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Kant on the Sensual and Rational Factors of Human Actions: A Psychological and Transcendental Analysis

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Abstract

The article examines Immanuel Kant's psychological and transcendental analysis of the factors that determine human actions in different ways and with different strengths. Based on the works, in particular, *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, as well as lecture notes and notes of the German philosopher, it was possible to study the interaction between the sensual determination of human actions – stimuli, affects and passions, and the rational determination of human actions-motives, imperatives, and freedom. We investigate how Immanuel Kant preserves the basic meaning of freedom in the interweaving and interaction of various factors that significantly influence human actions.

Key Words: Immanuel Kant, transcendental, dogmatism, critical philosophy, human actions, determination, stimuli, affects, passions, motives, categorical imperative, evil, freedom.



Preliminary

2024 is a special year. For us, of course, it is primarily another year of a terrible, full-scale war imposed on us, Ukrainians, by Russian barbarians. Yes, this war continues, but we believe in our victory, which will surely come, and all our efforts, grief, and suffering will not be in vain.

This year, an extraordinary event will take place – the 300th anniversary of the birth of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). It involves not only the world's philosophical community but also public circles that, although not related to philosophy, understand the scale and significance of Kant's figure, his ideas, and their influence on various intellectual trends of the modern world. It provides an excellent opportunity to revisit Kant's legacy, pay tribute to the brilliant philosopher of the Enlightenment, and answer contemporary questions concerning human existence and the factors that determine our actions. In this context, Kant has something to say for us, the people of the twenty-first century. Moreover, as always, when we immerse ourselves in Kantian philosophy to find answers to essential questions relevant to us, we can be sure that these answers will not be trivial; they will certainly enrich our understanding of cognition, moral duties, freedom, man, and the world. That is because the study of Kant's philosophy always moves us forward; our thinking is changing and moving, so to speak, to a higher intellectual level.

Introduction: purpose and objectives

A characteristic feature of Kant's philosophy is its thematic scope, which has nothing to do with superficially covering various issues without proper study. Kant repeatedly emphasized his interest in studying the factors that determine human actions, especially the basic meaning of freedom, which, for Kant, was the defining property of the human way of being. Man belongs not just to the natural world but also to the intellectual world; he is a free being, i.e., independently determining the grounds for his actions. This understanding of human freedom allowed Kant to create a powerful, practical philosophy where the central place is occupied by the justification of the moral law (categorical imperative) as the basis for a person's free choice of good or evil.

In this context, a problem arises that has not been properly addressed yet: how Kantian philosophy addresses the issue of the relationship between freedom as the defining principle of human existence and other factors that also determine human actions in a certain way: effective causes, incentives, passions, affects, and motives. Therefore, the study aims to discover how these factors affect the human ability to act as a free subject and the moral choice of a person. Their goal defines several tasks: 1) to show the importance and relevance of Kant's analysis of those factors that directly or indirectly influence actions; 2) to find out how (under the conditions of the effectiveness of these factors) freedom retains its basic meaning for a person.

A few words about the sources of the study and the general features of Kant's critical philosophy

It is known that during almost 40 years of his university career (from 1755 to 1796), Kant taught various academic disciplines: scientific (physics, mathematics, physical geography, pedagogy) and philosophical (metaphysics, logic, anthropology, moral philosophy, natural law, and the Encyclopedia of Philosophy [Encyclopedia philosophiae universae]). Since Kant served as a professor of logic and metaphysics, teaching metaphysics naturally occupied a significant place in his academic activities. He lectured on metaphysics (along with logic) for the longest time until the end of his career.

Kant's lectures on metaphysics corresponded to the structure of metaphysics introduced by Christian Wolff (1679–1744) and were taken up by numerous followers. Thus, a university professor of metaphysics (and Kant was no exception) had to lecture on metaphysics, gradually moving from ontology, rational cosmology, and psychology (empirical and rational) to rational theology, represented in Wolffianism. As evidenced by the student lecture notes on metaphysics published in the aforementioned academic collection, Kant generally adhered to this structure. In addition, according to the current official requirements of the Prussian government, teaching should be based on

a textbook, either his own or someone else's. Since Kant did not write textbooks, his metaphysics teaching was based on *Metaphysica* (1757) by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762). This textbook, written in Latin, was repeatedly reprinted, so it had a reputation as a well-written, student-friendly guide to all parts of metaphysics, which was used by many university professors of the time. It should be noted that Baumgarten was a well-known, respected representative of the *Leibniz-Wolfe school*, or, as it was also called, *Schulphilosophie*, in academic circles of the time.¹ In Kant's time, that philosophical school was very influential and widespread in the academic environment of Germany and beyond. Interestingly, the textbooks of this school's representatives were used to teach philosophical disciplines at the Kyiv Academy from the middle of the 18th century until its closure in 1817. After the opening of a new educational institution, the Kyiv Theological Academy, in 1819, philosophical disciplines continued to be taught using Wolffian textbooks, though only for a short time, until the early 1830s. As we can see, the influence of the Wolffians remained in the academic environment, especially outside of Germany, even after new philosophical doctrines appeared and spread, particularly the systems of German idealism. Of course, this testified to the didactic attractiveness of Wolffian rationalism for secular universities, theological educational institutions, and Orthodox institutions, which also used textbooks by representatives of this philosophical school, despite the fact that Wolffism had a Protestant orientation. This is significant because it testifies to the considerable potential of classical rationalism, of which Wolfean philosophy was a worthy representative. The attractive aspect of this philosophy was the framework that even God was considered a subject of rational theology, not Revelation theology; that is, God held the position of the Supreme Being, about whom it is quite possible to apply rational methods of analyzing his nature, in particular, arguments about his existence. Kant considered such claims of rational theology providers unfounded; the critical method allowed Kant to argue his disagreement with the encroachments of metaphysics on the knowledge of transcendent objects.

In his lectures, Kant followed the structure and subject of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*. The lectures were a commentary for the students on what was written in this textbook. However, the lectures reflected not the Wolffian position, but the position of the new, transcendental philosophy created by Kant, which found its embodiment in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). It is well known that this work brought the author worldwide fame over time. In this treatise, Wolffianism received the definition of dogmatic philosophizing, which Kant challenged by creating a critical philosophy that appeared in the form of transcendental idealism. Concluding the *Critique of Pure Reason*, summing up, Kant clearly defined the place of his critical philosophy in contemporary philosophical discourse: "Now, as far as the observers of

1 Incidentally, Wolff's influence is evidenced by the activities of the recently founded "Christian-Wolff-Gesellschaft für die Philosophie der Aufklärung," headed by the famous German philosopher Heiner F. Klemme (Martin-Luther- Universität Halle-Wittenberg).

a scientific method are concerned, they have here the choice of proceeding either dogmatically or skeptically, but in either case, they have the obligation of proceeding systematically. If I hear name with regard to the former, the famous Wolff, and with regard to the latter, David Hume, then for my present purposes, I can leave the others unnamed.”² As we can see, for Kant, philosophizing and its various directions differ from each other in methods and methodology, not in the subject area. Therefore, as opposed to the skeptical and dogmatic methods of philosophizing that were relevant at that time, Kant proposes a new method, the critical method, the development of which is the subject of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant writes about this new way, this new method of philosophy, clearly and concisely: “The critical path alone is still open.”³

Critical philosophy, created by Kant, was intended to investigate the conditions for the possibility of knowledge, not to deal with the objects of knowledge themselves, especially if they are transcendent objects. These are the subjects that metaphysics has been interested in throughout its history: the world as a whole, the soul and its immortality, God, and freedom. In one of his notes on the relationship between metaphysics and Kant’s critical, transcendental philosophy, the following is noted: “Metaphysica est philosophia intellectus puri et transscendentalis est Critica intellectus puri.”⁴ Kant emphasizes that metaphysics is the philosophy of pure intellect, and transcendental philosophy is the critique of this intellect – this is a clear formula of Kantian philosophy.

According to this philosophy, these objects cannot be part of any possible experience, and therefore, metaphysical cognition cannot claim the status of science. Kant accused the Wolffians of engaging in the cognition of these objects without a proper study of the tools of cognition and their cognitive capacities. They are involved in the cognition of these subjects, claiming the apodictic status of their cognition. For Kant, such claims are not properly substantiated. Kant emphasizes this feature of metaphysics as a transcendental doctrine: “There is no transcendental doctrine; hence, the organon of pure reason is a science which shows the use of pure reason regarding the empirical in general; hence, all philosophy of pure reason is either the critique or the organon of it. The first is transcendental philosophy; the second is metaphysics.”⁵ Thus, Kant knows that the central place in his transcendental philosophy is occupied by its method – the organon, the tool of knowledge. Kant himself wrote about the *Critics of Pure Reason* as a teaching about method, considering this to be his greatest achievement, and as for the doctrine, it still needs to be created.

Therefore, Kant calls on everyone to join in the transformation of this new, critical method from the small path he trod (modestly assessing his efforts) into the main road of philosophy if it wants to become a science. Kant notes: “If the reader has

2 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 704.

3 Ibid.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften* herausgegeben von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. XVIII, “*Handschriftlicher Nachlaß: Metaphysik (II)*” (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1928), 22.

5 Ibid., 22.

had pleasure and patience in traveling along in my company, then he can now judge if it pleases him to contribute his part to making this footpath into a highway, whether or not that which many centuries could not accomplish might not be attained even before the end of the present one: namely, to bring human reason to full satisfaction in that which has always, but until now vainly, occupied its lust for knowledge.”⁶

The critical method involves a skillful combination of the study of the a priori conditions of possibility of the objects of knowledge with the analytical disclosure of the elements of which they consist of. The analysis requires the following synthetic thought movement to systematize the results. In *Prolegomena*, Kant notes: “The analytic method, insofar as it is opposed to the synthetic, is something completely different from a collection of analytic propositions; it signifies only that one proceeds from that which is sought as if it were given, and ascends to the conditions under which alone it is possible.”⁷ Kant considers it possible to call the analytical method regressive in contrast to the synthetic method, which resembles a progressive movement of thought since there is a systematic combination of the analysis results. In addition, the analytical method is also essential because it makes it possible to separate old philosophical principles from new ones, that is, to prevent unnecessary mixing of the two. In particular, for critical philosophy, it is vital not to mix the old metaphysical intentions to ascend to the supersensible transcendental sphere with the new Kantian approaches, which imply the theoretical limitations of such intentions and their justification only in a practical, moral sense. Kant notes: “The ultimate intention of all metaphysics is to ascend from the cognition of the sensible to that of the supersensible. The *Critique of Pure Reason* now proves that this is never done with a theoretical but with a moral and practical intention.”⁸

Kant demonstrated this ability to combine analytics with synthetic movements of thought throughout his creative life, as evidenced by his fundamental works, the famous *Three Critiques*, as well as articles, numerous notes, and lecture materials, including student notes, which fortunately have been preserved and have been published over the past few decades and have become the property of the world philosophical community.

Kant’s critical philosophy has become the basis for lectures in various philosophical disciplines. The importance of these lectures lies in the fact that we can find analytical studies of certain topics that Kant did not pay enough attention to in his published works. This is due to the peculiarities of Kant’s philosophical style, a method of analysis that did not involve considering those issues that may be important or interesting and could distract from the main direction of the research. Kant always focused his attention on questions, the analysis of which corresponded to the research

6 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 704.

7 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will be Able to Come Forward as Science with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. and ed. by Gary Hatfield (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28.

8 Kant, “*Handschriftlicher Nachlaß. Metaphysik (II)*,” 667.

plan; it was on them that he focused and studied thoroughly. Kant believed that a specific “all-encompassing” style of thinking hinders, rather than helps, the analysis of the outlined issues. Therefore, the factors of human actions that are the subject of our study are the ones Kant considered in his significant, published works only in passing.

Nevertheless, this topic was reflected in his lectures on metaphysics, especially in those parts of the lectures that dealt with empirical and rational psychology. These parts of the lectures on metaphysics, or rather, the student notes of the lectures that Kant taught for a long time at the University of Königsberg (Albertus-Universität Königsberg), will be the focus of our attention. Of course, we will also refer to other sources in which the subject of our research is represented in a certain way – for example, Kant’s *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, as well as his *Critiques* and other works.

Sensory factors of determination: stimuli, affects, and passions

In his lectures on psychology, Kant starts by understanding life as the internal capacity of a being for self-movement. In addition, living beings can have certain sense perceptions; of course, these perceptions are simple, even primitive. However, according to Kant, their presence is a necessary condition for the existence of living beings. That leads to the fact that living beings have internal states, a sense of satisfaction from life or not satisfaction, which is associated with those obstacles that living beings have to overcome. This relationship between life’s obstacles and the feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction has also applied to such a complex living being as a human being. However, this is not enough because, according to Kant, men also have higher living standards: “Life is threefold: 1) the animal, 2) the human, and 3) the spiritual life (das geistige Leben). There is, therefore, a threefold pleasure. Animal pleasure consists of the feeling of the private senses. Human pleasure is the feeling according to the general sense, using the sensual power of judgment; it is a middle thing recognized through sensuality. Spiritual pleasure is ideal and is recognized from pure concepts of the intellect.”⁹ As a complex being, man is capable not only of feeling, enjoying, or disliking life and overcoming difficulties but also of enjoying certain things, and such enjoyment can be diverse, including aesthetic pleasure. Kant distinguishes between the feeling of pleasure and both subjective and objective aspects since the former is associated with an individual’s attitude towards things based on one’s preferences. At the same time, the latter is objective, based on some more or less general rules others can follow. No less important for a person are their desires, which, unlike pleasure, are aimed at human action; they fuel and motivate action based on the idea of a desired thing that does not yet exist but may appear. Kant emphasizes the dependence of desire on ideas, whether pleasant or not, but which lead to actions and

9 Immanuel Kant, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften* herausgegeben von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. XXVIII, “*Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie*” (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1968), 248.

deeds. Desires are effective, Kant emphasized, but at the same time, he made one clarification: we can desire passively, without doing anything to realize our desire. Kant emphasizes one of the peculiarities of our desire: “The faculty of desire should, therefore, be active and consistent in action. However, our faculty of desire goes even further; we desire even without being active, without acting; this is an inactive desire or longing, where one desires something without being able to obtain it.”¹⁰

In his lectures, Kant also draws attention to the division of desires into sensual and intellectual ones: “The very act of the soul by which the imagination seeks to attain the reality of its object is desire and craving, the sensual and intellectual motives or reasons for movement.”¹¹ At the same time, Kant distinguishes between desires that are fulfillable and those that are impossible to fulfill. A person is aware of this: “There are, indeed, two kinds of appetites: an appetitio practica, i. e., the imagination of the possibility of making it real, hence an appetite according to which the imagination is so qualified that the object can become real, and an appetitio minus practica, which is called a wish, optare, an appetite connected with the consciousness that it is not in our power to be able really to produce the object.”¹² Thanks to these different modalities of desires (*facultas appetendi vel aversandi objectum*), they can be both ambivalent and cease to be valid in the event of a change in a person’s attitude towards the object of their desire.

However, a person retains an active desire that motivates actions, forcing a person to act in a certain way rather than dreaming about some desired benefits. A desire that acts based on an idea of the desired object, relying on free choice (or based on free choice (*arbitrium liberum*)) is the will. This choice fundamentally distinguishes human actions from animal behavior. Thus, it is the will, according to Kant, that rejects hesitation and doubt and directs a person to the realization of a desire, the achievement of the goal. For Kant, the will unfolds based on impulsive causes, which are not something homogeneous because, according to Kant, they have a specific structure, namely, they are sensual or intellectual.

Interestingly, Kant defines sensual motives as pathological, while rational motives are practical, although sometimes they can also be pathological. In his lectures on moral philosophy, he emphasizes: “All coercion is either pathological or practical. Pathological compulsion is the necessity of an action per stimulus. Practical compulsion is the necessity of an action that is reluctant to take place per motiva.”¹³ It is worth explaining such a strange distinction of Kant’s. The fact is that for Kant, everything that does not meet the requirements of the moral imperative, of course, has the right

10 Ibid., 254.

11 Immanuel Kant, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften* herausgegeben von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. XXIX, “*Kleinere Vorlesungen und Ergänzungen*” (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1983), 1013.

12 Kant, “*Kleinere Vorlesungen und Ergänzungen*,” 1013.

13 Immanuel Kant, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften* herausgegeben von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bd. XXVII, “*Vorlesungen über Moralphilosophie*” (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1974), 267.

to exist because it is a vast expanse of bodily, sensual existence of person, which in many cases has a decisive anthropological significance. Kant turned to this empirical anthropology in his studies and articles; the German philosopher discussed this aspect of human nature during lectures on physical geography and anthropology. The fact is that Kant considers empirical, the “sensual nature” of a person from the point of view of the moral law, the categorical imperative. It is precisely in this comparison of sensuality, its determination of human actions with rational principles of morality, that such designation of sensual influence on actions as pathological is hidden since Kant does not consider such influence as morally acceptable, therefore as a certain deviation from the moral status of a person as an autonomous being. Thus, such a distinction should be understood in a moral plane, not a psychological one, as a specific deviation from the norm or a particular psychiatric pathology. For Kant, it was evident that everything that does not meet the requirements of practical reason in its two forms – moral and legal – is pathological. At the same time, he perfectly understood the power and influence of sensual factors in human actions and carefully analyzed them in psychology lectures and his writings and notes. Kant remembered to remind us about this dependence while pointing out the need to be guided by the requirements of practical reason.

Therefore, sensual causes are pathological. Sensual causes are the actual stimuli and urges, which are effective causes that push us to do specific actions. Stimuli do not focus on cognition, understanding what is needed, but on an “urge,” an impulse that depends on the stimulation of our sensory receptors. When our will depends on sensuality, stimuli that are something inexorable, a kind of necessary force (*vim necessitantem*) that appears as the driving force (*vim impellentem*) of some act or action. Kant notes that in this case our actions depend on sensuality, its necessary force, which stimulates us, prompts us to respond to external factors and move in a certain direction. Under such conditions, our actions are not so much different from animal (*brutum*) behavior. At the same time, Kant distinguishes human sensory stimuli from purely animal ones; even though there is a commonality between them, and this animal aspect is necessary for humans, it cannot be rejected: “The *arbitrium sensitivum* may well be *liberum*, but not the *brutum*. The *arbitrium sensitivum liberum* is only affected or *impellit* by the *stimulis*, but the *brutum* is necessitated. Thus, man has a free will; everything that springs from his will springs from a free will.”¹⁴ According to Kant, man always acts as a volitional, free being. This means that human choice, based on sensibility, differs from animal sensuality, which acts based on stimulation by external causes. In an animal, instincts determine its behavior as reactions to external stimuli. According to Kant, instincts can be either instincts of attraction or aversion. In this dimension, they are inherent in humans, in their sensory sphere, which makes possible an “automatic” (without reflection) human response to stimuli of the environment. In humans, instincts act purely reactively, as in animals, demonstrating man’s dependence on his bodily constitution and the external environment, which, in

14 Kant, “*Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie*,” 255.

the case of instincts, plays the role of stimuli, under which a person reacts sensually, not rationally. However, as Kant noted, human instincts are still somewhat different from those of animals – they are dark perceptions (*dunkeln Vorstellungen*). In his lectures on psychology, Kant repeatedly pointed out that a person cannot completely reject instincts, even if they pull him in the direction of the animal way of existence, and this is due to the bodily constitution of man, his sensuality, which is an anthropological fact outside of which (corporeality and sensuality), man cannot exist, nor can he radically change his anthropology, “remake” it into some other being, with a different nature.

Kant does not stop at the study of instincts; he is interested in affects (*affecten*) and passions (*leidenschaften*) as effective factors of human behavior. Regarding the affects and passions, Kant notes that they are not special behavior factors but characterize the intensity of those sensory impulses that influence human actions. Affects are closely related to the sensory states with the strength, intensity, and duration of these states, while passions demonstrate their connection with human desires. Accordingly, a person is excited by affects (*afficirt*), and external factors, reacting to this excitement with a certain intensity, while passions take a person by surprise, often unexpectedly. The person finds himself in a whirlwind of uncontrollable emotional states that prevent him from understanding what happened, why it happened, and why exalted emotions carry them away. Kant characterizes passions as a force that deprives a person of the ability to evaluate a situation critically and, therefore, the ability to act reasonably because the object of passion keeps a person firmly dependent on it, and the person does not even desire to get rid of it. Kant emphasizes that such dependence demonstrates a passion for the object of passion; it dictates to a person the attitude not only to this object but also to other things and people. Passion limits the possibilities of human perception of the world and distorts self-esteem.

Such a close analysis of passions and affects was determined not only by the fact that these concepts were part of Baumgarten’s textbook, which, as noted above, taught all parts of metaphysics, including psychology, but also by a specific philosophical tradition, in particular, the rationalism of Descartes and Spinoza, which investigated the factors that prevented the discovery of apparent truths of reason. For example, Spinoza viewed passions and affects as necessary factors of human nature, which we cannot dismiss as something insignificant. According to Spinoza, passions are inherent in man as a being limited by his bodily constitution. His classification of affects and passions is interesting, dividing them into passive and active, where the former visualize human suffering, and the latter, effective affects, characterize man as a positive being. These affects include courage, nobility, mutual assistance, etc.

Kant gave affects and passions a slightly different meaning; for him, they negatively impact the human perception of the world and other people and significantly limit human freedom. What Spinoza defined as positive affects in Kant has a different conceptual connotation since courage and nobility are not affects, but moral virtues. Of course, virtues have a certain emotional component (not affective, but emotional),

but their status is fundamentally different – moral and rational. Moreover, according to Kant, virtues are not self-sufficient since it is quite possible to imagine a brave and noble person who violates the general requirements of the moral law, replacing it with illusory notions of bravery, nobility, etc. Only when these virtues meet universal moral requirements can they be evaluated positively; otherwise, their moral value is highly questionable.

As for affects and passions, Kant is convinced that they have, in many cases, an irresistible force with which a person can fight, but it is extremely difficult. In this aspect, the German philosopher distinguishes the influence of affects and passions on human freedom. Yes, when it comes to affects, we must consider that affects act on freedom by strengthening those sensual stimuli that push a person to heteronomous actions, depriving a person of the ability to act freely since freedom and free actions require an autonomous mode of human existence. Affects prevent a person from acting freely and distort the ratio of factors of behavior and free choice. As for passions, the situation is somewhat different: passions do not just impede freedom; they can overcome it to subordinate to passions that “capture” a person and turn him into a slave of his passions. Passions can control human behavior for a long time, influencing consciousness and will. Often, a person cannot eliminate this dependence or does not want to.

A person as a free being (*arbitrium humanum*) is to a greater extent characterized by the efficient reasons for his actions, which arise on the basis of knowledge and awareness of what he needs and by what ways and means this can be achieved. It is the sphere of practical action, not the sphere of external causes or stimuli determined by sensual preferences and emotional states, which are also significantly dependent on external causes.

Rational factors of determination: motives, interests, moral imperative, evil, and freedom

Human dependence on sensual states and influences turns him into a receptive being, unable to act practically, that is, based on moral law and free choice. In this regard, Kant notes: “Only that *arbitrium* which is not conditioned at all and is not motivated by any incentive at all but is determined by motives, by the principles of reason, is *liberum arbitrium* intellectuale or transcendental.”¹⁵

Another situation with intellectual factors is motives or principles (*Motive oder Bewegungsgründe*). Motives are made possible by the act of cognition of what a person lacks, what is lacking (good, kindness, sincerity, wealth, etc.), and thus what a person needs. The need is closely related to this lack; it (need) is its realization, and at the same time, it is the basis for the motive for the future of the action that is supposed to end this lack. Thus, the motive is a realized need. In fact, the motive is the basis of the

15 Kant, “*Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie*,” 255.

movement that must be made to fulfill the need. Awareness alone is not enough because this movement toward a goal that is determined by the motive (the latter always includes the goal) can only be realized when it is based on the will, its strength, its ability to subordinate the subjective forces to achieve the goal, i.e., the realization of the motive. This process of realizing the motive also requires desire because the will is closely intertwined with desire as a sensual (a lower level of will, but an important one) and rational desire (the highest level). In many of his lectures and notes, Kant did not forget to remind us about the connection between motives, reflexive awareness of the desired good, and the will of this connection.

However, motives have another connection: they are intertwined with interests, as Kant wrote about in his works. For example, in the work *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, the German philosopher writes the following about the connection between interest and reason: “An interest is that by which reason becomes practical, i.e., becomes a cause determining the will. Hence only of a rational being does one say that he takes an interest in something; nonrational creatures feel only sensible impulses.”¹⁶ However, interest seems “embedded” in the mind, giving it a practical direction. Without interest, it is impossible to motivate actions since it is interest (rational or empirical) that orients motives and gives them stability and duration. When interest in something disappears, the motives lose their power; thus, a person loses the necessary basis for his or her actions. Kant emphasizes that even the realization of the moral law requires interest, which should not replace the law. Still, interest serves as a certain moral attitude, a moral feeling for the law, and its subjective perception. Kant notes the connection between practical reason and moral feeling: “The subjective impossibility of explaining the freedom of the will is the same as the impossibility of discovering and making comprehensible an interest which the human being can take in moral laws; and yet he does really take an interest in them, the foundation of which in us we call moral feeling, which some have falsely given out as the standard for our moral appraisal whereas it must rather be regarded as the subjective effect that the law exercises on the will, to which reason alone delivers the objective grounds.”¹⁷ However, it is not the interest that determines the law; it is not our subjectivity, its attunement to the moral law that makes its effectiveness possible, but rather, we feel interested in the law because it has unconditional force for us, people: “This much only is certain: it is not because the law interests us that it has validity for us..., instead, the law interests because it is valid for us as human beings.”¹⁸

In addition, Kant draws attention to the fact that motive and interest are grounds for a moral (or non-moral) act belonging to a finite rational being. Such a being is forced to appeal to interest and motive to fulfill moral imperative as a sufficient basis for its will. In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, the German philosopher emphasizes the

16 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, transl. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 63.

17 Ibid., 63-4.

18 Ibid., 63.

important connection between interests and human finitude: “On the concept of an interest is based that of a maxim. A maxim is therefore morally genuine only if it rests solely on the interest one takes in compliance with the law. All three concepts, however – that of an incentive, of an interest, and of a maxim – can be applied only to finite beings. For they all presuppose a limitation of the nature of a being, in that the subjective constitution of its choice does not of itself accord with the objective law of a practical reason; they presuppose a need to be impelled to activity by something because an internal obstacle is opposed to it.”¹⁹

Transcendental motives are related to those a priori motivating (*Bewegungsgrund*) of free choice, which acts as “permanent” prerequisites of actions, provided that a person consciously chooses *liberum arbitrium intellectuale*. Kant defines such permanent transcendental motives, motivating principles, as objective, and they do not contradict freedom since they are the property of reason, its prescriptions, imperatives that enable free choice and do not depend on sensuality, emotional states of a person, his or her affects, and passions.

In his lectures on moral philosophy, Kant draws attention to one remarkable circumstance: if our actions are influenced by sensuality, provided that this influence is not total but is limited by the authority of practical reason and its imperatives, then this is evidence of our freedom, not its absence. Kant formulated this quite clearly: “Consequently, he who is compelled by reason to act is compelled to act without contradicting freedom. We do the actions unwillingly but we do them because they are good.”²⁰ At the same time, Kant recognises that a person can act both morally and immorally and act, so to speak, unwillingly, under the pressure of various external circumstances, but what is essential, Kant notes, is how he acts and what kind of act he manifests. Often, a person acts morally while subjectively not wanting to act this way, not perceiving a categorical imperative as an unconditional basis for action. In this case, the act’s morality exceeds the person’s insufficiently strong ethical beliefs and desires. In the lectures, Kant admits this possibility. However, it somewhat weakens his well-known thesis that an act can be considered morally justified if a person fulfills two conditions: 1) it is based on an objective, self-sufficient moral imperative, regardless of any additional circumstances of it?; 2) this imperative must be represented as a moral way of thinking of person, i.e., it must be determinative for the person. The imperative must be a sufficient basis for the free choice of the good and the rejection of the evil, regardless of the possible utilitarian benefits of non-moral actions.

In the case of a non-moral act, the situation is fundamentally different – it is impossible to justify such an act, both formally (a person rejects the moral law) and in terms of the content of the act (because a non-moral, shameful act brings evil into the world). Kant did not view it as possible to consider various sophisms, such as the moral turning into the non-moral or universal moral imperatives being local and therefore

19 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, transl. and ed. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 66.

20 Kant, “*Vorlesungen über Moralphilosophie*,” 268.

relative, and not having a universal meaning, etc. These well-known Hegelian dialectical *Kunststück*, as outlined in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, are not peculiar to Kant since the creator of transcendental philosophy was aware of the falsity of such sophisms, which, despite their illusory nature, could confuse and undermine the moral foundations of human existence. It should be noted, however, that Hegel's sophisms have nothing to do with the transcendental foundations of the moral imperative and its universality, which, incidentally, also includes the autonomy of the subject of a moral act. As Susan Shell a contemporary researcher of Kantian philosophy, emphasizes, autonomy is a defining feature of the moral person, its basic structure, based on which a person makes his or her own choices: "For Kant, autonomy is not just a synonym for the capacity to choose, whether simple or deliberative. It is what the word literally implies: the imposition of a law on one's own authority and out of one's own (rational) resources."²¹ According to the American researcher, Kant's notion of autonomy is important for modern liberalism, the understanding that freedom is based on a moral objective principle and is inherent in any person: "Kantian autonomy ennobles liberal concepts of freedom and equality by grounding them in an objective moral principle – a principle that is deemed to be accessible to all ordinary human beings based on reason alone, and that does not depend on a particular religious dispensation or the blind acceptance of authority."²² Thanks to autonomy, each person can independently determine the rules (maxims) for his or her actions, make free choices and bear responsibility for them. According to Kant, the lack of autonomy and the dominance of heteronomy significantly limit freedom and deprive a person of the status of a moral subject.

In his lectures on moral philosophy, Kant always emphasized the universalist dimensions of the moral law and, thus, the particular modality of the subject, which must be guided by it as a command, the instruction of practical reason. Moreover, this being must be an autonomous subject and not heteronomous.

It should be noted that Kant associated philosophy teaching with several goals: 1) to prepare students for independent philosophizing, as he often said in his lectures on various philosophical disciplines; 2) to teach students moral philosophy; Kant tried to argue philosophically and show the authenticity of the moral law and its unconditional importance for "every being" (*jedem Wesen*). This means that despite all the possible differences with humans, other rational beings, in their actions, must be guided by a categorical imperative, the moral law. This requirement is fundamental to Kant's moral philosophy and must be considered by every researcher.

Regarding the universal dimension of moral philosophy, its necessity for man and every rational being, Kant remarked: "For the purpose of achieving this it is of the utmost importance to take warning that we must not let ourselves think of wanting to derive the reality of this principle from the special property of human nature. For, duty is to be practical unconditional necessity of action, and it must therefore hold for all

21 Susan Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 2.

22 *Ibid.*

rational beings (to which alone an imperative can apply at all) and only because of this be also a law for all human wills.”²³

The free choice of transcendental motives (principles) requires a conscious rejection of all those factors directly or indirectly related to sensory impulses, stimuli that tend to heteronomy. This involves the subordination of sensuality to the transcendental (a priori) principles of practical reason (moral and legal) as the basis of the will, based on which a person acts, acts as a free being.

Kant hypothetically discusses beings who are devoid of sensory impulses, drawing attention to the question of how we might evaluate the freedom of these beings. Can we, as human beings, be aware of freedom beyond the realm of sensuality? Kant is convinced that “we cannot appreciate their freedom because we have no yardstick for this, for our yardstick for appreciating freedom is taken from sensual impulses.”²⁴ As we can see, Kant clearly expresses that only in comparison with sensuality does a person have a demarcation of freedom and non-freedom, and thus a certain standard of freedom, as well as the possibility to conceive of freedom as independent of sensuality. In conclusion to this interesting conceptual reflection, Kant notes, “The highest freedom of all would therefore be where freedom is completely independent of all stimuli.”²⁵ At the same time, he realizes that, on the one hand, this is the prerogative of the Supreme Being; on the other hand, it corresponds to a certain extent to “human nature” but not empirical, but noumenal, transcendental nature. Empirical nature is subject to natural laws – external (physical, biological) and internal (physiological, mental), which makes freedom as a natural phenomenon impossible. In the realm of nature, there are causal laws laid down by human reason, generalizing, based on categories, schemes and analogies of experience, the material of sensory contemplation. The latter occurs in subjective a priori forms of space and time. Thus, the laws of nature are related to transcendental subjectivity; as beings related to this subjectivity, we do not discover the laws of nature but constitute them with the help of reason based on experience.

To fully realize freedom, that is, to act based on transcendental subjectivity, it is necessary to make considerable efforts, first, to overcome the influence of sensual impulses – stimuli, affects and passions, which, under certain conditions, direct the will to base actions, rejecting the requirements of transcendental (moral) motives of actions.

On the other hand, Kant did not believe that a person can completely overcome these sensual stimuli, even at the level of orientation to rational, moral principles of actions. Of course, this is desirable but hardly possible. Therefore, in his lectures, when explaining to his students the complex interaction of rational principles with sensory stimuli, Kant spoke clearly on this issue: “Reasonable volition is again *vel purum vel affectum*, depending on whether no stimuli concur in volition as contributing

23 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 34.

24 Kant, “*Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie*,” 256.

25 Ibid.

causes, or whether such sensory impulses simultaneously affect the mind and determine it to act. In appearance, however, human volition can never be assumed to be determined without being affected by stimuli, and just as little can it be determined by stimuli alone.”²⁶

In the Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Kant again returns to the relationship between sensuality and freedom and formulates it in the form of a clear formula: “The greater my capacity for freedom, the freer my freedom from stimuli, the freer Man is.”²⁷ In these lectures, Kant reminds his students that a person has to make considerable efforts to overcome sensual impulses, doubts and, perhaps, disagreement with the requirements of the categorical imperative. However, it is worth it, the German philosopher emphasizes, because this internal struggle allows a person to emerge as an autonomous moral person capable of overcoming external causes and internal obstacles, various impulses, passions, and affects: “Our yardstick for determining the extent of freedom is therefore based on the degree to which the sensual drives are outweighed.”²⁸ Thus, freedom’s fullness and effectiveness are inversely related to sensuality and directly to the power of influence of practical reason. Kant understood that a person cannot completely get rid of dependence, especially if we take into account (and this should be done, although the analysis of this issue requires further research) the inherent evil of human nature, radical evil, which Kant wrote about in his writings and lectures, and which was of fundamental importance for his moral philosophy.²⁹ We can say that the inclination to radical evil is one of the modalities of practical pathological Kant spoke about in his lectures on moral philosophy, which, however, is defined by motive as a compulsion to a desired action, a person’s quite conscious choice of an “evil maxim” for his or her unworthy “maxim” for his unworthy act. Kant emphasizes that a person guided by practical reason must triumph over the dominance of sensual stimuli and the human tendency to evil. In other words, by relying on practical reason, a person must overcome dependence on two pathological states – total dependence on sensual impulses and a tendency to evil. Man chooses evil not based on reason but based on sensual, affective states and as his free, rational decision; evil is a compulsion that is chosen. Kant saw this as the “secret” of evil. Therefore, it is not appropriate to consider evil as an external diabolical force incorporated into the world that influences people to commit shameful acts. Evil is a function of our freedom, our free choice, not external influences.

Thus, a person who relies on practical reason can overcome both sensual and practical pathology and direct his will to the moral law as a sufficient basis for a proper, morally significant act. Obviously, such should be the actions of every rational being – the German philosopher’s unconditional conclusion of the German philosopher.

26 Kant, “*Kleinere Vorlesungen und Ergänzungen*,” 1015.

27 Kant, “*Vorlesungen über Moralphilosophie*,” 270.

28 Kant, “*Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie*,” 256.

29 The significance of radical evil for Kant’s moral philosophy is explored in our book. See: V. Kozlovskyi, *Kantova antropohiia: Dzherela. Konsteliatsii. Modeli* (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2023).

Kant is quite sure that free choice based on intellectual (transcendental) motives is made possible by freedom, which, according to the German philosopher's notes, is absolute freedom (*libertas absoluta*), or moral freedom. Transcendental motives address the human being as an autonomous person; they serve as principles, i. e., general and necessary imperatives that make the moral modality of actions possible. These transcendental practical principles relate to actions, not to knowledge. Kant always emphasized the autonomy of practical reason as the sphere of the proper, imperatives, and norms based on which a person acts, while theoretical reason makes it possible to know theoretical knowledge, even if it is well-grounded, repeatedly tested, and successfully applied in the technological process, does not provide us with reliable grounds for moral choice, imperatives for the moral choice between good and evil. For Kant, this is the most important choice we have to make all the time throughout our lives. This choice ends with the death of a person.

Conclusions

A Kantian analysis of the factors that determine human actions has clarified several issues that have deepened our understanding of the relationship between different modalities of determination and freedom in critical philosophy. In lectures on metaphysics, psychology, moral philosophy, works "Critique of Pure Reason," "Grounds of the Metaphysics of Morals," "Critique of Practical Reason" and others, the German philosopher was able to explore the factors that have different influences on the free choice of the moral law as the basis of correct, morally justified actions. Kant distinguished between sensual and rational factors of determination. The sensual ones included stimuli, affects, and passions, and the rational ones included various modes of motives, the moral imperative, and freedom. The analysis has shown that Kant's position, especially in his lectures on psychology and moral philosophy, was expressed in an attempt not to reject sensory factors as morally unacceptable, but to carefully and attentively clarify the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which sensory factors interact with rational ones. At the same time, it shows how Kant manages to preserve the essential meaning of freedom, thanks to which a person makes a free choice between good and evil.

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