

**Iain P. D. Morrisson**

*Kant and the Role of Pleasure in Moral Action.*

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In this book Morrisson's ambitious project is to make sense of Kant's account of how the moral law of reason motivates human action. This is a famously difficult problem in Kant's moral theory, one that has puzzled Kant scholars since the theory's inception.

In the 'Introduction' Morrisson begins with an overview of Kant scholarship on the stubborn problem of how moral action is supposed to be motivated. The two main camps are those, the majority, who maintain that the moral law motivates action only in a nonfeeling way, and those who, against the majority, insist that Kant is committed to the moral law providing motivation through feeling. The majority is supported by an abundance of passages in which Kant appears adamantly to resist any connection between respect for the moral law and feeling. The minority has courageously attempted to overcome these passages but, Morrisson contends, has failed to provide an adequate account of how respect for the moral law motivates as a feeling. Morrisson announces that the purpose of his book is to present an adequate account of how this respect can motivate human action as a 'nonpathological feeling'.

Morrisson also uses significant space in the 'Introduction' to present a special method that he intends to guide his arguments throughout the book. His method is 'to project what Kant *should* have said (in order to be consistent) about respect as the moral motive by looking at those areas of his thinking that provide the relevant context for his account of moral motivation' (6). This method attempts to lend Kant a helping hand in making his moral theory capable of responding to criticisms that his account of moral motivation is inadequate. It seems clear that Kant needs this assistance, and Morrisson's approach may enable us to fill in some important gaps that have left Kant scholars and critics alike dissatisfied with the overall consistency of his account of morality.

Morrisson's first chapter is the first step of a thorough discussion of Kant's various claims concerning how human action is motivated in non-moral contexts. This discussion represents an attempt to draw from Kant's general account of human psychology clues that will help us understand how Kant would or should explain the unique problems related to moral psychology, given the commitments he has already made to the determination of the will by the moral law of reason. The chapter is specifically concerned with an explication of Kant's account of the faculty of desire.

Morrisson's primary goal in the first chapter is to undo the tendency in Kant scholarship to drive a deep wedge between Kant's account of human psychology and its

role in human action and Kant's account of rational agency. Morrisson traces much of this tendency to Henry Allison's 'Incorporation Thesis' that claims that the psychological forces responsible for incentives to act in one way or another do not actually play a role in the determination of action until they are incorporated into maxims. Although this thesis represents a noble attempt to give rationality the lead in free agency, it ends up minimizing the role that human psychology plays in both non-moral and moral action. An accurate interpretation of Kant's theory of action, Morrisson argues, must include a mixture of both psychological and rational elements. Here Morrisson attempts, apparently with some success, to unravel and clarify Kant's account of those various elements of human psychology that are germane to human action in the non-moral context, including desire, emotion, instinct, inclination, passion, feeling, and affect.

Chapter 2 contains a discussion of the relationship between desire formation and the feelings of pleasure and pain in Kant's account of human psychology. Here Morrisson argues that 'pleasure is the central notion in his account of non-moral motivation' (56). Several pages are spent wrestling with ambiguity in Kant's writings, highlighted by many Kant scholars, concerning whether desire is formed by 'anticipatory pleasure' at the thought of an object or by the 'anticipation of pleasure' at the realization of an object. Morrisson attempts to reconcile these two accounts of desire formation by arguing that the anticipation of pleasure in the realization of an object actually grounds a present experience of pleasure at the mere thought of the object.

Philosophers have long struggled with understanding how it is possible to reconcile Kant's adamant claim that humans are genuinely free only when they act from the moral law of reason with his claims that humans are on another level free to choose actions that are immoral or that have no moral import at all. Morrisson deals with this problem in his third chapter as he nears the book's primary argument: moral action is motivated in a way analogous to the way mundane actions in the non-moral context are motivated. Here the central problem is how to understand all human action, including those actions without any moral import, in a non-deterministic way. In this Morrisson seeks to dispel a tendency in Kant scholarship to interpret Kant as offering a completely deterministic account of human psychology. He is also seeking to resist the temptation to interpret Kant as having no theory of freedom in the nonmoral context and to move beyond Allison's account contained in the Incorporation Thesis. His argument ultimately amounts to the contention that freedom in the non-moral context consists in the ability to act other than we do. Here we are capable of having our actions both determined by the pursuit of happiness and yet subject to the spontaneous choice of rational nature. Morrisson argues that Allison's Incorporation Thesis does not go far enough in that it fails to show how the incorporation of sensible motives into maxims allows for a genuine freedom to act other than in a way that is entirely determined by those motives. It appears that Morrisson may also fail to accomplish this in a convincing manner.

Morrisson's fourth chapter is a laudable attempt to make sense of maxim

formation in a way that will make consistent sense of Kantian action-motivation in all of its forms. He has two goals in mind here, the second of which is the primary end of the entire project: (1) to maintain an account of motivation in non-moral contexts that does not let go of the progress that Allison made, and (2) to provide an account of moral motivation that draws on non-moral motivation as an analogous process. Maxims are formed, Morrisson contends, when an ‘infusion’ rather than an ‘incorporation’ process takes place (132). We choose ends in the non-moral context when both the anticipation of pleasure in the realization of an object and the resulting anticipatory pleasure in the thought of the object produce an interest in us where that object is concerned. Because we choose these ends ‘in the presence of’ this pleasure, the force of this pleasure carries on ‘into any maxim that is formed around it’ (132). The pleasure that carries over in the process of desire formation and then maxim formation provides the motivational force that makes the action possible. This is a crucial step in Morrisson’s argument, since he argues in the next chapter that moral action is made possible by a similar process.

In the fifth chapter Morrisson finally achieves what appears to be a significant contribution to the Kantian literature. He argues that in the same way that pleasure arising in the non-moral process of desire and maxim formation propels an agent to act, so respect for the moral law propels our moral actions. Morrisson points out that Kant gives us comments that both support and reject the idea of respect as a feeling that motivates our moral actions. Kant scholarship until now has tended to embrace one or the other of these two positions. Morrisson attempts to bridge the gap between the two by offering an account of respect as a special feeling that does play a role in motivating action that is not the same as, but analogous to, the way pathological feeling motivates action in the non-moral context. The moral law produces in us an interest in realizing objects through action, and this interest is accompanied by a sensible feeling that moves through the maxim formation process as it does in maxim formation in non-moral contexts. But this special feeling is made possible only by the presence of the moral law, thus grounding this particular feeling in a unique source. The feeling generated by the moral law infuses our maxims with the force needed to actually propel the action into motion.

Morrisson’s account will surely meet with many objections in the next several years, but it will also require Kant scholars in the future to dig deeper into the mess of Kant’s account of human psychology that on some levels they seem to have deemed too sacred to be dismantled. Morrisson demonstrates tremendous courage in his account and his book is worth a read for this reason alone. One wonders if Morrisson has not provided Kant with a much more systematized account than Kant himself was able to produce. This would be a larger problem if Morrisson had not established in the first few pages as his primary method the attempt to lay down what Kant should have said in order to be consistent.

**Ryan Showler**  
Yavapai College