Henson’s “multiple stipulations [5],” Hermann’s concept of duty as a restrictive condition [6], and Allison’s “absorption thesis [7].” However, these conciliatory propositions without exception have their own problems, namely, “to explain Kant’s motivation and moral value with a motivation theory that does not exist in Kant,” thus missing the “fundamental purpose [8]” of Kant’s practical philosophy.

2. Kant’s Philosophical Position on the Relationship Between Pathology Emotion and Duty

Kant’s philosophy distinguishes two kinds of emotion: pathological emotion and moral emotion. The former is the motivation for human action; that is, a series of actions motivated by such feelings or desires are pathological for Kant; the latter is the emotion that follows the action, or it can be understood as pure reverence for moral law, which is of higher ethical value for Kant. According to Kant, pathological emotion acts on man through the perceptual phenomenon of natural law. Therefore, acting out of such emotion is not a free action and cannot be called moral, so it is pathological. Moral emotion is a type of rational emotion distinct from pathological emotionality—a kind of respect for the moral law—and it belongs to the ontological world of the law of freedom. In the face of these doubts, this chapter will explain Kant’s reason for this division by returning to the relationship between moral values and pathological emotions in Kantian philosophy.

Kant’s critique of pure reason divides nature and freedom into an impassable epistemological chasm. At the same time, Kant starts with practical reason and points out that man, as a limited rational being, is fundamentally free. Therefore, based on this representationalism epistemology,

Kant pointed out that there would be two worlds: the world of sense (phenomenon) and the world of reason (noumenon). In this dichotomy, the natural being acts according to the law of nature, and the rational being acts according to the appearance of that law.

Table 2: Natural beings and rational beings.

Das Seiende	Basis of action	characteristics
The natural being	natural law	No subjectivity, objective necessity
The infinite rational being	Appearance of law	No rational will to force
The finite rational being	Appearance of law	The mandatory commandment

In the classification shown in the table above, the infinite rational being achieves the unity of subjective and objective necessity, and its will fully conforms to and acts in accordance with reason. Thus, the appearance of the law is not mandatory. As a limited rational being, although human beings can realize that the law is not changed by their subjective will, they also have the freedom to act in accordance with the law, and their wills will be affected by a series of subjective factors. As a result, the representation of the law is required of the finite rational being, the imperatives.

Imperatives are divided into two categories: hypothetical imperatives and categorical imperatives.

Table 3: Hypothetical imperative and categorical imperative.

Imperatives	Forms	Characteristics
Hypothetical imperatives	If A, you should B.	Conditional
Categorical imperatives	You should B.	Unconditional

Based on the classification in the table above, the hypothetical imperative provides the corresponding means to an end. The hypothetical imperative is rational if and only if it chooses the appropriate means relative to its end. The categorical imperative, on the other hand, is unconditional; it is not dependent on any of its preconditions and points to good for its own sake.

Kant demonstrated the validity of categorical imperatives for rational beings further by advancing the universal law formula established in the Foundation of Metaphysics of Morals, that is, rational beings are willed beings with practical reason who can act according to the appearance of laws. The willed being can give himself a reason to act, i.e., produce the goal of his action. And the end can be divided into objective and subjective ends: objective ends are valid for all rational beings, while subjective ends are valid only for individual beings. What makes the end possible are the means, and the means are good because of the end. In hypothetical imperatives, the means are called good in relation to a subjective end; in categorical imperatives, what makes them good is a free objective goal.

In addition, Kant's law of practical reason reveals the characteristics of self-legislation of rational beings, according to Kant, which actually gives human beings the assumption of an ethical community—the kingdom of ends. Since all rational beings abide by the same law only by virtue of reason, and since this law is essentially the self-legislation of rational beings, it is possible to imagine an ethical community composed of rational beings that is only held together by the moral relations among rational beings. The dignity of the rational being is thoroughly realized in the kingdom of ends because it guarantees the status of its objective ends through self-legislation.

At the same time, Kant begins his book by appealing to human moral intuition to clarify that good will is an unconditional good of purpose. Kant says, for example, that even if a person of good will fails to do good, his moral worth should not be denied. Kant also argues that the self of practical

reason will arouse the respect of human beings for it, and that acts out of this feeling are acts of duty. Thus, among the many pathological feelings, Kant retains the respect for the law and incorporates it into the moral feelings.

In addition, the dichotomy of Kantian philosophy also runs through Kant's pursuit of moral completeness and moral unconditionality. But why does Kant propose such a kingdom of ends? Is it merely to give us the ideal of an ethical community? Or is it convenient for us to understand the moral law of practical reason? Or is it the moral basis for the establishment of a realistic ethical community? None of these issues have been explored in detail.

3. The Conciliatory Propositions of Different Scholars

Facing the criticism and questioning of the dichotomy of Kant's moral emotion and pathological emotion, scholars of later generations have put forward different reconciliatory theories to defend or revise Kant.

3.1. The Conciliatory Propositions of H. J. Paton

According to Kant's recognition and classification of moral value, behavior that is directly or indirectly motivated by preference has no moral value; however, there are obvious doubts and criticisms on the assertion that behavior that is directly motivated by preference cannot produce moral value. For example, it is often difficult for people to accept that the behavior of a person motivated purely by the desire to save lives does not have moral value based on their own moral intuition. In addressing this problem, Paton and his "isolation approach" became an early adopter of a reconcilable approach. Paton advocated that the moral value of an action taken out of obligation should be judged by isolating it. In view of the difficulty of ascertaining moral values in the presence of indirect or direct preferences, it is possible to give practical ground to Kant's assertion by examining acts of duty alone and avoiding the interference of preferences with the former.

However, the problem with this reconciliation is also obvious; that is, people in real-life situations often have a hard time making a clear distinction between acting out of preference and acting out of obligation. In fact, the two often coexist with the same action, and this undoubtedly increases the difficulty of determining whether an action has moral value. On the one hand, the measurement of preference and obligation cannot be quantified. On the other hand, if an individual's emotion is derived from the practice of obligation (such as the inner satisfaction and pleasure of saving lives), then the emotion must have the presupposition that saving lives is pleasurable. So Paton's reconciliation does not fundamentally solve people's doubts.

3.2. The Conciliatory Propositions of Richard Henson

After Paton, a theory called "multiple stipulations" was developed by Henson; In contrast to Paton, Henson acknowledges and allows for multiple motivations to exist at the same time behind the same behavior, that is, the lifesaver can be motivated by direct preferences, indirect preferences, and moral obligations at the same time and these three can coexist; These dutiful preferences are also called "cooperative preferences". Henson also revises the traditional reading of Kant by arguing that we only know that a person is acting out of obligation if they are acting without any preference. Furthermore, an action has moral value as long as its motive includes the presence of obligation, in other words, the existence of other preferences does not make it less moral in this premise. In addition, he points out that if the preference motive is overcome by the duty motive, then the resulting action still has moral value.

Henson's revision of Kant is not perfect, and his definition of "cooperative preference" is too loose and vague. A common retort is that there is still a clear difference between direct and indirect

preferences, even though they may result in the same behavior; For example, the desire to save the wounded and the desire to save for favor or fame can both lead to the same result, but people's moral judgments of the two are bound to be very different. Moreover, it is difficult to determine the order of these "cooperative preferences"; It may be, for example, that a person's first motive for doing good is the enjoyment of honor, and that he or she may then find other reasons for the act, such as a desire to save lives or a reverence for moral obligation. So this Henson reconciliation is out of the question.

3.3. The Conciliatory Proposition of Barbara Herman

A more prepared conciliatory proposition has been developed by Herman. Unlike Paton and Henson, she imposes a restrictive condition on moral obligation, that is, an action must have moral value, and the agent must be concerned about the moral correctness of this action. According to this non-accidental requirement of morality, the definition of cooperative preferences in Henson's theory goes against it. At the same time, since people can't know whether an action comes from a certain pure preference, Herman thinks that pure motivation or preference alone is not enough to judge moral value. In addition, she also responds to the role played by non-moral motives in the action producing moral values. She believed that non-moral motives, such as emotional feelings, could accompany but could not become the behavioral motives of the agent. This idea is different from Henson's cooperative preferences but exists as a restrictive condition.

In spite of this, Hermann's theory could not find a corresponding basis in Kant's texts. More importantly, she asks people to be concerned about moral correctness, that is, moral motives, but then inevitably people will be concerned about the motives of moral motives, and this vicious circle always exists at the beginning and end of Hermann's theory.

3.4. The Conciliatory Propositions of Henry Allison

Allison attempts to accept the existence of preferences from the Kantian concept of "respect" after a failed reconciliation of the first three. Unlike the first three scholars, Allison tries to find an argument in the Kantian text to incorporate the motive of preference into the criterion; he argues that each criterion contains a specific motivation and is viewed as a concomitant emotional preference rather than a motivation. Under this "absorption theory," preferences are materially dependent on the moral behavior of obligation.

However, Allison's analogy of preference as matter eventually raises questions. Practical reason does not absorb empirical preferences. Therefore, the inference it leads to is inherently false. Moreover, if preferences are included in the criterion, there is "no place" for actions that are done out of duty. In short, Mr. Allison's theory, rooted in shaky analogies, naturally fails to grow.

4. The Response to the Reconciliatory Claim and the Claim of This Paper

The common point of failure of the above four theories is that they all try to revise the internal systematic conclusions of Kantian philosophy with a theoretical model external to Kantian philosophy, so it is inevitable to show a kind of overall separation. In other words, they attempt to "incorporate Kantian moral values into a set of behavior that Kant does not have [8]," and failure is inevitable.

Therefore, this paper puts forward a new conclusion on the relationship between moral emotion and pathological emotion in Kant's philosophy from a different perspective than the previous four: namely, Kant did not abandon pathological emotion, and his real claim is that the behavior with moral value cannot come from such emotion but can be accompanied by pathological emotion.

The argument for this conclusion in this paper will return to the concept given in Kantian philosophy: the three practical principles (the formula of universal law, the formula of human nature, and the formula of the kingdom of ends), and the relationship between other laws and self-discipline.

4.1. The First Practice Principle

In his *Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant pointed out that moral requirements must be absolute, and the highest moral principle is the categorical imperative mentioned in the second part above, that is, “you should act according to the rules you intend to become the universal natural law.” This first practical principle, also known as the “universal law formula,” is used to test all moral codes based on categorical imperatives.

Kant goes on to give a series of tests that can be generalized: that is, if we want to test whether a criterion is permissible by a moral law (a categorical imperative), then we can imagine a “possible world” in which the criterion to be tested becomes a universally observed law. Then, continue to examine two aspects. (i) Is such a world possible? (ii) If it were possible, would we want to live in such a world?

If the test (i) tells us that it is impossible, then we find a complete obligation that it is morally necessary not to act according to the rules that one has preconceived; if we test (ii) that we do not wish to live in such a world, though it is possible, we find an imperfect duty, that is, not to act according to one’s preconceived rules is not morally necessary but morally desirable; if both tests (i) and (ii) are OK, then it is morally permissible to act according to one’s own code.

In this set of tests, Kant took suicide, expiration, failure to help others, and neglect of one’s own abilities as examples, and thus argued that all moral obligations could be tested in this way.

4.2. The Second Practice Principle

The second practice principle, also known as the formula of human nature, is to treat others as ends in themselves. This principle can be understood as the categorical imperative’s search for the validity of rational beings.

Combining the dichotomy between objective and subjective ends in the second part of the article, Kant points out that rational beings themselves are objective ends. Kant asks us to analyze the possible conditions under which the things we call good can be established. Why do we think it is valuable to satisfy our own interests and hobbies and promote our own interests and well-being? Kant argues that this presupposes the condition that the prosperity of a rational being is worth pursuing. If the rational being has no objective end, then it is no different from the status of the instrument, which is morally unacceptable. So Kant comes to the conclusion that the actions of the rational being must be limited in such a way that it must treat the rational being not only as a means but also as an end. This is the second formula of the practical law of reason—the formula of human nature. The second formula is an alternative expression of the first formula (the universal law formula), which proves that the categorical command is indeed valid for rational beings.

4.3. The Third Practice Principle

The last formula, also called the kingdom of ends formula, and the first two principles adopt the concept of universal law. First, the practical principle informs us of the universal validity and necessity of the practical rational principle from the objective aspect. The second practical principle informs us of the purpose served by the principle of practical reason in a subjective way. In this way, we learn that the principle of practical reason, from the objective point of view, is the legislation of all rational beings, and that, from the subjective point of view, all rational beings are the requirements of the end in itself. It follows that the will of every rational being is the will of universal legislation,

that is, “you act according to the rules by which the members of a kingdom of ends, which is only possible, have made universal laws for them.” This universal perspective also inspired the social contract theory proposed by the later philosopher Rawls.

Kant seems to have consistently followed his rule of thirds here. The three formulas seem to describe the law of practical rationality from three perspectives, which reveal the content of the categorical imperative from different aspects. The first formula emphasizes the objectivity of its legislation from the aspect of form. From the standpoint of purpose, the second formula emphasizes the purpose of legislation. The third formula combines the form of purpose and emphasizes the self-legislation of rational beings.

4.4. The Relationship Between Autonomy and Heteronomy

Kant also distinguishes autonomy from heteronomy. In his opinion, moral people are self-disciplined; that is, they must follow a set of laws applicable to all rational beings when they act. In other words, morality, reason, and freedom are fundamentally consistent with Kant. By contrast, the essence of heteronomy is one who lacks self-discipline in his actions, perhaps out of self-interest or empathy for others. For example, if a person chooses to save the dying solely for the sake of his own reputation, even if the act itself is in accordance with moral law, the act will lack moral value because it is merely heteronomy rather than self-discipline.

5. Conclusion

This paper reviews the philosophical basis for the dichotomy between moral and pathological emotions in kantianism. It also reviews four later reconciliation claims against this dichotomy and the reasons for their failure. By returning to kantianism itself, it demonstrates that the fundamental reason for the failure of these four reconciliation claims lies in a misunderstanding of the fundamental aim of Kantianism, namely that pathological emotions can be a concomitant but not a generator of moral values. At the same time, the paper examines the role of the concept of freedom in kantianism: the freedom of consciously obeying the moral law is autonomy, which in turn ensures freedom, and therefore autonomy is freedom.

In summary, Kant denies the pathological emotion as a motive but not its legitimacy as a concomitant emotion. Simultaneously, Kant affirms moral emotions as motives compatible with moral law, ultimately leading to autonomy.

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