

Dissertation Abstract: *The Unity of Reason and Sensibility in Kant's Practical Philosophy*
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I argue that Kant, often taken to be a classical source of the opposition of freedom and feeling, is in fact one of the most insightful guides toward a coherent non-dualistic view of this relationship.

The dominant reception of Kant attributes to Kant a picture in which we are essentially rational, free beings capable of self-determination, *and* stand at the mercy of our feelings—forces produced by nature and habituation, outside of our rational control. On this interpretation Kant does violence to the most fundamental aspects of human experience. What we most deeply *care* about in our individual lives is rendered irrelevant from the standpoint of our “real selves,” the impartial standpoint of the moral law.

This putative dualism, I argue in Chapter 1, is not only alien to our common ways of self-understanding but it threatens the internal coherence of the Kantian account. It renders incoherent the idea that we can incorporate the pursuit of the objects of our emotions, i.e., of our particular concerns, into even morally permissible actions, and, most gravely, it renders unintelligible the idea of moral motivation itself: in a picture where our affective lives are divorced from our lives as free and rational being, it is impossible to see how a concern with the right thing to do could ever come to *move* us to act.

In the twentieth century scholars sympathetic to Kant’s account of morality, believing it to be the only account capable of securing *objective universal* moral claims, have tried to resist this picture of Kant by rehabilitating Kant’s treatment of human feeling. Specifically, commentators have recognized that the feeling of moral respect holds the key to Kant’s understanding the relation of reason and feeling in Kant. However, the full significance of this account, and thereby Kant’s profound insight in the distinctive role feeling plays in the life of a rational animal, have remained elusive.

In Chapter 2, I argue that implicit in Kant’s account of the feeling of moral respect is the remarkable and previously unrecognized idea that human emotion is a unique mode of self-consciousness—self-revelation and self-understanding—which discloses the subject to herself as rational, embodied and capable of freely determining herself to act in the world. Human emotion, the distinctive human capacity for feeling, emerges as the form of self-consciousness *constitutive of practical agency*, i.e., of freedom.

This reading of moral respect opens an entirely new perspective on moral character, which Kant very curiously characterizes as constituted in an act of ordering one’s *incentives*. First, I argue in Chapter 3, character is best understood as the rational *activity* of maintaining one’s identity as a practically rational agent. Second, in Chapter 4, I argue that maintaining a practical self-understanding is grounded in the development of feeling capacities which reflect and reveal our understanding of ourselves as rational and thus constitute the condition of being a subject to the demands of reason. This allows us, I argue, to find room in Kant’s account for the idea of the *acquisition* of character, which does not reduce, as it does on most readings, to morally irrelevant empirical habituation. In my reading the acquisition of character emerges as a rational accomplishment: the development and determination of our uniquely rational capacities for feeling.

This account of feeling and moral character decisively resolves the problem of moral motivation and is one in which feeling emerges not as a threat to our freedom and an obstacle to ethical life, but as a necessary condition of both.