

Respect for the Law and the Use of Dynamical Terms in Kant's Theory of Moral Motivation

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Abstract: Kant's discussion of the feeling of respect presents a puzzle regarding both the precise nature of this feeling and its role in his moral theory as an incentive that motivates us to follow the moral law. If it is a *feeling* that motivates us to follow the law, this would contradict Kant's view that moral obligation is based on reason alone. I argue that Kant has an account of respect as feeling that is nevertheless not separate from the use of reason, but is intrinsic to willing. I demonstrate this by taking literally Kant's references to force in the second *Critique*. By referring to Kant's pre-critical essay on *Negative Magnitudes* (1763), I show that Kant's account of how the moral law effects in us a feeling of respect is underpinned by his view that the will is a kind of negative magnitude, or force. I conclude by noting some of the implications of my discussion for Kant's account of virtue.¹

“Only the descent into the hell of self-cognition can pave the way for godliness.”
(6: 441)

This paper is an interpretation and defense of the feeling of respect for the moral law in Kant's moral theory. Because of its unique and strange status as “a feeling that is not of empirical origin and (which) is cognized *a priori*” (5: 73), Kant's discussion of respect has presented a puzzle to commentators regarding both its role in Kant's moral theory and the precise nature of this feeling. Still, it is clear that Kant thought that the feeling of respect for the moral law can explain how human beings, with all of their subjective desires, can nevertheless be motivated to act for the sake of the moral law alone.

¹ All references to Kant's works are given by volume and page number of the *Akademie* edition (*Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin 1900–), except for citations to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which utilize the customary format of 'A' and/or 'B' to refer to the first and/or second edition. English Translations: *Practical Philosophy*. Transl. M. Gregor. Cambridge 1996; *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Transl. P. Guyer / E. Matthews. Cambridge 2000; *Critique of Pure Reason*. Transl. P. Guyer / A. Wood. Cambridge 1997; *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*. Transl. A. Wood / G. di Giovanni. Cambridge 1988.

Yet, if this motive is a *feeling*, then it is hard to see how Kant can also argue that reason alone can motivate us to follow the moral law. Indeed, it would seem that in his discussion of the feeling of respect, Kant is making a concession to the philosophers of moral sense and saying that what moves us to perform a moral action must ultimately be a subjective feeling or sentiment toward the action.² But this would contradict Kant's stated view that "the ground of (moral) obligation [...] must not be sought in the nature of the human being [...] but *a priori* simply in concepts of pure reason" (4: 389).

Interpreters have thus tried to make sense of Kant's notion of respect in various ways. Wolff argues that Kant's account is incoherent, because, as a feeling, respect cannot provide the necessary determination of the will by the moral law that is required in order for an action to have moral worth.³ Allison considers Kant's account to be "essentially [...] a phenomenology of moral experience" and thus as extraneous to his attempt to ground morality.⁴ Others, such as A. T. Nuyen, take Kant's account to reveal that he does have a theory of moral sense similar to that of Hume and that the feeling of respect is like a passion that "propels the sensuous self to moral action"⁵. Andrews Reath takes a middle ground and says that there are two aspects to the feeling of respect, one is intellectual and the other is affective.⁶ What none of these commentators seems willing to consider, however, is that it is a coherent and defensible view that respect is, as Kant says, a "non-empirical" feeling that "is known *a priori*" (5: 79) and that it is a necessary condition of morality. I will argue that once we understand the feeling of respect as a feeling that all finite rational beings *must* have when they are aware of the law of their own practical reason, we can make sense of Kant's notion of respect as well as his theory of moral motivation.

² Broadly construed, "moral sense" philosophy refers to the views held by those philosophers of the 17th and 18th century, such as Hume and Hutcheson, who argued that the goodness of an action is based in some feeling or sentiment that we have towards the action, and not on our rational, or intellectual, cognition of the action. Only in this way, they argued, could we be moved, or motivated to do what is good. For useful discussions of the relationship between the sentimentalists, the rationalists and Kant, see Korsgaard 1996, chap. 2, and Timmons 1985.

³ Wolff 1973, 83.

⁴ Allison 1995, 121.

⁵ Nuyen 1991, 40.

⁶ Reath 1989, 287. Similarly Paton 1948, 67, says that the motive of respect viewed 'externally' or 'psychologically,' can be considered to be a feeling, whereas "internally, the motive is just the moral law".

This paper will focus primarily on Kant's discussion of "the incentives of pure practical reason" in the analytic of the second *Critique*. By means of a careful interpretation of this chapter, I will show that it contains two models on which Kant defends the role of respect in moral motivation. One is psychological; the other is physical and refers to dynamical forces. I argue that once one takes seriously Kant's model of force in this chapter, one can correctly understand that in order to act with a good will, and hence be properly motivated to follow the moral law, one must feel respect for it.

Although many commentators have noted that in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant uses language that implies he has a view of human agency in which motives are like forces, few have taken these descriptions seriously, since they seem to contradict his view that we are only motivated to act by reason.⁷ I will show that there is no contradiction and that instead attention to this language of force provides the key for solving the puzzle of respect in Kant's moral theory. I will do this by referring to Kant's pre-critical essay, *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763). In light of this essay, we can see that Kant's account of how the moral law effects in us a feeling of respect is underpinned by his view that the will is a kind of negative magnitude, or force. We will also see that, for Kant, one's "incentive" to follow the moral law is not an expected feeling of pleasure or the avoidance of pain, but just one's own self, which possesses an intrinsic worth. I hope to show that in the context of Kant's philosophy, the nature of moral feeling takes on a quite distinctive Kantian cast. I will conclude by noting some of the implications of my discussion for Kant's account of virtue.

I. Respect for the Law and the Subjective Determination of the Will

According to Kant, respect is the feeling that is the effect of the moral law on the subject (4: 401n). He describes it as a singular feeling that "cannot be compared to any pathological feeling" (5: 76). A pathological feeling is one that is felt through our physical senses and is either pleasurable or disagreeable. Respect cannot be compared to any path-

⁷ Reath 1989, 291, and Allison 1995, 126. One exception to this is McCarty 1994, 30, who argues that "if motivational forces of incentives are incorporated and somehow preserved in maxims as choice determinants, it may then be appropriate to speak of the relative strength of a maxim."

ological feeling both because it feels different and because its source is different. It feels neither pleasurable nor painful, nor is its object that of inclination or fear, “though it has something analogous to both” (4: 401n). Unlike other feelings, respect is not “*received* by means of influence; it is instead a feeling self-wrought (*selbstbewirktes*) by means of a rational concept” (4: 401n). Given its difference from all other feelings,⁸ one wonders why Kant considers respect a feeling at all. Indeed, Kant himself notes that “it could be objected that I only seek refuge, behind the word respect, in an obscure feeling (*Gefühl*), instead of distinctly resolving the question (of the effect one expects to receive by following the moral law) by means of a concept of reason” (4: 401n).

The reason why Kant needs to consider respect a feeling is because he wants to show that the moral law has an effect on the will of the particular *subject*. Kant writes that when we act from duty, “there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the law and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law” (401n). The question that Kant is answering when he discusses the feeling of respect is; why should I make the moral law the law of my own particular action? In order to answer this question, he must include an account of a moral feeling, even if it is “obscure”. Indeed, Kant explains that what both moral feeling and pathological feeling have in common as feelings is that they are merely subjective. He writes, “moral feeling (like pleasure and displeasure in general) is something merely subjective, which yields no cognition” (6: 400). By calling feeling “merely subjective”, Kant means it does not refer to the characteristics of external things, but rather to the particular constitution of each subject who has the feeling. When I talk about my feeling, I refer to me, even if the source of the feeling is something external. In this way, feelings can be said to be what are each subject’s own. They are the affectations of inner sense (6: 399) and refer to the internal sensibility of the subject and not to the external properties of objects. What all feelings also have in common is that they can have different degrees of strength. According to Kant, there is just one kind of feeling of pleasure, whose differences are just a matter of degree.⁹

⁸ Except, perhaps, the sublime. See Kant, 5: 271.

⁹ See 5: 23: “However dissimilar representations of objects may be – they may be representations of the understanding or even of reason, in contrast to those representations of sense – the feeling of pleasure, by which alone they properly constitute the determining ground of the will [...] is nevertheless one and the same in kind not only insofar as it can always be cognized only empirically but also insofar as it affects one and the same vital force that is manifested in the faculty of desire, and in this respect can differ only in degree from any other determining ground”.

Similarly, Kant explains that moral feeling can be strengthened “through wonder at its inscrutable source” (6: 400).

Although most feelings differ from subject to subject, the subjective nature of a feeling need not make it contingent. It is possible that there is something about all finite rational subjects that entails that, under certain conditions, some feeling must necessarily occur. For Kant, respect is such a feeling.¹⁰ What Kant wants to achieve with his discussion of the feeling of respect is thus the proof that the moral law can have a motivational effect within each subject that the subject can consider to be his or her own, but which, despite its subjective nature, is also necessary.

Thus, when Kant introduces the notion of respect in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, it is noteworthy that for the first time in the *Groundwork*, he writes in the first person, from the perspective of someone whose will is to be determined by the moral law. He writes,

duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law. For an object as the effect of my proposed action I can indeed have *inclination*, but *never respect*, just because it is merely an effect and never an activity of a will [...]. Now an action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will; hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law, and so the maxim of complying with such a law even if it infringes upon all my inclinations. (4: 400–401)

Here, Kant explains that the feeling of respect is the subjective determination of my will by the moral law. It is what motivates *me* as the particular subject that I am, to follow the moral law. In this way, the moral law, which is the law of reason in general, also becomes the law of my own subjective will. This is in contrast to the objective determination of the will by the moral law, which is the determination of the will insofar as it is purely rational and only determined by the moral law. A will that is subjectively determined by the moral law thus makes the moral law its ‘subjective principle’, or maxim, of action (4: 401). A maxim is one’s own particular reason for performing an action. It is the reason we give to ourselves to justify what we do. Thus, when I act with a good will, the reason why I perform an action is the moral law alone.

But what exactly does Kant mean when he says that the subjective determination of the will is “the maxim of complying with such a law (the moral law)”? What Kant wants to explain is how we can determine our own motive of action by the moral law and thus how we can act for

¹⁰ As is the pleasure we take in the beautiful and in the sublime.

the sake of the law alone. This subjective determination of the will¹¹ is, of course, what is expressed by the categorical imperative. Kant first expresses it in *Groundwork I*, right after his discussion of respect, as follows: “*I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law*” (4: 402). However, there is an ambiguity here concerning how we are to follow this principle and make the moral law our motive. One way of understanding what Kant means makes his view appear mechanical and impersonal. The other way means acting from moral feeling.

The mechanical and impersonal way of understanding the moral law sees it as a *description* of which of our actions get to count as morally good. From this viewpoint, those actions for which the maxim can also be willed to be universal law are those that get to count as good. Thus, to be good, I just need to adopt only those maxims that can be made universal without contradiction. This way of acting makes my own subjective will, which is supposed to represent my own particular volition, take the viewpoint of the objective, universal will of practical reason as such. This is because I make the *lawfulness* of an action my reason for doing it, instead of making *my own* reason for an action be for the sake of duty, and thus the moral law, alone. Here, the moral law is understood to be a procedure for determining right actions instead of being itself a reason that motivates me to do what it requires. When I act in this way, I stand outside of my own particular self and determine my actions as if from an objective standpoint. I dictate my actions from above, so to speak, and make sure that they meet the description of what is to be a morally good action.

A person who acts in this way can be described as a ‘high minded person’. The high-minded person identifies himself with the will that is ‘objectively’ determined by the moral law. He always does the right thing for the ‘right’ reason; conformity with the moral law. Even in difficult situations, he is able easily to make decisions based on his knowledge of what is really right. Nor does he suffer much from the loss of any unfulfilled desires, since he readily acknowledges that it is a necessary sacrifice. A person who takes such a psychological distance from his own particular inclinations, and does not see them as providing compelling reasons for action, can be said to act in a ‘remote’ way, or, indeed, without feeling. An example of such an action would be that of

¹¹ The “will” that I am referring to here should be understood in the sense of what Kant will later refer to as ‘*Willkür*’, the power of choice.

betraying to the authorities a friend who has committed a crime, without any internal deliberation or feeling of distress.

Many of Kant's critics have assumed that the account of morality described above is in fact Kant's own. This is why they see Kant's view as cold and calculating and as ignoring the role in moral activity of that aspect of the self that has feelings. Moreover, since this account leaves open the question of why anyone would feel motivated to act from a position that is external to and distanced from one's own immediate inclinations, it does not seem to be a plausible account of moral action. Bernard Williams, for example, argues that Kant's theory of moral action sacrifices an important aspect of morality, our immediate and particular concern for the person or action at issue, for an abstract concern for the moral law. Williams writes,

The fact that Kant's account of rational freedom is meant to apply to factual deliberation as much as to practical brings out what is wrong with the Kantian argument. What it says about reflection does indeed apply to factual deliberation, but it does so because factual deliberation is not essentially first personal. It fails to apply to practical deliberation, and to impose a necessary impartiality on it, because practical deliberation must be first personal, radically so, and involves an *I* that must be more intimately the *I* of my desires than this account allows.¹²

Moreover, according to Williams, if morality involves abstracting myself from all of my own desires and having no feeling, then it is hard to see how there is any self that remains that could be motivated to act at all.¹³ Yet, once we take into account the role of respect for the law in Kant's view of practical deliberation, we see that this criticism is mistaken. For Kant, the feeling of respect is what makes it possible for the moral law to have a claim on one's own particular self and to provide it with an incentive for action, yet also to be governed by the impartial law of reason.¹⁴

¹² Williams 1985, 66.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴ Other contemporary philosophers who make similar criticisms of Kant downplay the role of respect in Kant's account. Allen Wood, for example, in an article defending Hegel's objections against Kant has this to say about respect and the self in Kant: "To preserve our true (that is, moral) selves safe from nature and fortune, Kant must exile from this self all of our natural feelings and desires, and banish even [...] love, courage, moderation in passions [...]. He can retain for the moral self only a single abstract misanthropic feeling: respect for the law, and only a single cold and (by Kant's own admission) utterly unnatural motive: the motive of duty" (Wood 1989, 476f.). Although Wood is right that respect is the one feeling that pertains to our true, moral selves, he mistakenly argues that this

When I act from respect for the moral law, I do not try to make myself into someone else, such as a ‘*holy* being’, “who could never be tempted to violate duty” (6: 383),¹⁵ but instead make the moral law the law of my own particular subjective will. Although I might wish to be ‘altogether free’ (4: 428) from my inclinations, as a finite being, I cannot be. In order to be properly motivated to follow the moral law I must therefore be aware of the range of my possible motives of acting and make sure that my volition is morally good. As Kant explains in a penetrating illustration of internal deliberation, I can have many reasons not to tell a lie. Only one, however, can be that of duty alone (4: 402f.). If I ignore my inclinations, this makes it possible for me to deceive myself about my real underlying motives for conforming with the moral law. I must instead pay attention to my own inner motives and, so far as it is possible, eliminate the possibility of self-deception and know what my own motive for action really is, in order to make sure that the moral law really is what determines my will.

Of course, Kant is clear that we can never know what our real motive of action is. He writes that even if with the

keenest self-examination we find nothing besides the moral ground of duty that could have been powerful enough to move us to this or that good action [...] it cannot be inferred with certainty that no covert impulse of self-love, under the mere pretense of that idea, was not actually the real determining cause of the will (4: 407).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that on Kant’s view morality does not require one to “*know* (scrutinize fathom) *yourself* [...]. That is, know your heart – whether it is good or evil, whether the source of your actions is pure or impure” (6: 441). Indeed, since morality for Kant is not a matter of theoretical knowledge, it is not the *certainty* of our real underlying motive for action that gives an action moral worth (especially if this motive is to satisfy our inclinations!). Instead, just the activity of questioning my own motives reveals to me the authority of

is abstract and unnatural. If one instead considers respect as the subjective practical activity of introspection, then Kant’s theory becomes much more palatable. Even Louden 1986, 473f., who defends Kant against such critiques by emphasizing the role of virtue and the emotions in Kant’s practical philosophy, does so by quickly brushing aside the role of respect in Kant’s theory of moral motivation. It is my view that a correct understanding of what Kant means by respect will render many of these criticisms, as well as roundabout defenses of Kant’s theory of motivation, beside the point.

¹⁵ According to Kant, it is impossible for human beings to become such holy beings. See also 6: 64.

the moral law over my other reasons for acting. This is because the very act of examining my motives is structured by the authority of the moral law in the first place, which, Kant writes, common human reason “actually always has before its eyes and uses as the norm for its appraisals” (4: 403f.). Thus, Kant calls the knowledge that results from self-scrutiny “moral cognition” of oneself (6: 441) as opposed to theoretical cognition.

If what it means to follow the moral law from respect is that I pay attention to my own reasons for action, we can thus see how consciousness of the moral law can itself motivate us to follow it. I would not ask myself what the reason for my action is, if there were not indeed some *further* reason for asking this. If, for example, the mere inclination to help someone were enough of a moral motive to help her, it would not occur to me to then ask myself, “what is my reason for having this inclination to help her?” This further question is, for Kant, the product of pure practical reason which gives me a reason to evaluate my motives, namely, to find the one that is in accord with pure practical reason. By asking this further question, I also discover something ‘deeper’ about the nature of my self that is the source of my volitions. Although my knowledge of my own motives is empirical, and I can never know for sure what my real motive for action is, nevertheless, there is an important distinction to be made between examining one’s motives and not introspecting at all. If one does not introspect and question one’s motives at all, then one has not subjectively determined her maxim of action with regard to the law of practical reason. One therefore cannot act with a good will.

Still, why should I evaluate my reasons with regard to the moral law? There must be something about me that has an interest in making the law of reason into *my own particular reason* for action. I must want to be a self that acts in accordance with the moral law. But where does this interest come from? According to Kant, this interest just is the feeling of respect for the law of my own reason.

II. *The two Models of Respect for the Law in the Critique of Practical Reason: Psychological and Physical*

Now that we have a sense of the role that the feeling of respect is meant to play in Kant’s moral theory – that is, to ensure that I make the law of reason into my own particular reason for acting – I will explain what exactly Kant means by the particular feeling of respect, and how it

motivates us to follow the moral law. I will argue that this feeling does not originate from a faculty of moral sense, or the possession of some moral character, at least in the way these are typically understood. Instead, it is feeling I have by virtue of possessing my own rational will.

For Kant, all actions based on “the special constitution (*Einrichtung*) of human nature” (4: 442), our empirical psychological capacities, have no moral worth. Thus any action performed in order to receive a contribution to our well being, even if it is the well-being we expect to feel from good conduct, is not moral (5: 71).¹⁶ This is for the very reason that the empirical nature of our feeling makes it unfit to be the basis of the necessary obligation that morality requires. In order to show that there *is* such a thing as a moral feeling, the feeling of respect,¹⁷ Kant must therefore show that it is not a contingent aspect of our human constitution, but a feeling that we must have when we are aware of the moral law.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in the third section of the Analytic, Kant provides a detailed account of respect and moral motivation. He defines respect for the moral law as “a feeling that is produced by an intellectual ground, and this feeling is the only one that we can cognize *a priori* and the necessity of which we can have insight into” (5: 73). He argues that this feeling of respect serves as an incentive to make the moral law its maxim (5: 76). An ‘incentive’ (*Triebfeder*) is “the subjective determining ground of the will of a being whose reason does not by its nature necessarily conform with the moral law” (5: 72).¹⁸ It is thus something in a finite rational subject, such as a desire or a particular end that determines, or motivates, it to act. A subject can be moved to perform a certain action by an incentive that is either subjectively valid, which would be a particular desire, or that is also objectively valid, which would be the moral law.¹⁹ Kant’s aim in this section is to

¹⁶ See also 4: 442.

¹⁷ Although, in “The Doctrine of Virtue”, Kant explicates ‘Moral Feeling’ and ‘Respect’ under two separate headings, it seems clear that respect is for Kant the *only* moral feeling. Guyer 1996, 358, writes, “it would seem most accurate simply to treat ‘respect’ and ‘moral feeling’ as synonyms [...]”. He continues, however, to say that this feeling is the “effect of the decision to adhere to the maxim of duty.” On my view, this feeling is what *motivates* us to make this decision. Otherwise, it would not be a requirement for acting from duty, as Kant says it is.

¹⁸ The German word *Triebfeder* means a ‘motivating force’. ‘*Trieb*’, in German, is an ‘urge’ or a ‘drive’ and ‘*Feder*’ is a spring, such as that in clockwork.

¹⁹ Kant also writes that no incentives can be attributed to a divine will. Although Kant does not elaborate on this point, it seems clear that this is because a divine will by nature *always* necessarily acts in accordance with the moral law, it does not need any incentive to motivate it *each* time it acts. See Reath 1989, 286n.

show ‘*a priori*’ that the moral law has a necessary effect on the will²⁰ and that this effect, which is the feeling of respect, serves as an incentive to make us follow the law (5: 72). It is not to prove that there is such a thing as the moral law or that the will is autonomous.²¹ In the second *Critique*, our awareness of the moral law as supremely authoritative is a ‘fact of reason’ (5: 42). Nevertheless, this chapter is not, as Allison claims, *merely* a phenomenology of moral experience.²² Kant has an *ontology* of the will that makes it possible for him to claim that the moral law has a necessary effect on us, and that we do take an interest in morality.

In this section of the second *Critique*, there are two different models on which Kant discusses the process by which the moral law “effects a feeling conducive to the influence of the law upon the will” (5: 75): one is psychological, the other is physical. In what follows, I will first explain the psychological model. I will then show that this model only makes sense if we see that it is based on a model of forces considered as negative magnitudes. Indeed, only with regard to such a model can Kant argue for the necessity of a moral feeling in the subject that motivates it to follow the moral law.

According to the psychological model, Kant explains that obedience to the moral law involves ‘thwarting’ our inclinations. For Kant, all the inclinations together constitute regard for oneself (*solipsismus*). This self-regard is either love for oneself (*self-love*; *Eigenliebe*) or satisfaction with oneself (*self-conceit*; *Eigendünkel*). Self-love is the principle of making happiness, or the satisfaction of one’s inclinations, the supreme determining ground of one’s choice (5: 22). Someone who loves herself will perform an action for the reason that it satisfies her inclinations. For Kant, self-love, which “is natural and active in us even prior to the moral law”, can be made to agree with the moral law and become

²⁰ Here again and in what follows, ‘will’ should be understood in the sense of ‘*Willkür*’.

²¹ Kant (5: 72) writes, “how a law can be of itself and immediately a determining ground of the will (though this is what is essential in all morality) is for human reason an insoluble problem and identical with that of how a free will is possible”. In my view, the question of how the law determines the will, which is “identical with the question of how freedom is possible”, is the same question how the will acts as a force.

²² Later in his book, while discussing the fact of reason, Allison 1995, 237, does note that Kant’s discussion of respect “plays a crucial role in the presentation of the fact that is to be construed as the fact of reason. It does this by showing that we do in fact take an interest in morality, an interest that must be regarded as pure and therefore shows pure reason to be practical.”

“rational self-love” (5: 73). This happens when our constitution is such that we also want to do those actions that the moral law commands of us and we take pleasure in acting with a good will, although, of course, it is not this pleasure that motivates us to do these actions. Thus, Kant writes that practical reason ‘restricts’ self-love, since it limits what can satisfy the self to those actions based on pure reason alone.

But it is self-conceit that is struck down altogether by pure practical reason and that is the condition for the feeling of respect. Self-conceit is satisfaction with oneself (*arrogantia*). Unlike self-love (*philautia*), which can be made to agree with pure practical reason, self-conceit is completely opposed to the moral law. This is because self-conceit is what occurs when self-love, without taking the moral law into account, “makes itself lawgiving and the unconditional practical principle” (5: 74). Instead of making the motive of my action the satisfaction of my inclinations, I make it an unconditional principle that acting to satisfy my inclinations is the *right* way to act. The person of self-conceit is not only a self whose actions are to satisfy its inclinations and achieve happiness, but a self who takes such actions to be further justified, since it believes it is *entitled* to happiness. This form of self-regard is thus entirely in conflict with pure practical reason, which, Kant writes,

strikes down self-conceit altogether, since all claims to esteem for oneself that precede accord (*Übereinstimmung*) with the moral law are null and quite unwarranted because certainty of a disposition in accord with this law is the first condition of any worth of a person [...] and any presumption prior to this is false and opposed to the law. (5: 73)

When this false and ungrounded claim to self worth is struck down by the moral law, one feels humiliated. It is as a result of this humiliation that the moral law becomes an object of respect for the will. Kant writes,

Now the propensity to self-esteem, so long as it rests solely on sensibility, belongs with the inclinations, which the moral law infringes upon. So the moral law strikes down self-conceit. But since this law is still something in itself positive – namely the form of an intellectual causality, that is, of freedom – it is at the same time an object of *respect* inasmuch as, in opposition to its subjective antagonist, namely the inclinations in us, it *weakens* self-conceit; and inasmuch as it even *strikes down* self-conceit, that is humiliates it, it is an object of the greatest *respect* and so too the ground of a positive feeling that is not of empirical origin and is cognized *a priori*. (5: 73)

The moral law thus determines our subjective will by infringing on our inclinations and producing in the will a feeling of respect and hence an incentive to follow the law.

But there is something incomplete about this explanation of how the moral law produces in us the feeling of respect. Kant has not shown why the person of self-conceit would feel humiliated by the moral law, unless he *already* feels respect for it. But if he already respects the moral law, then he is not a man of self-conceit. Kant seems to be assuming what he wants to prove – that the moral law has this necessary effect on our will, and that the will necessarily feels respect for the law.²³ Unless he provides a separate argument for the possibility of an *a priori* moral feeling, Kant cannot show that we must necessarily feel respect for the moral law. It seems that here a sentimentalist critic of Kant would have the last word; morality must originally be grounded in a basic human moral sensibility that is independent of reason in order for us to feel motivated to act well. Indeed, the benefits Kant might gain from giving a psychological account of how we are moved to follow the law are met by a loss to his ability to argue for the necessity of our feeling of obligation to follow the moral law. Psychological arguments cannot be arguments for necessity. Thus, Kant's argument so far for the necessary effect of the moral law on the will fails. He has not explained why the moral law must infringe upon the inclinations or why the person of self-conceit must feel humiliated by the moral law. Yet, implicit in Kant's discussion of the effect of the moral law on our subjective will is a the-

²³ Henrich 1994 describes what I take to be the same problem. He writes that according to Kant, “respect must be counted among that class of accomplishments in which an identification with something of one's own takes place which is at the same time encountered as the other [...]. But his theory dissolves this structure into the interplay of two acts, which could equally well be experienced independent of each other. Although *I* undergo both experiences, this unity is only a formal summation of acts *which are not at all related to each other* [...] there is no possibility for his theory to account for a positive relation of consciousness to the law, a relation which would be an act of identification and thus distance and unity at once” (111). According to Henrich, it is this tension (among others) in Kant's moral philosophy that “set in motion the idealistic movement”. It is my view that this tension is resolved in Kant's own thought. Allison 1995, 127, argues that Henrich has misunderstood Kant here, and that the law is not supposed to have a direct effect on sensibility but that this effect is “mediated by judgment”, and that the feeling of humiliation “results from the *recognition* (an intellectual act) of the superiority of the law, as a product of pure practical reason, to the ‘delusion of self-conceit’, which consists in the granting of unconditional validity to the claims of reason in the service of inclination”. Although I am in general agreement with Allison here, still, Kant argues that this ‘recognition’ is the cause of a ‘feeling’ and that the moral law must determine the will “immediately” (5: 72). Allison leaves it open what the basis of this feeling is and the precise nature of its role in moral motivation. This is what I intend my account to show.

ory of dynamical forces. This account solves the apparent circularity of the psychological account. It also shows that such a moral feeling is the necessary effect of the use of practical reason.

In describing how the moral law has a necessary effect on feeling by excluding the inclinations from having an effect on our choice of maxims, Kant uses the model of force. He writes,

As the effect of consciousness of the moral law, and consequently in relation to an intelligible cause, namely the subject of pure practical reason as the supreme law-giver, this feeling of a rational subject affected by inclinations is indeed called humiliation (intellectual contempt); but in relation to its positive ground, the law, it is at the same time called respect for the law; there is indeed no feeling for this law, but inasmuch as it moves resistance out of the way, in the judgment of reason this removal of a hindrance is esteemed equivalent to a positive furthering of its causality. Because of this, this feeling can now be called a feeling of respect for the moral law, while on both grounds together it can be called a *moral feeling*. (5: 75)

In the paragraph that follows, Kant explains that the moral law is not only an objective determining ground of the will, but also a subjective determining ground, or incentive, since it “effects a feeling conducive to the influence of the law upon the will” even though “there is no antecedent feeling in the subject that would be attuned to morality” (5: 75). He then explains how this ‘practical effect’ of reason on feeling is possible:

[S]ensible feeling, which underlies all our inclinations, is indeed the condition of that feeling we call respect, but the cause determining it lies in pure practical reason; and so this feeling, on account of its origin, cannot be called pathologically effected but must be called *practically effected*, and it is effected as follows: the representation of the moral law deprives self-love of its influence and self-conceit of its illusion, and thereby the hindrance to pure practical reason is lessened and the representation of the superiority of its objective law to the impulses (*Antriebe*) of sensibility is produced and hence, by removal of the counterweight, the relative weightiness of the law (with regard to a will affected by impulses) in the judgment of reason. (5: 75–76)

Finally, in summing up how the moral law is the “sole and also the undoubted moral incentive”, Kant reiterates how the moral law has an effect on feeling which can be cognized *a priori*, since it “infringes upon the activity of the subject so far as inclinations are his determining grounds and hence upon the opinion of his personal worth”. He writes,

the lowering of pretensions to moral self-esteem – that is, humiliation on the sensible side – is an elevation of the moral – that is, practical – esteem for the law itself on the intellectual side; in a word, it is respect for the law, and so also a feeling that is positive in its intellectual cause, which is known *a priori*. For whatever diminishes the hindrances to an activity is a furthering of this activity itself. (5: 79)

In each of these passages, Kant describes the feeling of respect as what is produced when consciousness of the moral law removes a hindrance or counterweight that prevents the will from being determined by the law. Respect is the free and proper motion of the will that is made possible when an obstacle or counterweight preventing its movement is removed. In this way, the feeling of respect is both that *with which* the will follows the moral law and also the *effect* of the moral law on the will. Imagine two weights on opposite ends of a lever. The removal of one weight is the same act as causing the other to fall. The removal of the hindering weight is what makes possible the falling of the other. And, just as the falling of this weight can be said to be its proper, unhindered, motion, so is it the nature of the will to act out of respect for the moral law, when unhindered by self-conceit. In this way, the removal of obstacles to the will by the moral law is nothing other than the activity of producing respect for the law in the will.²⁴ Consciousness of the moral law thus removes our self-conceit, which also produces respect for the law. Thus Kant writes, “and so respect for the law is not the incentive to morality; instead it is morality itself subjectively considered as an incentive” (5: 76). Note that a phenomenology of moral experience cannot capture this account. Understanding the incentive to be moral derives from understanding the ontology of the will, not from understanding the empirical features of our psychological states.

III. Negative Magnitudes and the Will

So far, I have shown that Kant’s discussion of the moral feeling of respect as the subjective effect of the moral law on the will can be understood through an analogy to dynamical forces. But my argument is stronger than this: Kant thinks that the will is a force. My evidence for

²⁴ Indeed, this view of respect as the proper motion of the will that is made possible when a hindrance is removed has a parallel in Kant’s discussion of autonomy. In the *Groundwork*, Kant explains that the causality of the will that is “efficient independently of alien causes determining it” is freedom, negatively defined as the activity of the will in the absence of an external cause (4: 446). However, he writes that from this negative definition there ‘springs’ (*fließt*) a *positive* concept of freedom, that is of the will’s causality, not according to natural laws (since then it would not be freedom) but according to ‘immutable laws’ of a special kind; that is, its own laws. – Here I prefer Allison’s translation (Allison 1995: 202), to Gregor’s (“flows”).

this position is found in Kant's discussion of negative magnitudes in his pre-critical essay, *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy* (1763).

Kant's purpose in this essay is to "secure for philosophy the benefit of a concept which has hitherto not been used, but which is nonetheless of the utmost importance" (2: 170). Although this is a pre-critical essay, Kant continued to use the concept of negative magnitudes in his later, critical philosophy.²⁵ Negative magnitudes are predicates of a thing, whose opposition is not based on the principle of contradiction, but instead on what Kant calls a real opposition. A real opposition occurs when two predicates are opposed to each other, but do not contradict each other. They merely cancel out the effects of the other. The result of such an opposition is not an impossibility, or nothing, but is a negation; a lack or an absence (2: 172). Kant's primary example of real opposition is of two equal moving forces acting in opposite directions, such as the forces of attraction and repulsion in the same body. He writes,

a real repugnancy (or opposition) only occurs where there are two things, as positive grounds, and where one of them cancels the consequence of the other. Suppose that motive force is a positive ground: a real conflict can only occur in so far as there is a second motive force connected with it, and in so far as each reciprocally cancels the effect of the other. (2: 175f.)

A real opposition between two negative magnitudes is also one in which the destruction of something positive is at the same time the creation of something negative. Kant writes, I can just as well call descent "negative rising", as I can call rising "negative descent" (2: 175). He explains that negative magnitudes require a positive ground with regard to which their relation to each other can be measured. With motive forces, for example, this relation can be explained with regard to the traversing of space.²⁶ Kant's underlying interest in negative magnitudes is in this positive ground that makes it possible that "*every passing-away is a negative coming-to-be*" (2: 190). He writes,

²⁵ For a fine account of negative magnitudes in Kant's philosophy, see Warren 2001.

²⁶ See Warren 2001, 31f. Also noteworthy in this particular context is Broadie's and Pybus's discussion of respect. They write, "if there is no feeling of respect for the moral law, there can be no consciousness of the moral law. But, for Kant, without such consciousness there can be no moral experience. Consequently respect is *a priori*. It plays in moral experience the same sort of part that is played in perceptual experience by the *a priori* forms of intuition. Respect is the space of morality" (Broadie / Pybus 1975, 62).

in what concerns the *cancellation* of an existing *something*, there can be no difference between the accidents of mental natures and the effects of operative forces in the physical world. These latter effects, namely, are never cancelled except by means of a true motive force of something else. And an inner accident, a thought of the soul, cannot cease to be without a truly active power of exactly *the self-same* thinking subject. The difference here only relates to the different laws governing the two types of being; for the state of matter can only ever be changed by means of an external cause, whereas the state of mind can also be changed by means of an inner cause. The necessity of the real opposition, however, remains the same, in spite of the above difference. (2: 191f)

Just as in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the possibility of a synthetic unity of representations in a judgment rests on the transcendental unity of apperception, which is what makes it possible for me to be conscious that *I* am the one synthesizing these representations,²⁷ here, the ground for the possibility of the cancellation of one thing and the coming-to-be-of another is an active power of the self-same subject. It is only possible for my feelings to change and for me to be aware that they are still my own feelings if they are grounded in a single faculty in one and the same subject. I can therefore only say that I feel humiliated by the moral law if the ground of that feeling is also the same ground as the prior feeling of my self-conceit. This ground is nothing other than my own will, which is intrinsically capable of respect.

Self-conceit and humiliation are thus to be understood as negative magnitudes, such that the negation of self-conceit is the creation of humiliation.²⁸ They are predicates of our practical reason which can “each reciprocally cancel the effect of the other”, insofar as this effect is a determination of the will to act. They are also magnitudes since, as I will argue, our capacity for self-conceit or humiliation can have different degrees. This interpretation gives us the following account of respect: if the will is such that it has an intrinsic respect for the law, the person of self-conceit must at the same time feel both humiliated by the moral law and also respect for it each time he considers an action. The person of self-conceit is one who does not question his own motives for action. He does not ask himself why his motives are good, he merely assumes that they are. That is his conceit. Once he is aware of the moral law and asks himself this further question, he is immediately humiliated, since

²⁷ See, for example, B132–133.

²⁸ I am not claiming that Kant is providing a proof that there *are* negative magnitudes. Just as for the free will, such a proof is impossible. All I am showing is why such magnitudes are necessary for his moral theory, and what is behind his language of force.

he realizes that he is capable of producing further, rational, motives which he previously had not considered. Another, 'deeper', form of his self is revealed to him that includes a standard for evaluating his inclinations. Once he is aware of the authority of his own reason in this way, he cannot help feeling respect for it, since it is the underlying arbitrator of his own motives. To the extent that he values what is essential and not contingent about himself, he will thus be motivated to follow the moral law in determining his actions. Respect for the moral law is thus nothing other than our own intrinsic self-respect. Kant writes of respect,

it is not correct to say that a human being has a *duty of self-esteem* (*Pflicht der Selbstschätzung*); it must be said that the law within him unavoidably forces (*zwingt*) from him respect for his own being, and this feeling (which is of a special kind) is the basis of certain duties, that is, of certain actions that are consistent with his duty to himself. It cannot be said that he *has* a duty of respect towards himself, for he must have respect for the law within himself in order even to think of any duty whatsoever (6: 402f.).

We can now understand how respect for the law avoids the distance and coldness of the 'high-minded' person discussed earlier, who thought that his particular subjective self itself could be objectively good and made to act always in accordance the moral law. This person is no different from the person of self-conceit. What both of these have in common is the motivational structure of moral enthusiasm in which the inclinations of the finite subjective self are assumed to be identical with what is universally and objectively good. Such identification with the universal law absolves one of having to evaluate each action with respect to the moral law as the subjectively determining ground of the will.²⁹ Recall Kant's statement that the moral law "strikes down self-

²⁹ Many discussions in the literature say that self-conceit is an attitude one has with regard to others. Reath 1989, 293, for example, claims that whereas self-love tends toward a form of general egoism, "self-conceit would produce actions in which I act as though *my* inclinations could provide laws for the conduct of others: it expresses a desire that they serve or defer to my interests". And Wood 1996, 153, writes, "since in self-conceit it is the craving to be superior to others that produces the belief that we are superior to them, self-conceit also causes us to soften the perceived demands of morality so that we may more easily persuade ourselves of our merits". Yet, to my knowledge, there is no textual evidence that for Kant self-conceit is necessarily a claim of superiority over or in regard to others (although it might lead to that). These arguments seem to be based on confusing what Kant calls self-conceit (*Eigendünkelarrogantia*) with Arrogance (*Hochmut/superbia*). My discussion is concerned with self-conceit alone which is what, according to Kant, is 'struck-down' by the moral law. Unlike arrogance, which is associated with claims to superiority over others, self-conceit is more the

conceit altogether, since all claims to esteem for oneself that precede *accord* with the moral law are null and quite unwarranted [...] and any presumption prior to this is false and opposed to the law” (5: 73, my emphasis). The person of self-conceit is certain that he is right *before* determining his actions to be in accord with the moral law. He is certain because he is convinced he knows what the law *would* permit or prohibit without having actually to determine his particular maxim of action in accordance with the law of his own reason. Once this person has the least doubt about his motives and asks himself why he will perform some action, his self-conceit is at once struck down, as is his respect for the law simultaneously produced. It is important to note that the striking down of self-conceit and the feeling of respect for the law does not occur in a person once and for all, but *every time* the person considers an action and is confronted with the moral law.

It is thus by attending to the reasons for acting that one feels respect for the moral law. This is why Kant writes in ‘Analytic’ III, “it is of the greatest importance in all moral appraisals to attend with utmost exactness to the subjective principle of all maxims, so that all the morality of actions is placed in their necessity *from duty* and from respect for the law” (5: 81). After stating this, Kant continues his argument by contrasting actions done from respect for the law with those done from moral enthusiasm and with “ready fidelity” (5: 84). What is wrong with moral enthusiasm is not merely that an action is done from feeling, or a “spontaneous goodness of heart” (5: 85), and thus not from obligation.³⁰ What is fundamentally wrong with such actions, which are performed out of a love for the moral law and are thus *not* performed

characteristic of an unjustified feeling of rightness, or righteousness, and hence a lack of self-criticism. It therefore has to do primarily with one’s relation to one-self. At most it is an immodest claim to be respected by others (6: 462). But this is different from legislating for them, which, I believe would be just a *consequence* of one’s feeling of infallibility. Thus Kant discusses self-conceit as a form of enthusiasm (5: 85). Wood’s point that self-conceit causes us to soften the perceived demands of morality, although correct, does not then follow from it being the ‘craving to be superior to others’, but from the fact that such self-conceit leads to laxity in the application of the moral law. In addition, I would like to point out a related difference between Reath’s and my own account. Reath 1989, 297, writes that Kant’s view is “that one chooses to act on an incentive of any kind by regarding it as providing a sufficient reason for action, where that is a reason acceptable from the standpoint of others, not just that of the agent”. Yet, Reath does not provide any textual evidence for this. My view is that a sufficient reason for action is one that is acceptable to our own rational self.

³⁰ See Allison 1995, 184.

with respect for the law, is precisely their unreflective *spontaneity*. Such moral enthusiasts are indeed the high-minded people of self-conceit who do not take care to consider their motives for each action according to the moral law.

It is by paying attention to the moral law in each and every one of our moral decisions that our will acts from respect for the law. And indeed, it is no coincidence that the word for respect in German is *Achtung*, which means, “to pay attention”.³¹ This is why Kant writes that conscience is “practical reason holding the human being’s duty before him for his acquittal or condemnation *in every case* that comes under a law” (6: 400, my emphasis). Such attention to the moral law is also humiliating, since it strikes down the self-conceit, which everyone must have to some degree, that they have an intuitive knowledge of the good, or a basic moral sense. Consequently, Kant associates humility with self-knowledge (5: 86). Insofar as we have an interest in our rational self, we will be motivated to follow the moral law. Such a motive, to become the pure rational being which is our inner self, is, of course, moral, since it is not based on anything other than reason. Moreover, it is the motive that is intrinsic to our autonomous self, since, as I have shown, it is the motive proper to the will, and hence not determined by any external cause.³²

IV. Conclusion

It should now be clear that taking literally Kant’s use of terms that refer to force is essential for understanding his theory of moral motivation and what it means to have a good will. But by speaking of force, Kant is not referring to a stronger ‘force’ that the moral law would have to exert against the ‘force’ of the inclinations that push and pull the will. The will is not something that can be moved by an inclination, or by the moral law, in this way. It is instead practical reason, which can take inclinations to be *reasons* for acting. Still, the will can have its own inner strength, to varying degrees of magnitude, depending on the extent to which it can be exercised. The will is strong when it reasons well, that is, when it produces good reasons for why one ought to do something. The will is weak when it hardly tries to come up with reasons at all.

We can now see that Kant’s discussion of respect does not so much provide a theory of a moral feeling *separate* from the use of reason that would account for our

³¹ In fact it was Kant’s discussion of *Achtung* that first gave the word its moral connotations and therefore entitles Kant in the *Metaphysics of Morals* to call the Latin *reverentia*, *Achtung*. See Henrich 1994, 109f.

³² See 4: 446.

inner motivation to follow the law, as to make unnecessary the need for such an account.³³ What a theory of moral sentiment is supposed to do is to show how our motivation to do the right thing is intimately connected with our character and basic feelings that make us want to do what is good. A theory of moral motivation from such a perspective is supposed to answer the question of how *I*, as a particular subject with desires and needs, can be moral. It is my view that Kant's account of respect adequately addresses this opposition to his own view that moral action is based in reason alone. For, Kant, the feelings of respect and humiliation are built into, or 'self-wrought', from the will. Once someone is aware that there is a reason to act other than that of satisfying one's inclinations, one's self-conceit that one's self, as the subject of its desires, is itself good, is humiliated. In its place is the consciousness that one possesses a self that can be the source of pure practical reasons. Therefore, for Kant, the incentive to follow the moral law is none other than our own rational self. The more we pay attention to our reasons for acting, the more we are aware of our own inner worth as a source of reasons.

The respect that the will has for the moral law is therefore a feeling, because it has varying degrees of magnitude. It is also a feeling, since, as the subjective determination of the will to examine our own particular motives, it is intimately our own. It is indeed, our inner sense of self, which is "induced most intensely in its purity by a merely rational representation" (6: 400). Respect for the moral law is also a *necessary* feeling, since it must occur whenever we are conscious of our use of practical reason to produce reasons for actions.

Understanding the will as a force can thus help us to see what moral character is for Kant. The strength of the force of the will is none other than the capacity to question our motives for acting. This strength of will is itself the basis of a virtuous character – no extra moral feelings are necessary. Thus, those who criticize Kant for not having a theory of moral character are wrong, although his distinctive form of moral

³³ In this way, we can understand why Kant lists as the four moral endowments that are the "subjective conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty", 'moral feeling', 'conscience', 'love of one's neighbor', and 'respect' (6: 399). These are the conditions of the actual feeling of respect that acts as an incentive to follow the moral law that is the topic of the analytic of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. They are thus not themselves feelings that motivate us to follow the moral law, but the conditions for the feeling of respect. On my account, all of these conditions are required in order for us to be motivated by respect to follow the moral law. Once we see that this feeling of respect for the law requires the predisposition to feel pleasure or pain (moral feeling) with regard to the conformity of our actions with the moral law, the predisposition to judge ourselves with regard to whether each of our actions conform to duty or not (conscience), the predisposition for love of others, with regard to the limitation of our own self-love, and the predisposition for respect for the law (respect), we can see why these are for Kant the subjective conditions for having an incentive to be moral, that is, for having respect for the moral law. They can be considered to be the necessary conditions for respect for the law. For a comparison of Kant's discussion of moral feeling in both the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*, see Beck 1963, 223f.

character might not be quite what they have in mind. To be virtuous, for Kant, does not entail cultivating any specific character traits that would enable one to be unaffected by incentives presented by inclination. Instead, all that is required is the strength of the will to make a ‘strenuous self-examination’ each time one considers acting; indeed, it is the ability to be always, continually examining oneself, like a force that can overcome all resistance, or a hyper-active form of rationality. It is in this way that we avoid the distance and lack of feeling attributed to the ‘high-minded’ person. For Kant, morality is therefore grounded in the nature of the self and not just in the rightness of an action. This is because every good action requires that the agent think about her own various motives for action. In considering these actions with regard to the moral law, she is thus aware of her own particular character traits. Moreover, the more one is aware of which of one’s own maxims tend to be contrary to the law of practical reason, the easier it will be to not consider them in one’s deliberations. For Kant, then, virtue is thus not something *different* from practical reason; it is just the ability to use it persistently to a very high degree. Kant thus writes that virtue is not a habit acquired by practice. Instead,

unless this aptitude (virtue) results from considered, firm, and *continually purified principles*, then like any other mechanism of technically practical reason, it is neither armed for all situations nor adequately secured against the changes that new temptations could bring about. (4: 383f., my emphasis)

Kant’s Remark to this passage in fact describes virtue as a negative magnitude. He writes, “Virtue = + a is opposed to negative lack of virtue (moral weakness) = 0 as its logical opposite [...]; but is opposed to vice = – a as its real opposite [...] for by strength of soul we mean strength of resolution in a human being” (6: 384). To be virtuous, for Kant, is none other than to be always vigilant in thinking about one’s actions. It is an extreme, rigorous form of rational self-examination that can often lead to humiliation.³⁴ Good character therefore does not consist in the cultivation of

³⁴ Louden 1986, 488, concludes his paper by stating, “More generally, acting from virtue, on Kant’s view, does entail disciplining the emotions through reason so that one comes to want to perform the same external act that reason commands. But again, as Kant warns, there is a risk, for in training the emotions in such a manner it becomes more difficult to assess one’s motives for action. One is perpetually flirting with the possibility that one’s conduct is not autonomously willed but merely a product of heteronomy, but cultivation requires that the risk be taken”. Thus, for Louden, training the emotions to be in accord with reason, so that one *happily* does what is right, runs the risk of making it ambiguous whether one does something *because* it is right or because one wants to do it. On my interpretation of Kant, however, such ambiguity is not a problem. Virtue just is the activity of reason. The emotions, or how one feels about this activity, is a contingent matter. – I would like to thank Henry Allison, Charles Goodman, Jeanine Grenberg, Christopher Kanpp, Steve Scalet, Lisa Tessman, and two anonymous reviewers for valuable comments. An earlier version of this paper was presented at Cornell University. I am grateful to the audience there for helpful discussion.

some special moral sense, but in the active use of practical reason. This is why, Kant writes, morality comes about through a “continual revolution” in the disposition of the human being (6: 47).

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