Kant’s theory of moral motivation is notoriously controversial. Indeed, few areas of Kant scholarship have drawn as much attention or prompted as much disagreement. Kant himself was so confounded by the issue of how the moral law can provide an incentive that moves the will to action that he refers to this problem as the “philosophers’ stone” (LE 27:1428). Unfortunately, Kant’s perplexity ultimately translates into an unusually elusive theory of moral motivation. As a result, the list of scholars who have presented divergent, often mutually exclusive interpretations of Kant’s account of moral motivation is long and distinguished.¹ In this study, I want to contribute to the debate over how Kant thinks we are moved to act morally by approaching the issue in a new and, I argue, wholly enlightening way.

The problem that is perhaps central to this debate is as follows: how can Kant account for moral motivation while divorcing the basis of morality from the pathological, and therefore motivational, side of human agents?² To put this pivotal question another way: if Kant thinks that morality is not grounded in our sensuous and affective natures (as the British moral sense theorists suggest), then how does he think we are moved by moral considerations at all? Kant (notoriously) introduces the concept of respect (Achtung) as an answer to this question. On the face of it, his solution seems to be that respect is a moral feeling, and, as such, bridges the gap between the moral law and the capacity of humans—as sensuously affected beings—to be motivated. But, to get to the heart of the matter, it has proven extremely difficult for readers of Kant to grasp the precise nature and function of this bridging feeling of respect.
In what follows I will not rehearse the scholarly debate that has surrounded this particular issue in any great detail; this has been adequately done elsewhere. In the most general terms, then, the central disagreement in the secondary literature is over whether respect as a feeling is the actual motive to moral action. Most commentators argue that, in fact, respect is only a moral motive insofar as it has a nonfeeling dimension. There are numerous variations on this position, but the basic view is that Kantian respect involves a recognition or consciousness of the moral law, and that it is this recognition that actually motivates moral choice. Now, there is evidence supporting the identification of respect with a kind of consciousness in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, when Kant writes, “The direct determination of the will by law and the consciousness of this determination is respect” (G 4:401n). Furthermore, Kant’s well-known insistence that moral actions are performed purely for the sake of, or from, duty seems to be linked to this cognitive characterization of respect. In insisting that moral actions are done for the sake of duty, Kant appears to be indicating that the mere thought or recognition of our duty can motivate moral action. Finally, this interpretation is also supported by passages such as the following: “If the determination of the will occurs in accordance with the moral law but only by means of a feeling of any kind whatsoever, which must be presupposed in order that the law may become a determining ground of the will, and if the action thus occurs not for the sake of the law, it has legality but not morality” (Pr. R 5:72). This passage seems to make it clear that, for Kant, even if moral motivation involves the feeling of respect, this feeling cannot do the actual motivating in any given moral action. If it does, then this action is not properly moral.

According to the primary alternative to this interpretation—an alternative that I will ultimately defend—Kant’s moral feeling of respect can and does motivate moral action. This understanding of respect is consistent with Kant’s claim that a moral action is done for the sake of duty, and not from feeling, so long as the latter is taken to mean pathological feeling. A pathological feeling is one that is caused by our susceptibility to sensible objects. A nonpathological feeling is one that is caused independently of our sensible susceptibility to objects. Thus, when Kant says that we cannot be morally moved by a feeling of any kind, he means a pathological feeling of any kind, and is primarily referring to the notion
of a moral sense or feeling proposed by Hutcheson, Shaftesbury, and Hume (against whom Kant’s Critical ethics is to a large extent formed). One central virtue of this interpretation of Kant’s notion of respect (as an effective nonpathological feeling) is that it, too, is supported by quite a bit of textual evidence. For example, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant says of the moral law that it “has an influence on the sensibility of the subject and effects a feeling which promotes the influence of the law on the will” (Pr. R 5:75). The implication here is that the moral feeling of respect is a mediating force between the moral law and the human will. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes that in a moral person “feelings arising from sensible impressions lose their influence on moral feeling only because respect for the law is more powerful [mächtiger] than all such feelings together” (MM 6:408). But if respect does not move us as a moral feeling, then in what sense is it “more powerful” than feelings arising from our sensibility?

This evidence for the idea that respect motivates as a feeling is, on its own, inconclusive, in that Kant offers no real account of how such a moral feeling might actually move us. At best, he just says that it does, leaving us with an unexplained view that seems to contradict some of his fundamental claims about morality (such as those referred to above). Those critics who argue that Kant thinks that respect motivates as a feeling have failed to supply any account of precisely how this feeling motivates. Without such an account there does not seem to be any compelling reason to accept the view that Kant’s feeling of respect motivates. In this study I want to present just such an account. Thus, although I will refer to the textual evidence supporting the view that Kant’s feeling of respect motivates as a feeling, my focus will be on explaining precisely how it motivates.

What are some of the concerns that arise in trying to explain how Kant’s moral feeling of respect motivates? The main issues can be framed in terms of the following kinds of questions:

1. Is respect a nonpathological feeling? If so (and leaving aside the thorny issue of how a nonpathological feeling might arise), then how does it motivate? Presumably, on such an account, respect does not motivate in the same way that ordinary pathological feelings of pleasure and pain motivate. Is there, then, a special kind of motivational mechanism operating in moral actions that differs from the mechanism operating in the
case of nonmoral actions? (Some scholars—thinking along these lines and referring to the Critique of Judgment—have pointed to Kant’s account of the sublime for help in articulating what such an alternative mechanism might look like.)

2. Or, is respect essentially the same as a pathological feeling but with a different—that is, nonpathological—origin? Kant does seem to indicate that respect is a practical feeling, only differing from pathological feelings in its origins. If this is so, and it is only in its origin that the feeling of respect differs from nonmoral feelings, then does it follow that moral and nonmoral feelings motivate in essentially the same way? In other words, does moral motivation somehow share a common structure with nonmoral motivation? If so, then what is this common structure?

Ultimately, I will argue that for Kant respect is a nonpathological feeling that motivates moral action in a way that is identical (in crucial respects) to the way in which pathological feelings motivate desire-based actions (and in a way that does not compromise the notion that moral actions are done for the sake of duty). I will contend that respect motivates moral choice in a way that can be illuminated by looking at how nonmoral feelings motivate nonmoral choice. Of course, in order to defend such a contention I must first present an account of how nonmoral feelings motivate. It is this requirement that prompts my methodological approach.

I. METHODOLOGY

The question of motivation in Kant’s ethical theory will be addressed explicitly only in the final two chapters of this book, yet this question (or, more specifically, the question of how the moral motive actually motivates) is still the central focus of this study. Putting off a direct analysis in this way is part of the methodology that I will adopt in articulating Kant’s view of moral motivation.

Broadly speaking, there are two distinct (but not exclusive) methodological ways of approaching philosophical problems such as that of interpreting Kant’s theory of moral motivation. On the one hand, texts in which the philosopher discusses the disputed issue can be closely examined, compared, contextualized, and weighed against each other. This
approach can produce interpretive conclusions based on a variety of possible criteria, such as the weight of the evidence or whether the relevant text expresses the author’s mature position. Unfortunately, this method has not yielded much success in interpreting Kant’s theory of moral motivation. There are a number of reasons for this, but two are perhaps most important. First, Kant consistently maintains what appear to be contrary positions on this issue. For example, as I indicated in the last section, he repeatedly says things to suggest that a moral action is one that is done for the sake of duty and without any influencing feeling. And yet, at the same time he consistently tells us that respect is a feeling that moves us to moral action. Second, Kant is virtually silent when it comes to articulating explicitly how respect actually motivates the agent. As a result, there really is no direct evidence to resolve the disagreement over whether it is a cognitive or noncognitive dimension of respect that does the actual motivating.

Kant’s most focused discussion of the feeling of respect—in the chapter called “The Incentives of Pure Practical Reason” from the second Critique—provides a good illustration of the first difficulty outlined above, insofar as it can be read in support of at least the following three interpretations of respect. First, there is evidence in this chapter for the view that the feeling of respect represents the direct determination of the will by the law. Thus, the moral law does not cause the feeling of respect so much as it is represented in a sensuous way by this feeling. On this reading, the feeling of respect is just the moral law in a sensible form. Second (and this is the position for which I will ultimately argue), it is possible to read Kant as saying that respect is a complex feeling—made up of feelings of pleasure and pain—that is somehow produced or caused by (and, therefore, distinct from) the moral law. On this view, respect is not identified with the moral law. Instead, it is a feeling caused by the moral law, and it motivates insofar as it is made up of a combination of feelings of pleasure and pain. Finally, one could also argue that Kant contends in this chapter that while respect is distinct from the moral law, it is the cognitive dimension of respect that does the actual motivational work. The feeling aspect of respect only clears the (sensuous) way for this cognitive motivation by attacking our self-love and self-conceit.

And so—to get back to the methodological issue—Kant’s theory of moral motivation appears to be one of those thorny philosophical areas
in which a balanced and close reading of the immediately relevant texts just does not resolve the issue at hand. Indeed, a balanced and close engagement with these texts appears to complicate the matter further. It seems necessary, then, to approach Kant’s understanding of respect by a more circuitous methodological route. This route is as follows: one can project what Kant should have said (in order to be consistent) about respect as the moral motive by looking at those areas of his thinking that provide the relevant context for his account of moral motivation. This is the method that I will adopt in interpreting Kant’s thinking on how respect functions as the moral motive. Now, of course, this approach might fail if it turns out that the view that Kant ought to hold, on such an account, cannot be reconciled with any of the things that he actually says on respect. Fortunately, this is not the case. In chapter 5, I will argue that Kant usually says exactly what one might expect him to say about the feeling of respect in view of the relevant contextual background to his theory of moral motivation. This background throws a clarifying light on Kant’s discussions of respect, and allows us to read them as part of a systematic and coherent account of moral action.

Establishing the contextual background relevant to this particular issue involves asking the following questions. First, how exactly does Kant think that nonmoral motivation works for a free but sensuously affected being (such as a human being)? Second, how does Kant understand the distinction between moral and nonmoral motivation for such beings? If the points at which moral and nonmoral motivation differ are made clear, then an account of nonmoral motivation should provide a framework in terms of which we can understand Kant’s ambiguous and often conflicting hints on how moral motivation works.

Ultimately, I will contend that for Kant the a priori moral law moves us by causing a feeling that is partly pleasurable and partly painful. This feeling is incorporated into moral maxims and these maxims affect choice insofar as they contain a moral pleasure that tends to maintain itself. The choice to act morally is still “for the sake of duty alone” because it is only as such that moral pleasure maintains itself. I will argue for this position by first laying out the philosophical background relevant to Kant’s theory of moral motivation, and then moving to this theory (chapter 5). In articulating this background I will address in some detail Kant’s thinking on human psychology (chapter 1), his account of desire.
formation (chapter 2), his purported hedonism (chapter 2), and, finally, his account of free and rational nonmoral choice, focusing specifically on his understanding of the role of maxims in choice (chapters 3 and 4). I will conclude by defending my reading of respect against a representative of the dominant contemporary interpretation.

Before turning to any of this, though, I want to explain why Kant’s theory of nonmoral motivation (including his empirical account of desires and feelings) provides us with the relevant background to his understanding of how respect functions as the moral motive.

II. EMPIRICAL ETHICS AND A PRIORI ETHICS

In the preface to his first mature ethical work—the *Groundwork*—Kant divides ethics into an a priori part and an empirical part. According to this division, ethical thinking is concerned either with the moral law and the derivation of this law from some ground (the a priori part), or with the nature of human beings and how this nature bears on their ability to live according to the moral law (the empirical part). Broadly speaking, Kant refers to this empirical part as “anthropology.” For Kant, previous philosophers made a mistake insofar as they did not strictly adhere to this clear and programmatic division. This was especially true in the cases of those philosophers—Kant likes to use Epicurus and Hutcheson as examples—who started their ethical thinking with an account of human nature and then tried to derive moral principles from this account. In so doing, Kant argues, these thinkers jumbled the two sides of the division in such a way as to prevent any possibility of grasping the true moral principle. In many respects this division between the a priori and the empirical is the hallmark of Kantian ethics. At the very least, I will argue, it is at the heart of the Kantian problem of moral motivation, and provides a framework for the justification of my methodological approach.

*Kant’s Focus on A Priori Ethics*

Kant scholars concerned with understanding and articulating his ethical theory have typically abided by the a priori/empirical distinction in their expository accounts. But, until recently, interest in the empirical side of Kant’s ethics has been very limited and quite critical. Commentators usually
focused on the a priori moral law and often only went as far as the link between this dimension and the empirical in discussing the problems associated with Kant’s real-world applications of the categorical imperative in the second section of the *Groundwork*. However, in contemporary scholarship there have been a few attempts to look more closely, and charitably, at Kant’s empirical ethics.\(^{19}\)

These attempts are to some degree justified by an important historical consideration. Recent work done by Werner Stark and Reinhard Brandt indicates that Kant ran his series of lectures on anthropology contemporaneously with his lectures on pure ethics.\(^{20}\) In spite of Kant’s emphasis on a distinction between empirical and a priori ethics, Stark argues that he actually conceived of a complex relationship between the two kinds of enquiry. The appearance of a total separation between these two realms of enquiry—an appearance that is partly a product of Kant’s exaggerated insistence, and partly of scholars’ tendency to read the a priori works in isolation from the empirical works—misrepresents Kant’s understanding of a deeper connection between the two.

Why, then, in view of the closeness that may actually exist between Kant’s empirical and a priori ethics, have scholars not been more interested in his empirical ethics? Many factors have probably contributed to this lack of interest, and I will just touch on a few here by way of introducing the question of how the two dimensions of moral investigation relate.\(^{21}\) First, the neglect of Kant’s empirical ethics may be explained in part by early criticisms, from the likes of Schiller and Schopenhauer, leveled against Kant’s abilities as an empirical thinker. The popular image of Kant studiously and fastidiously working out a formally beautiful but practically inapplicable moral theory may have warned off those with any interest in exploring his empirical thinking. Indeed, as a result of this common portrayal, many ethicists still regard themselves as reacting to Kant in presenting nonuniversalist, virtue-based theories that are more sensitive to human psychology and everyday life.\(^{22}\) Second, it is not at all obvious how Kant’s empirical ethics can be systematically connected to his a priori moral thinking. Kant conceives of the moral agent as transcendently free, and transcendental freedom involves the freedom of one’s choices from all antecedent causal determination.\(^{23}\) But, in view of these considerations, we might ask how the study of empirical factors (such as human psychology or education) is relevant to morality at all.\(^{24}\)
It might be argued that it is not relevant to moral deliberation since empirical matters cannot causally influence one’s free choices. Nor, it could be said, is it relevant to moral assessment since Kant thinks that the agent’s free choices, and not any empirical consequences, should be the focus of this assessment. The fact that scholars have largely ignored Kant’s empirical ethics may indicate that these problems, noted by early critics such as Fichte and Hegel, have been taken seriously.

Probably more important than either of these two considerations is the fact that Kant himself seems to privilege the pure dimension of his moral philosophy over the empirical. For example, in the preface to the *Groundwork* he writes, “In ethics . . . the empirical part may be called more specifically practical anthropology; the rational part, morals proper [*eigentlich Moral*]” (G 4:388). Kant not only places the emphasis on the a priori part by referring to it as “proper” or “real” morals, but he also goes on to portray the empirical as somehow getting in the way of this pure enquiry. He continues, “Since my purpose here is directed to moral philosophy, I narrow my proposed question to this: Is it not of the utmost necessity to construct a pure moral philosophy which is completely freed from everything which may be only empirical and thus belong to anthropology? . . . [T]he ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of man or in the circumstances in which he is placed but a priori solely in the concepts of pure reason” (G 4:389). Of course, this prioritization is not just a matter of blind favoritism on Kant’s part, but rather reflects something crucial about his ethical thinking: the a priori part of morals is morality proper because the moral law, given the requirements that it be universal and necessary, cannot be empirically (or contingently) grounded. Kant posits this distinction after some twenty years of pre-Critical grappling with the difficulty of grounding a moral law, so his exaggerated emphasis is perhaps understandable.

But what is fundamental and new, and therefore prioritized, is at the same time (and by Kant’s own account) only half of the story. Kant is a systematic philosopher, and, I want to argue, his empirical thinking on human beings connects in direct and systematic ways to his pure ethics. This is a critical claim for my project since the methodological principle guiding this study is that a crucial extension of Kant’s a priori ethics—the question of how the purely rational moral law motivates—cannot be properly understood without reference to a contextual background, and
I am going to argue that Kant’s empirical thinking on human psychology provides us with the first part of this background. In what follows, I will try to establish the link between certain dimensions of Kant’s empirical ethics and his theory of moral motivation by looking at the larger connection that he draws between empirical and a priori ethics. In concluding this discussion I will turn briefly to the more general, and very thorny, issue of Kant’s two worlds/standpoints.

**The Relation between Empirical and A Priori Ethics**

Kant is concerned with the relationship between the empirical and a priori dimensions of ethics in both his early and late Critical period. So, for example, in one of his *Lectures on Ethics* from 1784–85 he says:

> The science of the rules of how man ought to behave is practical philosophy, and the science of the rules of his actual behavior is anthropology; these two sciences are closely connected, and morality cannot exist without anthropology, for one must first know of the agent whether he is also in a position [*im Stande*] to accomplish what it is required from him that he should do. One can, indeed, certainly consider practical philosophy even without anthropology, or without knowledge of the agent, only then it is speculative, or an Idea; so man must at least be studied accordingly. (LE 27:244)

What does Kant mean by the investigation into “whether [man] is also in a position to accomplish what it is required from him that he should do”? Surely, he cannot be suggesting that anthropology explore whether humans are *fundamentally* capable of being moral. Ultimately, this suggestion would mean that anthropology is an investigation into whether humans are free—but it seems highly unlikely that Kant would refer to such an investigation as a science of “the rules of [man’s] actual behavior.” Moreover, even a cursory glance at Kant’s anthropological works indicates that they are most certainly not a study of whether humans are free.

In drawing this connection between anthropology and practical philosophy, then, does Kant simply mean that anthropology is the study of whether man is, in fact, ever moral? Kant’s anthropology does *involve*
some documenting, or surveying, of moral tendencies, but this only constitutes a very small part of his anthropological project. More importantly, Kant consistently maintains that the morality of an action lies in a deep choice of maxims, and as such we can never know with certainty whether any action is truly moral. With this in mind, we might ask, then, whether Kant is suggesting that anthropology investigate whether people appear to be moral. But it is not at all clear how an investigation of whether people appear to be moral would supplement morality proper, such that the latter “cannot exist without” the former.

Perhaps the best way to discover what Kant means by this elusive characterization of the relationship between anthropology and practical philosophy is to check it against the central issues actually discussed in his anthropological work. One of the main focuses of Kant’s anthropological thinking is the psychology of the agent. Thus, the faculties of desire and feeling—two of Kant’s three powers of the mind—are central to his most comprehensive anthropological account in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Maybe Kant’s point, then, is that anthropology includes the study of whether humans (as free agents) are in a psychological position to act morally. More precisely, anthropology may involve an empirical study of whether, and how, our psychological makeup hinders moral action. This reading seems to be confirmed in the *Metaphysics* when Kant says that moral anthropology deals with “the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in fulfilling the laws of a metaphysics of morals” (MM 6:217). Typically, Kant puts this question of hindrance in terms of whether, and how, our desires and feelings impede our morality, reason, and freedom. So, for example, at the heart of Kant’s anthropological discussions of the faculty of desire is his concern that passions can lead to evil. Thus, passions can provide a psychological threat to our being moral. Meanwhile, in the third *Critique*, Kant addresses the relation between rational principles and psychology, saying that the passions “belong to the faculty of desire, and are inclinations that make all determinability of the faculty of desire by means of principles difficult or impossible” (CJ 5:272n). Finally, he also describes the passions as “enchantments” that can “do the greatest harm to freedom” (A 7:266; emphasis added). Kant’s point is that our psychological makeup can impair our ability to choose freely actions that are based on principles of reason (including the moral principle).
The suggestion here that anthropology studies man understood as a free and rational being capable of choosing morally seems to contravene Kant’s radical distinction between the empirical sciences and a priori (or practical) philosophy. Anthropology is an empirical kind of study, and, as such, surely it analyzes humans as beings that are entirely governed by mechanistic causal laws? In the Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Kant tells us that the basis for the division of the sciences is determined by “the difference of its object [Objekt], or of the sources of knowledge, or of the kind of knowledge, or of some if not all of these together” (Prol 4:265). With this in mind, we might say that anthropology gives us an empirical kind of knowledge, the object of which is man. On this account, anthropology is largely synonymous with what Kant calls empirical psychology. Anthropology would thus yield a theoretical, as opposed to practical, kind of knowledge. In line with this interpretation the Lectures passage quoted above says that anthropology is not a branch of practical philosophy; it studies humans as they are and not as they would or should be. How can I reconcile these considerations with my reading of this passage?

The first thing to note is that Kant uses the term Objekt to mean either the subject matter or aim of a science. So, on the same method of classification that Kant uses in the Prolegomena, pragmatic anthropology turns out to be a part of practical philosophy, since its object—in the sense of aim—is the betterment of man. Kant writes at the start of the Anthropology that pragmatic anthropology “aims at what man makes, can, or should make of himself as a freely acting being” (A 7:119). For Kant, moral anthropology is that branch of pragmatic anthropology that deals with moral betterment. So, the object—in the sense of subject matter—of anthropology is man. Meanwhile, the object—in the sense of aim—of moral anthropology is moral betterment. But when the object as aim is practical (as in the case of moral anthropology), then the object as subject matter of this same science is the human as a free and moral being. Clearly, it is only as such that humans can improve morally. Thus, the subject matter of moral anthropology is the human as a free agent and not as a determined being. It is surely in view of this that Kant tells us in the Metaphysics that practical philosophy “has not nature but freedom of choice for its object,” and a few lines later adds, “The counterpart of a metaphysics of morals, the other member of the division of
practical philosophy as a whole, would be moral anthropology” (MM 6:216–17). Practical philosophy deals with freedom of choice, and moral anthropology is a branch of practical philosophy. With all of this in mind, we can now draw a fairly concrete distinction: the subject matter of Kant’s anthropology is nature, and the subject matter of his moral anthropology is freedom.

Unfortunately, Kant does not always employ this distinction between anthropology and moral anthropology in a systematic or consistent way. For example, in the Lectures passage quoted at the start of this section he refers only to anthropology, but, insofar as this notion of anthropology includes a study of “whether man is in a position to” act morally, it seems to overlap with moral anthropology (and thus, in spite of what Kant says, it is a part of practical philosophy). The rules of action to which Kant refers in this passage are not at all relevant to the issue of acting morally if these rules concern man as a determined being. In the Anthropology itself Kant also seems to mix anthropology and moral anthropology. His investigation in this text clearly assumes that man is free to change. But it is also an empirical study in that Kant makes numerous empirical observations, and often draws what appear to be mechanically causal connections within psychological, social, and pedagogical contexts. Moral anthropology, insofar as it has practical ends, assumes that the object of its study (i.e., the human being) is free, and thus that whatever causal relations are (theoretically) described do not undermine freedom. When Kant blurs the division between anthropology and moral anthropology he allows freedom into the former. And so, while we might expect Kant’s anthropology to present an empirical story that traces cause after cause of human behavior, the reality is otherwise. As Allen Wood puts the point, “The truth about Kantian anthropology, however, is very different from this picture. . . . [His] empirical anthropology always proceeds on the fundamental presupposition that human beings are free” (Wood 1999, 181).

On this account, then, both Kant’s anthropology and moral anthropology turn out to be concerned with the psychology of moral, and thus free, agents. Now, Kant refers to the kind of freedom that is relevant to actual moral action as practical freedom. In one of his lectures, Kant (referring to some earlier comments he made) explains that “Practical or psychological freedom was the independence of the power of choice
from the necessitation of stimuli. This is treated in empirical psychology, and this concept of freedom was also sufficient enough for morality” (LM 28:267). Practical freedom is the freedom of the moral agent from being determined, though not affected, by sensuous impulses. Rather than causally determining our behavior, our desires and feelings only have an effect upon the actions—including the moral actions—that we freely choose. In Kant’s own terminology, we are free and rational, but sensuously affected. It is this sensuous dimension of man that is studied in Kant’s anthropological work. It is studied in order to see if man is “in a position” to act morally even while this sensuous nature affects him. Consequently—and this is the basic point of the passage from the Lectures on Ethics quoted above—anthropology is relevant to a priori morals insofar as it tells us something about our sensibility, and how this sensibility affects moral choices.

This interpretation is borne out by Kant’s published comments on the relation between anthropology and morals proper. For example, Kant tells us in the Groundwork that “all morals . . . need anthropology for their application [Anwendung] to men” (G 4:412). He elaborates on this notion of the “application” of morals in the Metaphysics when he says that “a metaphysics of morals cannot dispense with principles of application, and we shall often have to take as our object the particular nature of human beings, which is cognized only by experience. . . . The counterpart of a metaphysics of morals, the other member of the division of practical philosophy as a whole, would be moral anthropology, which, however, would deal only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in fulfilling the laws of a metaphysics of morals” (MM 6:217). Kant characterizes moral anthropology here as the study of our psychology (“subjective conditions”) and how it impacts our acting morally. Since it is only in view of our free choices that we are moral creatures, Kant’s point must be that this anthropology studies the hindering or helping impact of our desires and feelings on our free choices.

My central contention is that this question of the impact of our psychology on our free choices is also relevant to the more specific issue of how we are morally motivated, since the moral motive must combat these psychological hindrances to morality. But why, one might ask, does this make psychology pertinent to the issue of how moral motivation works? In other words, why does it follow from the fact that the moral motive
must combat desires and feelings that the latter are relevant to how respect works? Kant himself comes closest to linking anthropology and moral motivation along these very lines when he says, in the mid-1780s, “Anthropology is pragmatic, but contributes to moral knowledge of the human being because from it one must derive \[schöpfen\] the grounds of movement [bewegungsGründe] for morality, and without it morality would be scholastic and not applicable to the world.”\(^{34}\) According to this passage, the basis of moral motivation (“movement”) must somehow be drawn (schöpfen), or taken, from anthropology. In saying this, Kant cannot mean that the basis for the existence of moral motivation must be drawn from anthropology, since this basis is the moral law itself and this law is most certainly not drawn from any empirical investigation. But Kant’s point makes sense if we take him to be referring to the basis for the functioning of moral “movement” or motivation. In this case, the claim would be that in order to know how the feeling of respect works as the moral motive we must understand how the desires and feelings that threaten it work.

As I will argue in chapter 5, the key reason that the motivational workings of desires and feelings are relevant to the workings of moral motivation is that for Kant the moral incentive functions in essentially the same way as these motive forces with which it competes. There are some essential structural parallels between the ways in which pathological forces and respect move the will. Kant seems to say just this in the second Critique, when he comments that “respect . . . is hardly an analogue of the feeling of pleasure, although in relation to the faculty of desire it does the same thing but from different sources” (Pr. R 5:117; emphasis added). Anthropology, then, shows us what the moral motive must be like in order to impact the agent’s motivational mechanism and influence choice. Ultimately, it is in this way that studying anthropology and the psychological hindrances to morality points us to the question of how the moral law moves us to action. The empirical part of ethics provides a background, then, to the a priori part, in providing a background to the issue of how the law moves us as free but sensibly affected beings.\(^{35}\)

**Subjective and Objective Determination of the Will**

Kant’s distinction between the objective and subjective determination of the will helps to clarify and support the point just made. For Kant, the
objective determining ground of the will is the standard of morality, while the subjective ground is the principle of motivation. Kant tells us, in a lecture from the mid-1780s:

We have first to take up two points here: (1) The principle of appraisal of obligation, and (2) the principle of its performance or execution. Guideline and motive have here to be distinguished. The guideline is the principle of appraisal, and the motive that of carrying-out the obligation; in that they have been confused, everything in morality has been erroneous. If the question is: What is morally good or not?, that is the principle of appraisal, whereby I judge the goodness or depravity of actions. But if the question is: What moves me to live according to this law?, that is the principle of motive. Appraisal of the action is the objective ground, but not yet the subjective ground. That which impels me to do the thing, of which understanding tells me that I ought to do it, is the *motiva subjective moventia*. . . . This motive is the moral feeling. Such a principle of motive cannot be confused with the principle of judgment. (LE 27:274)

To objectively determine the will is to tell it what it ought to do, morally or prudentially. To subjectively determine the will is to move it to perform an action. This is the most important (and prevalent) use of the subjective/objective distinction that Kant makes in the ethical context. For Kant, the moral feeling of respect is the subjective determining ground of the will. Since we are not fully rational, but, rather, partly sensuous, we require a distinct subjective, or motivating, ground that can affect us sensuously. Kant never strays from this view. He tells us in the *Groundwork* that “A maxim is the subjective principle of volition. The objective principle (i.e., that which would serve all rational beings also subjectively as a practical principle if reason had full power over the faculty of desire) is the practical law” (G 4:400n). Thus, insofar as reason does not have full power over the faculty of desire, being moved by the practical law is not an essential and intrinsic feature of our nature. Instead, the practical law *obligates* us, it places a demand upon us, and this demand must somehow matter to us as free but sensuously affected beings. Now, what matters to us as sensuously affected beings are the
maxims that we freely adopt by incorporating incentives into “subjective principle[s] of volition.” For Kant, then, the moral law can only matter to us if we somehow have an incentive to act morally that we incorporate into our “subjective principles” or maxims. Respect is this incentive, and Kant tells us in the Religion that “This capacity for simple respect for the moral law within us would thus be moral feeling, which in and through itself does not constitute an end of the natural predisposition except so far as it is the motivating force of the will. Since this is possible only when the free will incorporates such moral feeling into its maxim, the property of such a will is good character” (Rel 6:29; emphasis added). I will argue in chapter 5 that the feeling of respect is incorporated into moral maxims in essentially the same way as nonmoral incentives are incorporated into nonmoral maxims.

Bringing these strands together, we can conclude that insofar as reason qua reason does not have full control over the faculty of desire, the moral law strikes us as an obligation, and that in order for us to meet this obligation the law must in some way sensuously impact our faculty of desire (i.e., through the incorporation of respect into maxims). Thus, we must be moved sensuously by the moral law for precisely the same reason that we are obligated by it in the first place—that is, as a result of our partly sensuous nature. It is in view of this that, when Kant reflects on his earlier chapter on the moral feeling of respect as an incentive (in the second Critique), he tells us that it is an attempt to understand the “necessary influence” of “pure practical reason on our sensibility” (Pr. R 5:90). Without this necessary influence we would not be able to act morally. Studying the sensuous (i.e., psychological) dimension of our nature is important, then, for an understanding of how reason impacts us psychologically and thus allows us to meet the moral demand or obligation.

At the heart of my methodological approach is the view that Kant’s comments on the moral feeling of respect can only be properly understood against the background of his account of our sensibility. It is only with this account in mind that we can grasp how Kant thinks the moral law influences our sensibility such that we are motivated to be moral. Understanding how the moral law functions in our human world is essentially equivalent to comprehending the conditions for the possibility of our acting on the moral law in view of (perhaps in spite of) our sensuous
constitutions. But these conditions are part of our motivational mechanism and the psychological forces that operate upon it, so we must understand this motivational mechanism and the forces that act upon it before we can reconstruct Kant’s understanding of how respect works as an incentive to moral action. The relevant background to the issue of how Kant thinks respect functions encompasses both the psychological dimension of his anthropology and his theory of action, including his theory of motivation. More specifically, that background is provided in Kant’s theory of action (and motivation), understood in the light of his account of psychology.

Two Standpoints

Before saying a little more about both of these areas—Kant’s theory of action and his account of human psychology—I want to address briefly an issue that has been lurking (or looming) behind my discussion of the relation between a priori and empirical ethics: Kant’s two standpoints on the will. According to what is now quite a common reading, Kant thinks that humans are free agents when seen from the “intelligible standpoint,” and causally determined beings when viewed from the “empirical standpoint.” I have already argued that Kant’s study of anthropology is, in spite of some of the things he says, the empirical study of the human as a moral and free being. On this account, Kant focuses on the empirically discoverable characteristics and conditions of a being that he assumes is not causally necessitated by these characteristics and conditions. But, again, if anthropology really is an empirical study, then the object of this study should be a causally determined being, not a free and merely intelligible one. On my reading, then, Kant is somehow combining both standpoints—empirical and intelligible—in a way that does not seem to be legitimate in view of the strictness with which he is supposed to divide these standpoints.37

A full defense of my interpretation of the two standpoints is not within the scope of this introduction, but I do want to sketch an explanation of (and present some evidence for) this interpretation. On my account, there are two distinct ways of looking at agents: practically (as free but sensuously affected beings) and theoretically (as determined beings). Notice here that this practical/theoretical distinction does not map precisely onto Kant’s intelligible/empirical (or noumena/phenomena) distinction.38 What
is the difference between these two distinctions? According to the latter, the intelligible self is beyond all sensible intuition, and thus is not susceptible to tempting desires or urges. Kant writes of the intelligible/empirical distinction as follows:

Thus in respect to mere perception and receptivity to sensations he must count himself as belonging to the world of sense; but in respect to that which may be pure activity in himself . . . he must reckon himself as belonging to the intellectual world. . . . For this reason a rational being must regard itself qua intelligence (and not from the side of his lower faculties) as belonging to the world of understanding and not to that of the senses. Thus it has two standpoints from which it can consider itself and recognize the laws [governing] the employment of its powers and all its actions: first, as belonging to the world of sense, under the laws of nature (heteronomy), and, second, as belonging to the intelligible world under laws which, independent of nature, are not empirical but founded on reason alone. (G 4:451–52)

Kant’s division here between intelligible and sensible selves is not the same as the division between the practical and theoretical (i.e., the morally obligated and the determined) agents referred to above. Instead, the intelligible self provides the condition for the possibility of our being moral creatures, but actual human morality involves a conjunction of the intelligible and sensible. It is surely with this in mind that Kant writes, “But we now see that, if we think of ourselves as free, we transport ourselves into the intelligible world as members of it and know the autonomy of the will together with its consequence, morality; whereas if we think of ourselves as obligated, we consider ourselves as belonging both to the world of sense and at the same time to the intelligible world” (G 4:453; emphasis added). Kant is clear here: somehow, both the intelligible world and the world of sense include the obligated self. (I am referring to the standpoint of this obligated self as the practical standpoint.) Unlike the intelligible self, the agent that is obligated does experience tempting desires; otherwise she would not go through any of the moral conflicts typical of human beings. Of course, this practical agent does not experience these desires as causally determining—but she experiences
them nonetheless. They affect her actions insofar as they produce motives between which she must freely choose. The intelligible self, on the other hand, is purely rational and not susceptible (i.e., passive) to sensible experience. It is this intelligible dimension of our total being that legislatively (or, in Kant’s terms, “objectively”) determines the will.

Kant’s distinction between transcendental and practical freedom is relevant here. For Kant, transcendental freedom is defined negatively as “independence from everything empirical and hence from nature generally” (Pr. R 5:97), and positively as “the power of beginning a state spontaneously” (A 533/B 561). Practical freedom is (negatively) the “will’s independence of coercion through sensuous impulses” (A 534/B 562), and (positively) the capacity to act on “motives which are represented only by reason” (A 802/B 830). Transcendental freedom is the freedom of the purely intelligible self. Meanwhile, practical freedom is the freedom of the sensuously affected/morally obligated agent. It is through this kind of sensuously affected freedom that the feeling of respect must operate and move us to moral action. It has been argued, however, that Kant abandons his notion of practical freedom after he discovers the principle of autonomy in the *Groundwork*, maligning it (in the second *Critique*) as the compatibilist freedom of a “turnspit.” I will contend in chapter 3, however, that Kant maintains essentially the same incompatibilist notion of practical freedom throughout his works, insofar as he never wavers from the idea that it is a sensuously affected free will (i.e., *Willkür*) that makes moral choices.

Of course, none of this should be read as undermining the importance of transcendental freedom in Kant’s moral system. Again, transcendental freedom is the freedom of the agent considered as purely intelligible—it is the freedom of a spontaneous first cause, and insofar as we possess it we are the ultimate ground of our moral actions. Transcendental freedom is a purely intelligible concept insofar as it requires us to posit an uncaused cause and thus to suspend our theoretical commitments to a causal chain. Now, Kant tells us that transcendental freedom is an important component of practical freedom but that it “does not by any means constitute the whole content” (A 448/B 476) of this idea. It is this transcendental component of practical freedom that is “the real stumbling-block” (A 448/B 476) for philosophy in that it is a merely intelligible idea. Our discussions of the practically free agent are therefore
going to involve explanatory gaps as we approach the intelligible (i.e., transcendental) dimension of this freedom.\footnote{43} At the same time, however, this intelligible aspect of practical freedom is required in order to ensure the spontaneity and thus the imputability of the agent.

As I will argue, when Kant speaks of the intelligible world in the *Groundwork*, the relevant notion of freedom is transcendental freedom. But when he speaks of us “belonging both to the world of sense and . . . to the intelligible world” (G 4:453), the relevant notion is practical freedom, for it is this “mainly empirical” (A 448/B 476) notion that has both sensible and intelligible dimensions (captured in the idea of being sensuously affected). Ordinarily, when Kant discusses moral actions he has the practically free agent in mind. Kant’s anthropology, in studying the sensible side of this practically free agent, does not explore psychological factors as causal determinants of behavior; instead, these factors are understood as merely affecting behavior. Ultimately, the effect of our feelings and desires is that they provide motives to non-moral and, of course, immoral actions, and I will argue in chapter 5 that these motives operate in a way that is (in part) *structurally parallel* to the way in which respect operates in the case of moral action. Kant’s anthropology is relevant to my argument, then, insofar as it provides some of the details of his account of the structure of motivation for non-moral actions.

*Kantian Psychology and Theory of Action*

In his *Encyclopädisches Wörterbuch der kritischen Philosophie*, Georg Samuel Albert Mellin (a contemporary of Kant) connects Kant’s a priori and empirical ethics by saying that practical anthropology “is the application of morality to the characteristic condition and situation of the human faculty of desire [Begehungsvermögens]—to the drives, inclinations, appetites, and passions of the human being, and the hindrances to the carrying-out of the moral law” (Mellin 1970, 277). Mellin correctly sees that the faculty of desire is at the heart of human psychology for Kant.\footnote{44} Feeling and desire—Kant’s two basic psychological categories—can both be understood in terms of the faculty of desire, since feelings determine, and desires are determinations of, this faculty. Ultimately, then, Kant’s account of the faculty of desire and its receptivity to the moral law is critical in understanding how respect works as a motive.
With very few exceptions, analyses of the faculty of desire are new in Kant scholarship. This is not to say that scholars have never talked about Kant’s understanding of human psychology. They have, but their focus has all too frequently been on Kant’s dismissal of the psychological forces that move us as candidates for grounding moral actions. As a result, scholars have often passed over Kant’s finer psychological distinctions. For example, numerous Kantians have treated feeling, emotion, desire, and inclination as though they were interchangeable notions. In one such case, Lawrence Hinman writes, “Once Kant has taken this rather crucial step of placing the emotions quite squarely in the world of causally determined phenomena, he is faced with a very serious problem: showing how pure reason can move the will to action. . . . Not only does he hold that the realm of our feelings and emotions—in this context, Kant calls them ‘inclinations’ (Neigungen)—is a causally determined one, but he also maintains that it is generally ordered in such a way that it runs counter to the demands of the moral law” (Hinman 1983, 254). But, in actual fact, there is never a context in which Kant refers to our feelings and emotions as our inclinations. Indeed, for Kant, feelings and emotions on the one hand, and desires and inclinations on the other, form the two primary psychological categories. Similarly, Nancy Sherman says that for Kant “the reasons for an agent to act based on emotions such as compassion or friendship are permissible so long as they are constrained by a motive of duty. That is, inclinations can support acting from duty but only within boundaries set by duty” (Sherman 1990, 161). But again, Kant consistently draws a concrete distinction between emotion and inclination, so Sherman’s interchangeable use of these terms is unjustified. In what follows, I hope to redress these oversights by clearly drawing the psychological distinctions that Kant has in mind and articulating the role that these distinct psychological elements play in nonmoral, and then moral, action.

Of course, Kant’s fully developed theory of nonmoral action is not simply a matter of his account of the faculty of desire and the various psychological forces that determine and are determinations of this faculty. Kant posits a second crucial dimension to action, the essence of which is captured in what Henry Allison dubs the Incorporation Thesis. According to this thesis, the faculty of desire throws up incentives, upon which the agent may or may not act. The process of acting upon
incentives, for a free and rational agent, involves the incorporation of these incentives into maxims that govern action. Unfortunately, scholars have only used the Incorporation Thesis to explain how Kant thinks we can be sensuously affected yet free beings. Without further discussion, incorporation has been understood simply as a way of securing freedom for the agent, by inserting a wedge—the somewhat mysterious act of incorporating—between the agent and her desires and feelings. But I think that there is more to consider in, and conclude from, this thesis. Along these lines, I will investigate how we as sensuous beings act out of respect for the law (i.e., the moral incentive) by considering how we act out of any incentive at all. This will involve looking more closely at what incentives really are (i.e., psychology), and at precisely what it means to incorporate an incentive into a maxim (i.e., theory of choice/action).

As I mentioned above, many Kant scholars have thought of moral motivation as a kind of motivation that is entirely distinct from nonmoral motivation. But, in fact, Kant's notion of incorporation goes some way toward removing the radical distinction between moral and nonmoral action. According to this thesis, all actions are freely chosen insofar as they are grounded in an incentive (moral or nonmoral) that has been incorporated into a maxim. Thus, it is not just nonmoral incentives that are incorporated into maxims. As we saw above, Kant writes, “This capacity for simple respect for the moral law within us would thus be moral feeling, which in and through itself does not constitute an end of the natural predisposition except so far as it is the motivating force of the will. Since this is possible only when the free will incorporates such moral feeling into its maxim, the property of such a will is good character” (Rel 6:29; emphasis added). A little later in the same text Kant refers to the “subjective ground for the adoption into our maxims of this respect as a motivating force” (Rel 6:29). So all actions, moral and nonmoral, involve the presence of an incentive and the incorporation of this incentive into a maxim. I will attempt to articulate and explain this process in the chapters that follow.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

The general direction and aim of my study can be outlined as follows. I begin with Kant’s analysis of human psychology, and then work toward
formulating a theory of *nonmoral* action by connecting this psychology with Kant’s views on rational agency. I then discuss the differences between moral agency and nonmoral agency before moving, finally, to a theory of moral action. That is, I intend to illuminate Kant’s thinking on respect by placing it in the context of his account of nonmoral agency. In a sense, this reverses the order of inquiry typical in Kant studies, where discussions of Kant’s ethics often precede, and spawn, interpretations of his theory of action.  

In chapter 1, I describe Kant’s treatment of the faculties of desire and feeling in texts such as the *Religion*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Anthropology*. Rather than merely presenting an inventory of Kant’s psychological concepts, I introduce each notion through a discussion of an associated issue. The overall concern of the chapter, however, is to present a broad outline of Kant’s understanding of the relationship between the faculty of desire and the faculty of feeling.

In chapter 2, I bring the notion of pleasure into greater focus by pointing to an ambiguity in Kant’s understanding of desire formation. Kant presents three distinct accounts of the role of pleasure in the formation of desires. I propose a resolution to this ambiguity by arguing that these accounts are not incompatible, but can actually be reconciled in a single theory. Furthermore, I claim that in spite of Andrews Reath’s arguments to the contrary this account of desire formation commits Kant to a form of hedonism. This hedonism allows for a greater understanding of some of the terrain covered in chapter 1, so I refer back to this chapter in order to clarify further the nature of the relationship between feelings and desires.

In chapter 3, I turn my attention to Kant’s understanding of rational agency by discussing his account of the freedom of nonmoral actions. According to some scholars, Kant’s treatment of freedom commits him to the idea that only moral and immoral actions are free. On this view, choices between nonmoral ends are not free but are determined by the agent’s conception of happiness. In response, I argue that Kant actually grounds a nonmoral conception of freedom in the moral concept of autonomy.

In chapter 4, I develop Kant’s account of nonmoral rational action by raising the issue of how the Incorporation Thesis can be reconciled with the phenomenon of weakness of the will. According to Kant’s Incorporation Thesis, all actions are chosen on the basis of maxims. It follows
from this that all actions are principled, and, thus, justified for the agent. But how, then, can weak actions be possible if they are understood as actions that the agent does not think are justified? In tackling this issue I introduce all of the notions relevant to Kant’s theory of rational action: maxims, interests, and happiness. I go on (in the second part of this chapter) to bring my accounts of the rationality and freedom of nonmoral action together with some of my conclusions from chapters 1 and 2. In doing so, I present an interpretation of Kantian rational action that takes into consideration the psychology of the agent. Thus, I take seriously Kant’s persistent claim that we are rational but sensuously affected agents. The focus of the second part of this chapter is on working out exactly what happens when incentives are incorporated into maxims that then determine action.

In chapter 5, I draw on my treatment of nonmoral agency in presenting an account of respect as the moral motive. I argue that Kant’s account of nonmoral agency can be used to understand his treatment of respect as a moral motive since this feeling of respect operates in a way that fundamentally parallels the way in which nonmoral motives operate. The only differences between moral and nonmoral motivation lie in the distinct grounds of each, in the intentional objects of the feelings involved, and in the differing intentions the agent has in mind. My account pieces together all of the structural parallels between moral and nonmoral action and concludes by responding to the most serious objection that might be leveled against this interpretation.

In my conclusion, I supplement my argument by challenging Andrews Reath’s influential reading of Kant on respect. I argue that Reath’s interpretation—which claims that respect does not motivate as a feeling—is not faithful to Kant’s texts. I contend that the ultimate source of the misreading is Reath’s failure to consider all of the possible ways in which feeling might play a role in action.