

CHAPTER 2

Reason, desire, and the will

Stephen Engstrom

Much attention has been devoted to Kant's famous doctrine of autonomy, the proposition that morality finds its source in the will's self-legislation, depending neither for the content of its principle nor for its motivating power on any source, natural or transcendent, outside the will and its power of self-rule. But Kant also advances another striking proposition about the will, that it is nothing but practical reason. Though less extensively investigated, this idea is at least as important, both in its own right and for the light it throws on other parts of his ethics, including his doctrine of autonomy, which can seem unduly voluntaristic if not appreciated in its practical-cognitivist setting. According to tradition, the will is rational desire. Kant too understands the will in terms of reason and desire, but his way of combining these notions in his conception of a practical application of reason accounts for much of what is distinctive in his moral philosophy.

This chapter examines Kant's mature conception of the will, as presented in the Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant approaches this conception from a definition of the faculty of desire. But before doing that or indeed anything else, he makes a few remarks about the system of philosophical rational knowledge within which the metaphysics of morals is situated.¹ Though somewhat fragmentary, these remarks recall the account he offered at the outset of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* – the work that, as its title announces, lays the ground for the metaphysics of morals. Before we turn to the faculty of desire, therefore, we should consider the conception of rational cognition that the metaphysics of morals presupposes.

¹ If recent textual scholarship is correct. According to Bernd Ludwig, the traditionally accepted order of the first two sections of the Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals* is the result of a typesetter's error and should be reversed. See his Introduction in Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre*, B. Ludwig (ed.) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1986, 1998).

I REASON

1.1 Kant begins the Preface to the *Groundwork* by marking two distinctions that partition philosophy into three sciences. Philosophy's rational knowledge divides into formal knowledge, comprising the a priori science of logic, and material, which concerns objects and the laws to which they are subject. Material philosophy divides into natural and moral, according as the laws it studies are laws of nature or of freedom. Laws of nature – laws “according to which everything happens” – determine how the objects they govern operate; laws of freedom – laws “according to which everything ought to happen” – determine for the things they govern how they are to act. Kant also draws a third distinction, within each of these material sciences, between an a priori, or metaphysical, part and an empirical part, thus marking off two a priori material sciences, a metaphysics of nature and a metaphysics of morals.

Though of Hellenistic provenance, Kant's taxonomy exhibits the principal differences separating his moral philosophy from the standard rationalist and empiricist approaches that have emerged from the Stoic and Epicurean traditions. Its identification of moral philosophy as a distinct form of material rational knowledge involves an implicit denial that ethics is subordinate to the theoretical knowledge of nature. And its identification of an a priori part of moral philosophy entails a rejection of empiricism. That there must be a pure moral philosophy, Kant argues, “is clear of itself from the common idea of duty and of moral laws,” by which these laws are recognized as having absolute necessity and strict universality, the hallmarks of a priori or rational knowledge (G 4:389).²

Of particular significance for present purposes, however, is that Kant's presentation of this taxonomy shows him to be taking for granted already at his point of entry into practical philosophy a conception of philosophy as a system of rational knowledge. His distinctions are divisions; they respect the unity of philosophy and of reason. Later in the Preface, with an eye to the second of the three divisions, Kant says it must be possible to show practical reason's unity with speculative, or theoretical, “for in the end there can be only one and the same reason, which is distinguished only in the application” (G 4:391).

If the difference between natural and moral philosophy, or, as Kant also expresses it, between theoretical and practical knowledge, is a difference

² My translations of passages from Kant's writings follow for the most part the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.

in the application of the same reason, then it must be possible to articulate the conception of this common reason and to describe how these applications differ. Let us take up these questions in order.

1.2 A starting point for reflection about the conception of reason is suggested by Kant's distinction between formal and material philosophy. Since logic deals "merely with the form of understanding and reason itself and the universal rules of thinking in general, without distinction of objects" (G 4:387), its formal account of reason is essential to an understanding of reason's use in both practical and theoretical applications.

Kant's broadly Aristotelian logic expounds the form of thinking in general by offering a formal account of the acts of the discursive intellect, treating first of concepts, then of judgments, and finally of conclusions. Kant frames his conception of reason by reference to the last of these three logical acts, in which a judgment is derived from another, or thought as necessary on account of its relation to the latter. In particular, reason is the faculty responsible for the mediately derived conclusion that constitutes a syllogism (*Vernunftschluß*: "conclusion of reason") (LJ 9:114, 120–21). In the principal case of the categorical syllogism, the conclusion is a judgment reached through the subordination (in the minor premise) of its subject concept under a universal judgment (the major premise), which serves as a **rule or principle** determining the attachment of the predicate (in the conclusion).

This logical conception of reason clearly underlies Kant's understanding of reason's theoretical and practical application. Reason is depicted as exhibiting the form of the syllogism both in deriving effects (what "happens") from laws of nature and in deriving actions (what "ought to happen") from laws of freedom (KrV A298–305/B355–61, A645–47/B673–75; G 4:412).

Reason so conceived is not merely a capacity to think consistently, or to calculate, or to infer one thing from another, nor an ability to figure out what to believe or to do, or to recognize the reasons one has to believe this or to do that. It is the capacity to know through a derivation of the form just noted. Knowledge gained through reason lies in a judgment conscious of its own necessity through its subordination to a universal cognition, or a principle. Rational knowledge is thus "knowledge from principles," or "knowledge of the particular in the universal" (KrV A300/B357). Since "a priori knowledge" is another name for knowledge from principles, "rational knowledge and a priori knowledge are the same" (KpV 5:12). Kant points out, however, that we speak of principles in a comparative as well as an absolute sense (KrV A300/B357). Many



conclusions of reason are derived from universal knowledge that is nevertheless contingent, having been acquired through experience. But knowledge that is a priori in the strict sense derives from principles having an absolute necessity, which marks them out as cognized through reason alone. Kant thus characterizes reason as “the faculty of principles” (KrV A299/B356; MS 6:214), indicating thereby that the principles of rational cognition have their origin solely in reason.

As the source of principles, reason must be conceived as spontaneity, “the capacity to produce representations itself” (KrV A51/B75), or as a self-active, self-determining power. An investigation that seeks to identify reason’s principles must therefore do so through self-consciousness, or reflection, abstracting from the conditions in which reason is exercised. For only self-consciousness provides an understanding not dependent on affections of receptivity and the contingent conditions they reflect; without self-consciousness there would be no thought of self, nor therefore of representations as *self*-produced, or spontaneous.

Such an investigation is just what Kant undertakes with regard to reason in both its theoretical and its practical application. He says the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which sets out the fundamental laws of nature, “rests on no facts whatsoever,” “taking nothing as given for its basis except reason itself” (Pr. 4:274). Likewise in morals, reason “need presuppose only *itself*” in its legislation (KpV 5:20–21), and philosophy must accordingly be the “sustainer of its own laws,” occupying a position “that is to be firm even though it is neither dependent on anything in heaven nor supported by anything on earth” (G 4:425). And in both cases the principles are grasped in self-consciousness. Kant argues in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the fundamental laws of nature, being presupposed in experience rather than discovered through it, are recognizable only through reflection, in the act of theoretical cognition, on such cognition’s form. And he makes a parallel point in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, that the fundamental law of freedom is just the self-consciousness of pure practical reason (KpV 5:29, 42, 46).

1.3 How are we to understand the distinction in reason’s application? Kant’s way of drawing the contrast in the *Groundwork*’s Preface, by distinguishing between laws of nature and laws of freedom, might seem to suggest that he sees it as derived from a difference in the objects, or the material cognized. But this appearance dissolves when we consider other passages, where Kant says the objects determined in theoretical knowledge must be given from elsewhere, whereas practical knowledge need not wait for objects to be given in order to know them, but rather works

to make the object it determines actual (KrV Bix–x; KpV 5:46). In other words, in theoretical knowledge the actuality of the knowledge depends on the actuality of its object, whereas in practical knowledge the actuality of the object depends on the actuality of the knowledge. Thus, it is possible for practical and theoretical knowledge to share the very same object: so far as practical knowledge makes its object actual, the latter can be known also theoretically. What “ought to happen” and what “happens” are then one and the same. These points indicate that practical knowledge is distinctive in that it is efficacious. To make its object actual, it must have a certain causality.

Theoretical and practical knowledge can also be distinguished in another way, however, by saying that the former is of an object originally represented as distinct from the cognizing subject, whereas the latter is at bottom a form of self-knowledge, in which the object known is the knowing subject.³ This way of marking the difference does not lie on the very surface of Kant’s text, but it is directly implicated in explanations he does offer, such as the ones just noted, which highlight the difference in the direction of existential dependence that theoretical and practical knowledge bear to their respective objects. He says, for instance, that theoretical knowledge concerns “objects that may be given to reason somehow from elsewhere,” while practical knowledge “can become the ground of the existence of the objects themselves” (KpV 5:46). To regard an object as given from elsewhere is clearly to regard it as distinct from oneself. Since the conception of self originates in self-consciousness alone, everything included in what is originally understood as self is contained in self-consciousness; and since in self-consciousness consciousness understands itself as identical with what it is conscious of, the latter cannot be conceived as given to consciousness from elsewhere. And as for the claim about practical knowledge, reflection on what it is for knowledge to become the ground of its object’s existence positions us to see that such knowledge must be self-knowledge. The crucial consideration here is that practical cognition’s causality is essentially self-conscious, hence not such as could be discovered only through experience, but originally represented in the knowledge itself. The essential self-representation of this causal relation is reflected in Kant’s characterization of an end – the object of such knowledge – as “the object of a concept, so far as the latter is regarded as the cause of the former (the real ground of its possibility)” (KU 5:220; cf. MS 6:384). Practical knowledge, then, in being conscious of its own efficacy,

self & self-
consciousness

concept as real
ground of possibility

³ Although plural as well as singular subjects are possible, for present purposes it will suffice to consider the singular case, which is primitive.

represents itself as the cause of its object. To that extent, it is a form of self-knowledge, though not, of course, theoretical self-knowledge: **it can be the cause of its object only through representing itself as the cause.**

To prevent confusion, we should observe that in the foregoing discussion “object” has been used in two senses, reflecting the presence of two moments in the act of practical cognition. As a form of discursive cognition, **practical cognition lies in an act of judgment, in which a practical predicate, the concept of a possible effect (e.g. to keep one’s promise), is attached to a concept of the subject.** **When Kant says practical knowledge can make its object actual, “object” refers to the effect the judging subject represents in the act of practical predication, or (what amounts to the same) to the content of the judgment.** But when we say practical knowledge is self-knowledge, in which subject and object are the same, “object” signifies the judgment’s subject matter, what is thought through its subject concept. Thus, if the judgment is that I ought to keep my promise, “object” in the latter sense refers to myself, in the former to myself keeping my promise.

In sum, **practical knowledge is efficacious rational self-knowledge.** As *self-knowledge*, it lies in the practically cognizing subject’s attachment of a predicate to itself. As *rational*, it is knowledge in which the predicate’s attachment is derived from a principle, or representation of a law, to which the subject subordinates itself. It is thus an act of cognitive self-determination from a principle: one’s determination, derived from a principle, of what one ought to do. And as *efficacious*, it is an act of causal self-determination as well, a law-governed act of making the object cognized actual: through it, one determines oneself to do what one knows one ought to do, making happen what ought to happen. In this act – the conclusion of a practical syllogism, in which reason is employed to derive an action from a law – rational cognition and causality are united.

It deserves notice that it was the earlier characterization of reason as spontaneity that made it possible to appreciate the identity of cognition and causality in the act of practical knowledge. **Had the possibility been ignored of investigating reason through self-consciousness – the one, original position from which reason’s spontaneity can be recognized – it would have seemed natural to regard reason as a form of receptivity, and hence natural to suppose, as Hume famously did, that “reason is perfectly inert.”⁴** It would then have been difficult even to comprehend how cognition could itself be a form of causality. But no such impediment confronts the conception of reason as spontaneity. Though the concepts of spontaneity and causal power

⁴ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edn., L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (eds.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), III.1.1, 458; cf. II.iii.3, 413–18.

are not the same (as the possibility of theoretical cognition shows), spontaneity, as self-active, can nevertheless, in a suitable condition, be also a causal power. We have next to consider this condition.

1.4 The distinction in human reason's application reflects an inherent limitation. If we consider the idea of an infinite intellect, which Kant occasionally deploys as a foil to highlight the finitude of our discursive reason, we will note that such a cognitive power, as omniscient, would be creative, causing the existence of the object it knows in the very act of knowing it (KrV B72). Such cognition would contain as a unity what is present only in a divided way in discursive rational cognition. For discursive reason, achieving completeness or perfection in its cognitive activity involves establishing a harmony across its two applications, an agreement between its knowledge of what happens and its knowledge of what ought to happen. In infinite cognition, this harmony is immediate, pertaining to different aspects of a simple act; such cognition contains no discrete acts of creation and inspection, being at once knowledge of what is and knowledge of what is to be.

The limitation of discursive reason implies that its knowledge is in a sense subject to certain external conditions. But the limitation cannot spring from these conditions. Reason's finitude cannot arise from an externally imposed limitation on an originally infinite cognitive power, for the idea of such a power excludes the possibility of such limitation. Nor can reason's limitation stem from inner conflict, from one component's restricting or infringing another. For such conflict is incompatible with the unity that the self-consciousness of cognitive activity establishes as essential to all cognition and hence to the cognitive capacity, even if finite. Nothing originally understood as absolute unity – as the cognitive power is – could conceivably limit itself by opposing itself. The inner limitation must rather lie in a certain lack of completeness in the capacity, entailing a reliance upon external conditions for its exercise, grounding a distinction between power and act. The external conditions must include things whose existence lies outside discursive consciousness, among them subjects – bearers of discursive reason – coexisting with the rest in such a way that their reason can be exercised. And since reason is spontaneity, the ground of this way of coexisting, so far as it lies in the subject, under the name of sensibility, must contribute to reason's exercise, not by determining it, but by enabling reason to determine itself. As enabling, this subjective ground must be a cooperating representational power; as cooperating without determining, it must be determinable material to which reason can apply itself, namely receptivity, the capacity to acquire representations through being affected.

Though it reflects reason's inner limitation, the distinction in its application cannot come into view so long as we attend, as we did earlier (section 1.2), merely to what is the same across the different applications. Kant's claim that "in the end there can be only one and the same reason" (G 4:391) can have no basis but the recognition that there is at bottom but one thing it ever does. The distinction must therefore depend on some division in the subjective condition of reason's exercise, in sensibility. The division is easily found. As the subjective ground of the reason-enabling mode of the subject's coexistence with other things, sensibility can reflect the two sides of coexistence, passive and active. It can accordingly include two powers, each able to cooperate with reason, enabling it while at the same time being determined by it. The first is *sense*, the capacity to acquire representations of objects so far as those objects affect the mind; the second is *feeling*, the capacity to acquire desires for or aversions to objects through being affected – pleased or displeased – by sense representations of them (MS 6:211–12n). The first is recognized through consciousness of certain representations as effects; the second through consciousness of certain representations as having a causality of their own. On the consciousness of sense is founded the consciousness of a power of perception (or a capacity to be conscious of objects' actuality); on the consciousness of feeling is founded the consciousness of a faculty of desire, which as we shall see Kant defines as a representation-involving causal power, through which objects can be produced, or made actual. Being dependent on a sensibility that can enable its exercise through these two powers, one and the same reason can distinguish itself in application. In relation to the capacity for perception, this spontaneity constitutes the capacity for theoretical knowledge, under the title of the *understanding*; in relation to the faculty of desire, it constitutes the capacity for practical knowledge, under the heading of the *will*.

We next examine Kant's account of the faculty of desire, then consider how the will is constituted through the relation reason bears to this faculty.

2 DESIRE

2.1 The section of the Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals* containing the discussion of desire and will bears the caption "Of the relation of the faculties of the human mind to moral laws."⁵ Although Kant holds

⁵ I thank Barbara Herman and Andrews Reath for very helpful conversations regarding this section of the Introduction.

there to be at bottom three such faculties – the faculty of knowledge, the faculty of desire, and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure (KU 5:177) – here his eye is chiefly trained on the faculty of desire. The faculty of knowledge is not directly discussed, though as we shall see it is implicated in his account of the faculty of desire. Feeling receives considerable attention, not however as an independent faculty, but only insofar as its operation is combined with desire, as cause or effect.

Some readers, suspicious of talk of faculties and capacities, may wonder what the point could be of introducing the notion of a faculty of desire, preferring instead simply to speak of desires. **This notion is needed, however, to represent a grounding for all desire in the single nature of a living, or animal, being.** As Kant notes elsewhere, life-power expresses itself in the faculty of desire (KpV 5:23). An animal's desires belong to it, not in a sheerly accidental way, as mere elements of a "motivational set," but as modes of its living, as determinate actualizations of its life-capacity. By representing desires as grounded in a power in the living being, the notion of a faculty holds in view their relation to that being's nature. On account of that relation, there are "laws of the faculty of desire"; at one point Kant even characterizes life as the capacity to act in accordance with such laws (KpV 5:9n). Some of these laws must be discovered empirically, through pleasure and displeasure, pursuit and avoidance, but there are certain things relating even to such laws that can be inferred a priori from the concept of life itself, as a form of organized natural being, notably that all of an animal's desires, to the extent that they are healthy expressions of its nature, will be in systematic harmony with one another (KU 5:430).

Kant defines the faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*) – or the capacity to desire, as it might also be called – as "the capacity [*Vermögen*] to be, through one's representations, the cause of the objects of those representations" (MS 6:211). In speaking of the cause of the objects of one's representations, Kant means the cause of those objects in respect of their *actuality*, or *existence*. Thus, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, this faculty is defined as the capacity of a living being "to be through its representations the cause of the actuality of the objects of those representations" (KpV 5:9n). If for instance the representation of one's health is included among the representations through which one is such a cause, then one's faculty of desire will include the capacity to be the cause of one's health, the cause through whose action one's health is effected, or made actual.

It follows that the representing through which, in desire, the subject is the cause of the existence of the represented object differs from the

representing that figures in theoretical knowledge. For the very idea of such knowledge implies that the actuality of the representation depends on that of the object represented, not the reverse. For a similar reason, desiderative representation cannot lie in perception. Perception represents its object through sensation, which, as a modification of consciousness dependent on the workings of the outer senses (sight, hearing, etc.), is the effect an already existing object present to the senses has on the subject's capacity to represent. Perception also includes, however, the exercise of the imagination (KrV A120n), the capacity to represent objects in intuition even without their presence (KrV B151; ApH 7:153, 167). Insofar as this capacity can be used to represent an object not already present, it can furnish representations suited to figure in the exercise of the faculty of desire. The possibility that desiderative representation might be a concept, or even an idea or principle, will be considered in due course.

2.2 Two points about Kant's definition are particularly significant for our purposes here. **The first is that it situates desire under the broad headings of causality and action rather than affection and passion.** Despite the long-standing tendency to conceive of desire in terms of want and passion, which entail need, dependence, and passivity, Kant rejects as tendentious definitions that build such notions in from the beginning (KpV 5:9n). To claim that all desire arises from affection – from the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, as a hedonist would hold – would be to advance a substantive and disputable thesis. It is true that desire implies limitation and dependence in one sense, owing to its essential relation to life, a form of organized and therefore merely contingent natural being.⁶ But this limitation lies, not in the way the faculty of desire is determined, but in its efficacy, in the productive power residing in the animal's capacity to be the cause of the object it represents. Such a limitation entails a dependence on external conditions, a dependence on account of which the desired object (one's health, say) may not be made actual if such conditions are unfavorable; but it does not imply that all desire arises from affection. It is also true that there is a form of desire – namely sensible desire – that is essentially passive, depending on affection in the form of a feeling of

⁶ Organized natural being (the subject matter of biology, embracing the vegetable as well as the animal kingdom) is naturally self-productive (see KU 5:369–72), but as a product of nature, indeed a self-organizing product, its existence (unlike that of bare matter) lacks natural necessity. What marks life (animality) out as a distinct form of organized natural being is that in its case the (contingent) self-production generically characteristic of the latter is self-production *through representation*. The faculty of desire is precisely the natural capacity for such representation-guided self-production.

pleasure or displeasure, and Kant notes that the term “desire” (*Begierde*) is sometimes used in a correspondingly narrow sense (MS 6:212). But this dependence is not already implicated in the original concept of desire. That concept does, on the other hand, include the thought of causality. As Kant observes, such causality figures even in bare wishing. “As *striving* (*nisus*) to be by means of one’s representations a *cause*, a desire is ... always causality” (MS 6:356).

This point has an obvious importance for our investigation, comparable to the significance we found in Kant’s characterization of reason as spontaneity (section 1.3). In order to conceive of the will as at once cognition and causality – reason and desire – it is necessary to avoid not only the assumption that reason is a passive power of apprehension and hence inert, but also the assumption that the faculty of desire is determinable only from without, through the effects objects produce upon the mind in perception and experience. Having introduced the faculty of desire through a definition free of any such assumption, Kant keeps open a path by which he can approach a conception of a form of faculty of desire that is spontaneously determinable.⁷

The second point is that, by identifying desiring as a type of causality distinguished from other forms by the involvement of representation, the definition marks an internal dependence of the faculty of desire on the faculty of representation. Whether the latter capacity can be exercised without the involvement of the former is a nice question, which might be disputed by some,⁸ but it is not even conceivable that a being might desire without representing.

This second point is significant in part because it reflects Kant’s recognition that living beings generally have a nature that comprises the dynamically interrelating representational capacities of perception and desire. Earlier, we noted the relation these capacities bear to *rational cognition* on account of their being integral to the subject’s reason-enabling mode of coexistence with other things (section 1.4). But appreciating how representation is involved in desire brings into view the essential relation these capacities have

⁷ Though Kant keeps his conceptions of reason and desire free of the assumptions just mentioned, he does not aim in the *Metaphysics of Morals* to show that the cognitive power itself has causality, that pure reason is practical. That task was addressed earlier, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

⁸ Aristotle holds at least that where there is the *power* of sense there is also the *power* of desire. See *De Anima* 11.3 414b1–2 (*The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, J. Barnes (ed.) (Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 1, 659). Kant too supposes that any animal having the first of these powers also has the second. But he does so on the grounds that *life entails desire*, which in turn entails sense. And he seems to hold that only a theoretical application is already implied by the bare idea of the faculty of discursive cognition (G 4:395; KU 5:178).

to *one another* in the integral roles they play in the very *existence* of an animal being. A causal power can be representational only in cooperation with a power of *perceptual* representation. The striving in which desire consists comes to rest only in experience or perception – that is, in a representation of the existence of the object the desire works to produce. And conversely where perceptual and desiderative representations thus coincide, a feeling of pleasure, or consciousness of the desire's reinforcement, is necessarily involved. Thus, the perception sustains the desire inwardly through feeling, just as the desire sustains the perception outwardly through action. Since it is in the faculty of desire that life-power expresses itself, this relation of mutual furtherance between perception and desire constitutes the specific form of self-production distinctive of life as a form of self-organizing natural being, and pleasure resulting from the act of this faculty is accordingly life's consciousness of its own self-production.

The dependence of the faculty of desire on the faculty of representation is significant for another reason as well. In the paragraphs following his definition of the faculty of desire, Kant introduces increasingly specific forms of desiderative capacity by characterizing them in terms of increasingly specific forms of representational capacity. In particular, he proceeds from (i) the *faculty of desire* through (ii) the *faculty of desire in accordance with concepts* to (iii) the *will* by moving from (a) the *faculty of representation* through (b) the *faculty of concepts* (the understanding, or the faculty of knowledge) to (c) the *faculty of principles* (reason, the faculty of a priori knowledge). But though various forms of desire are distinguished, it will emerge as we follow his exposition that they are related as moments in a single sensibly affected but rationally determinable desiderative capacity in a human being under moral laws.

In what follows, we shall ascend this ladder, advancing from receptivity to spontaneity, **from sensible desire to the will.**

2.3 *Desire in the narrow sense (sensible desire)*. Kant holds that desire always has pleasure (or displeasure) combined with it. He calls this pleasure *practical* to indicate that it is necessarily combined with desire, in that it accompanies a representation of the *existence* of an object (i.e. a *sensation-involving* representation of the object, as in experience or perception), making the self-sustaining causality integral to it as pleasure (KU 5:220) identical with that of a desire for the object. But as we noted, Kant's definition of the faculty of desire nevertheless leaves unspecified whether desire always arises *through* such a feeling. He goes on to consider briefly the form of desire that does arise in such a way and to contrast with it

the form that precedes the pleasure. In discussing the former – sensible desire, or desire in the narrow sense – he introduces two further notions, those of inclination, or habitual desire, and interest.

No account is offered of inclination, but the points recorded above concerning the faculty of desire, along with remarks Kant offers elsewhere, suggest the following view. In a living being, the faculty of desire includes within its natural constitution certain propensities and instincts, owing to which the experience or perception of certain objects is pleasing (cf. RGV 6:28–29n). When such an object is experienced, the pleasure determines the faculty to an act of desire, a representation of the object of the pleasing experience (the object, not its existence), and the animal is thereby and to that extent moved to pursue or to produce the object. That is to say, the animal is moved to reproduce the pleasing experience of the object by keeping the thing present to the senses thereby maintaining that experience of it, or by bringing about another such experience of such an object. The returning pleasure is a further causal stimulus, reinforcing the original desire. Thus, desires arising from pleasing experiences naturally tend to become habitual, establishing themselves as inclinations of the faculty of desire. (To the extent that they are also grounded in the animal's instincts, which have as their objects its "true natural needs," they qualify as *natural* inclinations.)

The habitual character of sensible desire shares such desire's nature as receptive. The habit arises in the faculty of desire without needing to be an object represented in any act of that faculty. It is possible, of course, to desire to instill habitual desires in oneself or in another and to inculcate them successfully. Indeed, such habituation is integral to the cultivation of the faculty of desire in moral upbringing. But this possibility depends on the natural constitution of the faculty of desire, on account of which habitual desire would arise willy-nilly in any case, provided only that the object be experienced and re-experienceable in conditions not unfavorable for the habit's acquisition. The habitual character of the pleasure's connection with the faculty of desire no more belongs to sensible desire's object than does sensible desire itself; it arises without needing even to be noticed at all by the subject.

interest

Next in the ascending sequence is the concept of interest: "the combination of the pleasure with the faculty of desire is called *interest*, so far as this connection is judged through the understanding to be valid according to a universal rule (if only for the subject)" (MS 6:212). The combination, or connection, here referred to seems clearly to be the one already implied in the notion of practical pleasure, so in speaking of such

a connection so far as it is judged valid by the understanding according to a universal rule, Kant evidently has in mind the sort of general combination implicated in habitual desire, but as represented as such by the understanding. Such a relation is not just the generic connection that any pleasure in an object's existence has with the faculty of desire, but a specific connection of the pleasure figuring in the enjoyment of a certain object (an apple, say, or the company of another) with that faculty, a connection residing in an habitual determination of the latter – an inclination – to have that same thing as its object. And while as we noted this connection might hold without the subject's being aware of its generality, it is only through such awareness that there is any interest. (So interest, unlike inclination, “is never attributed to a being unless it has reason” [KpV 5:79].) Kant immediately goes on, however, to identify an interest of the sort in question – an “interest of inclination” – with the pleasure itself, not, as he initially suggested, with the combination of the pleasure with the faculty of desire; and other passages too suggest that he regards interest as a pleasure.⁹ Presumably his thought is that once an inclination is in place, as one term in a stable, homeostatic connection between the pleasing experience of some object and the faculty of desire, an animal may, if it has understanding, notice this general connection and represent it conceptually, through a rule, in which, on account of the rule's generality, the pleasure must itself be represented through a *concept* of the object the representation of whose existence it accompanies: in such a case, the pleasure will count as an interest. Thus, unlike the object of inclination, which may be no more than what is represented through an animal's reproductive imagination, an object of interest is always represented through a concept figuring in a rule by which the subject represents the object's relation to its own faculty of desire, or to itself as a living being. Kant does not identify this conceptual representation as an act of the faculty of desire. And rightly, for it cannot be the inclination, though based on it, nor is it a wish, a choice, or an exercise of the will. But he does see it as the basis for a certain form of desire, for he takes maxims, which are exercises of the power of choice (MS 6:226), to be founded on interest (KpV 5:79). We shall return to this relation, but we can anticipate that a maxim goes beyond interest in that it first introduces a conception of action through which the object of interest is to be made actual.

⁹ “The delight [*Wohlgefallen*] that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest” (KU 5:204; see also KU 5:296).

Kant concludes his discussion of practical pleasure with a comment on the other way such pleasure may be combined with desire, as the latter's effect rather than its cause. Here the pleasure "must be called an intellectual pleasure and the interest in the object an interest of reason." Kant is clearly supposing that in this case the faculty of desire is determined spontaneously, by the intellect, or reason. He is also clearly thinking that insofar as reason determines the faculty of desire, it does so in a *practical* use, under the name of the will. As he remarks in the *Critique of Judgment*, "to will something and to delight in the existence of the same, that is, to take an interest in it, are identical" (KU 5:209).

Kant's implicit claim that the faculty of desire is determinable in just the two ways indicated has been questioned from different angles. Some have doubted his contention that, aside from reason, only pleasure can determine this faculty;¹⁰ others have seen reason as having no genuine practical use, but at most a theoretical power to apprehend or to intuit goodness or value.¹¹ While detailed consideration of such challenges lies outside our present concern, we can throw some light on the issues while pursuing our immediate purpose if we pause briefly to appreciate how the exhaustive and exclusive character of Kant's distinction between the two ways the faculty of desire can be determined flows from the exhaustive and exclusive character of his distinctions between theoretical and practical and between sensible and intellectual representation. As we noted, a living being's capacity to represent may be operative either as ground or as consequence of its object's actuality. In the former case, it constitutes the faculty of desire; in the latter, the capacity to represent existence ("what is") in perception or experience. Where, as in the human case, the capacity to represent is a cognitive capacity, this distinction is between its practical and theoretical applications. Now in both theoretical and practical cognition, the distinction between the sensible and the intellectual is drawn in terms of the contrast between the two representational powers that cooperate in discursive cognition – externally determined receptivity and self-determining spontaneity. Both are requisite, self-determination for cognition's formal unity, external determination for its material content.

¹⁰ See esp. KpV 5:21–25. For discussion, see Andrews Reath, "Hedonism, Heteronomy, and Kant's Principle of Happiness," in his *Agency and Autonomy in Kant's Moral Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 33–66; and Barbara Herman, "Rethinking Kant's Hedonism," in her *Moral Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 176–202.

¹¹ Kant would presumably regard such a view as subject to his general criticism of heteronomous theories of morality. See John Rawls, "Themes in Kant's Moral Philosophy," in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions: The Three "Critiques" and the "Opus postumum,"* Eckart Förster (ed.), (Stanford University Press, 1989), 95–98.

But the external determination takes different forms in accordance with the difference in sensibility that, as we saw (section 1.4), grounds cognition's division into theoretical and practical. In theoretical cognition, the external determination is of *sense* (in sensation) by *objects*, whose existence is thereby represented; in practical, it is of *feeling* (of pleasure or displeasure) by the resulting *representations* of those objects' existence, whereby those objects become objects of desire or aversion. Thus, in the former, there is always sensation connected with the capacity to represent existence, but in a human being, where this capacity is not a **bare animal power** (of sensible representation, or perception) but a capacity for theoretical cognition, the sensation need not always precede the latter's representations; it does in the case of sensible representation, but it follows where the representation is a self-determining act of the intellect (**reason in the guise of the understanding**). In parallel fashion, there is always feeling connected with the faculty of desire, but in a human being, where this faculty is not a bare animal power (of sensible desire) but a capacity for practical cognition, the feeling need not always precede the latter's representations; it does in the case of sensible desire, but it follows where the representation is a self-determining act of the intellect (reason in the guise of the will).

3 THE WILL

3.1 *The faculty of desire in accordance with concepts.* Having outlined separately Kant's conceptions of reason and desire as powers of cognition and causality, we next consider them together, in the idea of the will. Kant approaches the will by situating it under the general heading of "the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts" (MS 6:213).¹² This latter

¹² Between his treatments of practical pleasure and the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts, Kant pauses to distinguish concupiscence from desire, describing the former as a "stimulus to the determination" of the latter, and as "a sensible determination of the mind but one that has not yet grown to an act of the faculty of desire" (MS 6:213). Kant's meaning is unclear, but possibly he has in view that moment in the feeling of pleasure that traces to the condition of our sensible nature (a condition knowable only empirically) on account of which it is possible for choice to be contrary to or only reluctantly in conformity with reason's moral law: the condition, that is, owing to which this law operates in us as an imperative or constraint – a principle that necessitates – making moral perfection for us a matter of virtue rather than holiness. In the *Doctrine of Virtue* he says this constraint "applies not to rational beings in general (there could perhaps also be *holy* ones) but rather to *human beings*, rational *natural beings*, who are unholy enough that pleasure can induce them to overstep the moral law, though they recognize its authority, and, even when they follow it, to do so *reluctantly* (with opposition from their inclinations)" (MS 6:379). But since this topic receives no further attention in Kant's advance from desire to will in the passage we are examining, we need not pursue it here. For discussion, see Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 231–34.

faculty is not defined.¹³ But the reference to concepts shows that Kant means to designate a form of desire that depends not just on the capacity to represent but specifically on the understanding, the capacity for discursive cognition, a form of representation that lies in the combination of concepts in thought and judgment. The preposition “in accordance with” (*nach*) might seem to leave open the possibility that this faculty’s operation is distinct from the use of the concepts with which it accords, so that the desire could stand to the understanding’s act in something like the way an inclination instilled in a young, uncomprehending child stands to the thought that guided its parent’s training of it. But this is plainly not what Kant has in view, since the acts he ascribes to this capacity are wishing, choosing, and willing, none of which are inclinations. His idea seems rather to be that this faculty’s acts are thoughts or judgments that are themselves desires.

To understand how thinking can be identical with desiring, two points noted earlier must be borne in mind: that the cognitive power’s exercise is self-conscious and spontaneous, and that the concept of desire does not already imply that all desire arises from affection, or external determination (from some pleasing experience). Appreciating these points enables us to comprehend the identity, and spelling out the implications of that identity will bring into focus the form of desire common to wishing, choosing, and willing. Since the act of the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts is a judgment (or thought) that is also a desire, the self-consciousness essential to it as a judgment must also include consciousness of itself as a desire, as a causality, a striving. And for essentially the same reason, the act’s self-consciousness must include awareness that the judging subject and the desiring subject are likewise the same. The judgment thus contains awareness of itself as efficacious, and the judging subject is therein necessarily aware of itself as the agent of the action the judgment strives to effect. Consider choice, for instance. In my choice to pursue some object, to make it actual, I am aware, at least implicitly, that I, the choosing subject, am the very agent who through this choice is to pursue that object. The exercise of this faculty thus always has two moments – one cognitive, the other causal – united in a single act. The former lies in the subject’s judgment, its self-conscious determination of

¹³ Some of the few other passages where similar expressions occur may suggest that, for Kant, speaking of the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts is just another way of speaking of the will (e.g. KU 5:220). From the way the expression is used here, however, it is clear that it has a broader sense in the present context.

what it should do, the latter in the causality of which the subject is conscious *in* and *through* that judgment, and by which that subject, as agent, does (barring unfavorable conditions) what, in that judgment, it sets itself to do. This two-sided self-consciousness will prove significant. For the moment it will suffice to note that it entails a twofold self-conception, in which the subject regards itself first and originally as a knower, a bearer of the capacity for cognition, and second as also an agent, a subject with the power, through its judgments, to make the objects therein represented actual. The first moment is basic, since self-consciousness belongs originally to cognition and only through it to anything else.

From the implications just traced, we can outline the general form of the act of this faculty. As a judgment, this act must lie in a self-conscious combination of concepts. Being also an exercise of causality, it must lie in a reflexive use of the concept of cause, in which causality and the thought of it are the same. In addition, the subject making the judgment is necessarily conscious of itself as identical with the subject the judgment concerns, the agent. Finally, since determinations of the faculty of desire lie in representations of the objects they themselves work to make actual, so must exercises of the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts. From these points it follows that the judgment in which the exercise of the latter faculty consists must include a concept of the subject – indeed the twofold conception just noted – and a predicate, representing some effect to be produced (the object); and the judgment itself must consist in the *use* of these concepts, the attachment of the predicate to the concept of the subject, and specifically the *practical* use of them, that is, a *reflexive* act of attachment, conscious of itself as both a judgment and a desire, as at once the cognition of causality and the causality of cognition. We can thus distinguish in the act of practical judgment the materials – the concept of the subject and the concept of the effect – and the act of combination, which constitutes the practical cognition of the very thing it also (to the extent that conditions permit) effects, namely the action, or the relation of causal dependence of the object on the subject, the effect on the cause. Also to be noted, however, is an asymmetry in the way the subject and predicate concepts figure in the combination. The judgment begins with the concept of the subject, not the predicate, and the attachment of the predicate yields an enlarged, more determinate conception of the subject. It is therefore a condition of the judgment's validity that the predicate it attaches be in agreement with the subject concept. Hence, so far as there are formal, or necessary, elements of the self-conception that serves as the subject concept for the act of practical judgment, there will

be formal, universal conditions of self-agreement to which the judgment's act of attaching its predicate will be subject.

Now this self-conception does, as we saw, necessarily include two moments, consciousness of oneself as a cognizer, a bearer of reason, and consciousness of oneself as a cause, a subject with a faculty of desire. The act of the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts – the act of practical judgment – can accordingly be considered in relation to each of these moments. As will be suggested below, the power of choice and the will lie in the capacity these two moments of self-consciousness have to contribute to the determination of practical judgment: so far as such judgment is determined by the subject's cognizance of its causal power, it lies in the exercise of the power of choice; so far as it is determined by the subject's consciousness of its cognitive capacity, it is determined by the will.

3.2 *The power of choice.* Kant says of the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts that “so far as it is combined with the consciousness of the capacity [*Vermögen*] of its action to produce the object, it is called *power of choice* [*Willkür*]; but if it is not combined therewith, its act is called a *wish*” (MS 6:213). At first glance, it might seem that wish is mentioned here in an aside, to provide a contrast for the power of choice. But closer examination reveals this act to have a fundamental importance for the metaphysics of morals and to be the proper starting point for a consideration of choice. To an inattentive eye, Kant might appear to be suggesting that wish is combined with consciousness of a lack of capacity to produce the object. Certain other passages, dealing with wishes for things that are impossible or beyond one's power (e.g. KU 5:177–78n), can contribute to the impression. But while Kant does in places seem to have such a conception in view, in others he employs a broader notion. The present passage is a case in point. **Wishing is said to be marked, not by consciousness of lack of capacity, but by lack of consciousness of capacity.** Rather than regarding the object as unattainable, wish represents the action indeterminately and problematically, leaving open the possibility that choice might be reachable by finding a more determinate representation of the action, one that renders it recognizably within one's capacity while still sufficient for the production of the wished-for object.¹⁴ Wish is accordingly the beginning, a problematic major premise, in the exercise

¹⁴ This broad conception of wish is also expressed in other passages, e.g. MS 6:482 and AA 28:254. Since Kant accepts many of the Scholastic doctrines that survived in the tradition of German school-philosophy to which he belonged, it is not surprising to find that his conception of wish is in broad agreement with the account presented in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 111.2–4 (in Barnes [ed.], *Complete Works*, vol. 11, 1755–58).

of the power of choice, and choice is the conclusion, reached through deliberation. So understood, wish can also be captured in other terms Kant uses. As an act that will be immediately expressed in choice where, in the absence of constraints and limitations, one has “the capacity to do or to refrain as one likes” (MS 6:213), it counts as an immediate “liking” (*das Belieben*). It can also be characterized as the “inner employment” of the power of choice, its first use, in maxims of ends, whereas the choice issuing from deliberation would constitute this power’s “outer employment,” in maxims of action.¹⁵

To appreciate this deliberation in its proper setting, we must of course bear in mind not only the human subject’s empirically gained theoretical cognizance of the extent of its power as an agent, but also an additional, empirically determined component of its self-conception, touched on in our discussion of sensible desire and interest (section 2.3). As a human subject, one is conscious through the feeling of pleasure that one’s faculty of desire is determinable by one’s experience of certain objects,¹⁶ and one can thereby gain acquaintance with the empirically modified constitution of that capacity. So far as one becomes cognizant of one’s inclinations, one can conceptually represent their objects, now objects of interest, and regard them as elements of one’s happiness. The concepts of these objects provide the materials for practical predicates one can attach to oneself in wishes, or maxims of ends. Deliberation ensues, as in each case one’s power of choice strives inwardly to reach a practical judgment in which the attachment of the practical predicate containing the concept of the object of interest is “combined with the consciousness of the capacity of its action to produce the object.” Securing such consciousness will require a deployment of reason in the service of this interest of inclination, a specification of the wish’s practical predicate in accordance with one’s awareness of one’s power of agency, including one’s empirically determined cognizance of its extent, what one can and cannot do. The office of the power of choice, then, is to close the apparent gap between the habitually pleasing objects of one’s interest and one’s limited causal capacity. In choice, one subjects one’s practical judging to the condition of agreement with one’s empirically determined cognizance of oneself *as agent*,

¹⁵ Kant’s distinction between the outer and the inner employment of the power of choice (MS 6:214) is closely related to his distinction between outer and inner freedom and his division of the *Metaphysics of Morals* into its two parts, the *Doctrine of Right* and the *Doctrine of Virtue* (cf. MS 6:406).

¹⁶ More precisely, such experience determines the faculty of desire’s *lower*, receptive power, yielding sensible desire, which *affects*, but does not *determine*, the *higher*, spontaneous power, the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts (MS 6:213; KpV 5:32).

ensuring that ends set in acts of choice are possible, within one's capacity, and that the actions chosen are sufficient for reaching them.

3.3 *The will.* From the power of choice Kant advances to the will, ascending from the practically judging subject's conception of itself *as agent* to its conception of itself *as knower*, as bearer of the "one and the same reason" exercised in all judging, practical as well as theoretical: "The faculty of desire whose inner determining ground, consequently even whose liking, is met with in the subject's reason is called the *will* [*Wille*]" (MS 6:213). Now a conception of oneself as knower depends on an understanding (in self-consciousness) of the cognition of which one conceives oneself as capable, an idea of its form. So we can take Kant to be identifying the will with the capacity one's consciousness of the form of rational cognition in general has to determine one's capacity for practical judgment (in particular, as we shall see, one's power of choice), making its exercise agree with its form. We noted earlier that rational cognition is "knowledge from principles," or knowledge derived from universal knowledge originating in reason alone (section 1.2), and that such cognition, in the specific form it takes in reason's practical application, is efficacious self-knowledge (section 1.3). Cognition having such a form is precisely cognition belonging to a subject capable of acting from a recognition of universal law. The will thus lies in the capacity the practically judging subject's consciousness of this cognitive form – the form of universal law – has to determine its capacity for practical judgment, or its faculty of desire in accordance with concepts. So far as this consciousness has this capacity, the subject will (unless influenced by sensible desire) judge in conformity with that form. Through this capacity, then, reason subjects maxims to "the condition of suitability to be universal law" (MS 6:214).

From his initial characterization of the will, Kant draws the following conclusion, comparing and relating the will to the power of choice and identifying it with practical reason:

The will is therefore the faculty of desire, considered not so much (as is the power of choice) in relation to the action as rather in relation to the ground determining the power of choice to the action, and has itself properly no determining ground, but is, so far as it can determine the power of choice, practical reason itself. (MS 6:213)

On the proposed interpretation, the two relations in which the faculty of desire is here considered – "to the action" and "to the ground determining the power of choice to the action" – correspond respectively to the two ways the practically judging subject conceives of itself: as agent, through

whose action the object represented can be made actual, and as knower, or bearer of reason. The first correspondence is reasonably clear. The second may seem less so, owing to Kant's somewhat obscure description of the will as the faculty of desire considered "in relation to the ground determining the power of choice to the action." But Kant's meaning becomes clearer once we recall the earlier characterization of wish as the beginning of the exercise of the power of choice, the first framing of a maxim of an end. Just as it is through the exercise of the *power of choice* that we reach, in *choice*, the *representation of an action* that determines our *power of agency*, so it is through the exercise of the *will* that we frame, in *wish*, the *representation of an end* that determines our *power of choice*. Not that wish is an act of bare will. As the "inner employment" of the power of choice, wish also depends, for its materials, on the interests one acquires through cognition of one's inclinations. But to the extent that the will is efficacious, one attaches to oneself the practical predicates representing the objects of those interests only so far as the resulting maxims of ends are suitable to be universal laws. It is here in the first act of the faculty of desire in accordance with concepts – the determination of the ground that in turn determines the power of choice – that the will first brings its cognitive form to bear.

It is noteworthy that the will is here represented as having a certain precedence over the power of choice, even in the latter's inner employment. Kant underscores this supremacy in the next sentence by situating both wish and the power of choice *under* the will, and commentators have marked it too, identifying will and power of choice as, respectively, the "legislative" and the "executive" functions of practical reason.¹⁷ But our investigations of reason and of desire position us to appreciate a metaphysical significance in the subordination. Will and power of choice, we saw, are distinguished through the difference between cognitive and causal self-consciousness. But we also noted that since self-consciousness belongs originally to cognition and only through it to anything else, the cognitive moment in our self-conception is prior to the causal moment (section 3.1), just as representation is prior to desire (section 2.2). The primacy of will over power of choice thus registers an essential priority of reason and cognition over desire and causality: knowledge is the rule for the use of the desiderative power in the conduct of life – not an instrument that serves it, but a determining form and pattern that governs it.

¹⁷ See for instance Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), 198–202; Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 129–36.

This self-consciously recognized priority of cognitive form is of a piece with the will's autonomy, its character of being a law to itself. Since the will is practical reason, its autonomy is just the spontaneity of rational cognition in its practical application, and the will itself is just the capacity this self-determining faculty of knowledge has to determine the faculty of desire. Self-rule is the rule of knowledge.