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The Conative Character of Reason in Kant's Philosophy

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FROM THE FIRST SENTENCE of the *Critique of Pure Reason* through the writings of the late 1790s, Kant describes human reason as striving for the unconditioned and as having needs and interests.¹ I refer to this as Kant's characterization of reason as "conative." Although several authors have aptly described this characterization of reason,² few have reflected on the problems it raises. These

¹References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the pages of the first (A) and second (B) editions. All other page references are to *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, edited under the auspices of the Königliche Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–.

All translations are my own.

Abbreviations used:

ApH = *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* [Anthropology]

GMS = *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* [Groundwork]

KrV = *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [Critique of Pure Reason]

KpV = *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* [Critique of Practical Reason]

KU = *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [Critique of Judgment]

Logik = *Immanuel Kants Logik. Ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen* [Logic]

MdS = *Metaphysik der Sitten* [Metaphysics of Morals]

ProI = *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* [Prolegomena]

Rel = *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* [Religion]

RezHer = "Rezensionen von Johann Gottfried Herders *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*" [Herder Reviews]

TPP = "Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Prinzipien in der Philosophie" ["On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy"]

VvT = "Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie" ["On a Dignified Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy"]

WhDo = "Was heißt: Sich im Denken orientieren?" ["What Is Orientation in Thinking?"]

ZeF = "Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf" ["Perpetual Peace"]

²Daniel Breazeale, "Kant, Fichte, and the 'Interests of Reason'," *Daimon* 9 (1994): 81–98; Amihud Gilead, "Restless and Impelling Reason: On the Architectonic of Human Reason according to Kant," *Idealistic Studies* 15 (1985): 137–50; Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1973), 235–62; Susan Neiman, *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Heinrich M. Schmidinger, *Das Problem des Interesses und*

problems are more complicated than is generally assumed. Given the oddity of personifying reason as having needs and interests, one might be inclined to read these notions as merely decorative metaphors, and indeed this is how they are usually taken.

But metaphors for what exactly? Here Kant seems to get into difficulties. If he intends these notions to play a merely ornamental role,³ he cannot be justified in using them—as he does—to defend assumptions of pure reason, such as the practical postulates. Alternatively, if by “needs of reason” he means no more than “needs of humans,”⁴ he cannot legitimately claim—as he does—that such needs apply to all finite rational beings. Although the conative terms play a crucial role in several of Kant’s arguments, he nowhere explains this usage. In this essay, I examine the problems raised by Kant’s characterization of reason as conative and propose an interpretative solution.

The structure of this article is as follows. I first introduce Kant’s talk of the needs and interests of reason and give two examples of arguments in which it plays a decisive role. I then discuss four different interpretations. Having identified a number of problems with literal interpretations of the conative characterization of reason, I further examine whether a metaphorical reading, suggested by several authors, can solve these problems. I argue that it is impossible to regard the conative terms in which Kant describes reason as merely decorative metaphors, but that they are better understood as cases of “symbolic exhibition” in Kant’s own sense.

1. REASON AND THE “RIGHT OF NEED”

Kant assumes the meaning of the term ‘need’ (*Bedürfnis*) to be familiar and uses it in the ordinary sense of a deficiency of something necessary or desired. If the subject of the need is conscious of the deficiency, it is thought to *desire* whatever is expected to fulfill the need, and to aim at this fulfillment. If this striving is successful, a feeling of *satisfaction* on the part of the subject will

die Philosophie Sören Kierkegaards (Freiburg: Alber, 1983), 84–117; Manfred Sommer, *Die Selbsterhaltung der Vernunft* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977); Yirmiyahu Yovel, “The Interests of Reason: From Metaphysics to Moral History,” in *Kant’s Practical Philosophy Reconsidered*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 135–48; John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s “Critique of Judgment”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 169–77, 312–16. The most detailed discussion to date—Manfred Pascher’s *Kants Begriff ‘Vernunftinteresse’* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaften, 1991)—is focussed exclusively on the notion of “interests” of reason. Pascher does not discuss related terms, and although he shows very carefully where reason’s interest plays a role in Kant’s argument, he does not problematize the notion as such.

³Sommer, *Die Selbsterhaltung der Vernunft*, 232, n.29; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 16, 105; Yovel, “The Interests of Reason,” 137f.

⁴Neiman, *The Unity of Reason*, 165f.

follow. 'Interest' is closely related to 'need', although the two terms are not identical in meaning. If one consciously has a certain *need*, one takes an *interest* in that which is expected to contribute to its satisfaction. According to Kant's definition, 'interest' is the feeling of delight (*Wohlgefallen*) connected with the representation of the existence of a certain object or action, which can thus become a determining factor of our will, namely, to bring about this object or action (cf. KU V, 204, 207). "[T]o will something, and to take a delight in its [conceived] existence, i.e., to take an interest in it, are identical" (KU V, 209).⁵ Finite rational beings always aim at the satisfaction of their needs, and this satisfaction always depends on the existence of what is needed (cf. KpV V, 137). Significantly, the concepts 'need' and 'interest' are applicable only to finite beings: for an infinite being, Kant claims, wanting something and the existence of the wanted object would coincide (cf. GMS IV, 413.n.).

Whereas Kant's use of these terms is most often discussed in relation to inclination, I concentrate here on Kant's attribution of needs and related characteristics to human *reason*. At the very beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant introduces reason's striving character. In the oft-quoted opening sentence of the first preface to the first *Critique*, he speaks of the "peculiar fate" of reason, that "it is burdened by questions which it cannot dismiss, because they have been prescribed by the nature of reason itself, but which it is unable to answer, because they transcend all powers of human reason" (KrV, A vii). These questions, according to Kant, regard the unconditioned. Reason "demands" to find the unconditioned condition for everything conditioned (KrV, B xx; A 324/B 380). Because the unconditioned cannot be found within the limits of possible experience, however, reason's "inextinguishable desire" (KrV, A 796/B 824) leads it to transcend these limits. Reason is "driven by its own need" (KrV, B 21).

Kant claims that reason has both a speculative and a practical interest. Its speculative interest consists in "*knowledge* of objects up to the highest principles *a priori*," and its practical interests in the "determination of the *will* with regard to its ultimate and complete end" (KpV V, 120).⁶ This duality may seem to threaten the ultimate unity of reason—thereby contradicting another "unavoidable need of human reason," namely, "insight into the unity of the entire pure faculty of reason (the theoretical as well as the practical)" (KpV V, 91). Although such insight is ultimately unavailable,⁷ Kant stresses that there

⁵See also the definitions of 'interest' in GMS IV, 413n.; KpV V, 119; KU V, 204, 207, 209; and Mds VI, 211. The fact that Kant repeatedly defines 'interest' (unlike 'need') may be explained by the novelty of the concept in the philosophical vocabulary of the time.

⁶See also KrV A 462-76/B 490-504; A 804f./B 832f.; WhDo VIII 139.

⁷Dieter Henrich stresses the in-principle unavailability of such insight in "On the Unity of Subjectivity" in his *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy*, ed. Richard L. Velkley, and

is no conflict between theoretical and practical reason, and that the interests of practical reason have primacy over those of theoretical reason (KpV V, 119).⁸ Kant's sparse remarks do not make it easy to see what the grounds for this primacy are, but one may assume they lie in the fact that the moral determination of the will is unconditionally required, whereas theoretical knowledge is not. Furthermore, as shall be shown below, reason's practical interest is able to satisfy the demand for the unconditioned to a much higher degree than is possible for theoretical reason.

Reason's quest for the unconditioned is a recurring narrative theme in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's vivid descriptions are well-known: reason tries to get a hold of the supersensible, but initially chooses the wrong strategy, thinking it can do so via theoretical-speculative means. The *Critique* reveals this to be an illusion, but also shows that reason can eventually find its satisfaction in pure practical faith.⁹ Kant then concludes by stating that the impossibility of knowledge of the supersensible is actually quite proper given our moral situation, and that it can be viewed as the wise design of Providence.¹⁰ Between the beginning and the end of the first *Critique*, reason's "peculiar fate" receives meaning and is reconceived, within the context of Kant's moral philosophy, as Providential design. In his other works, too, there are frequent links to this narrative theme.¹¹

It might seem as if this theme of reason's quest for the unconditioned, and with it the idea of reason as having needs and interests, function only as rhetorical devices on Kant's part to add some drama to his otherwise all-too-prosaic philosophical treatises. Such an interpretation of the function of the conative character of reason would be unlikely to encourage the (nondeconstructivist) reader to analyze it further in philosophical terms.

Reason's conative character does, however, play a decisive role in several of Kant's arguments. I here focus on only two arguments in which it fulfills a justificatory function: Kant claims that reason's speculative interest justifies the regulative use of the idea of God (KrV), and that its practical interest justifies the postulates of God's existence and the immortality of the soul (KpV).

The decisive principle underlying these arguments is the concept of a *right*

trans. Jeffrey Edwards, Louis Hunt, Manfred Kuehn, Guenter Zoeller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 17-54.

⁸ See Daniel Breazeale's insightful discussion of this issue in "Kant, Fichte and 'The Interests of Reason'," 86-88.

⁹ Cf. KrV, A 462ff./B 490ff.; A 583f./B 611f.; A 795f./B 823f.; A 797ff./B 825ff.; A 804ff./B 832ff.

¹⁰ KrV A 801/B 829; cf. KpV V, 148.

¹¹ Cf. ProI IV, 362; WhDo VIII, 136ff.; TPP VIII, 159ff.; KpV V, 5 and 146ff.

of need (*Recht des Bedürfnisses*), which he introduces in "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" Kant's basic idea in speaking of a right of need is that, whenever an objective decision is impossible in a matter of interest to reason, it is legitimate for reason to orient itself on the basis of its own needs.¹² Reason has this right *only* when it is impossible to prove either the existence of something or its nonexistence, and where assuming one or the other does not involve a contradiction. If one or the other satisfies a need of reason, reason has a *right* to this assumption (cf. MdS VI, 354), i.e., the assumption is justified. Kant speaks of the *right of need* of reason . . . as a subjective ground to presuppose and assume something which it is not allowed to presume to know on objective grounds; and consequently, [the right] to *orient* itself in thinking—in the immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with opaque night—merely by means of its own need. (WhDo VIII, 137)

Against the impression that this thesis provides *carte blanche* to regard any assumption about unknowables as rationally justified, Kant stresses that the right of need takes effect only in the case of needs of *reason* and neither in that of needs of inclination nor in that of mere wishes and phantasies. Hence he dismisses the objection raised by Thomas Wizenmann that the concept of a right of need would entitle a person who had fallen in love with a self-created idea of beauty to conclude that a corresponding object really exists (KpV V, 143f., n.).

Kant uses the concept of a right of need explicitly only in his essay "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" but it is implicit in a number of arguments. In the next section, I provide two examples in which Kant appeals to the needs of speculative and practical reason, respectively. It is not my intent to determine the ultimate soundness of Kant's arguments here. Rather, I only wish to show *that the concept of a need or interest of reason plays an important role in Kant's work and how it does so*, in order to set the stage for the critical discussion in the rest of this essay.

2. TWO EXAMPLES

1. The first example concerns needs and interests of speculative reason. Part of what Kant aims to show in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that theoretical, or better (since it here transcends the limits of possible experience) speculative reason, cannot gain knowledge of the supersensible. That is not to say, however, that speculative reason does not have an important contribution to make. It would be a mistake to think that the Dialectic of the first *Critique* has

¹²By using the term 'right', Kant locates the concept within the juridical discourse with which he describes his philosophical program of a *critique of reason*, as the tribunal before which the claims of traditional metaphysics are to be judged.

only a negative role. In positive terms, Kant wants to show that speculative reason has an indispensable systematizing function.

In the Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic Kant does not discuss the possibility of forming general empirical concepts and finding empirical laws, and of forming a system (i.e., a coherent whole that is organized by one principle) of such empirical concepts and laws. In principle, the world *could* be so complex that it would be impossible for humans to discover any regularities or similarities, let alone construct a systematic unity of empirical concepts and laws. Whether or not this is the case cannot be established a priori. But, Kant claims in the Transcendental Dialectic, especially in its Appendices, reason's need for systematic unity of knowledge leads one out of this theoretical undecidedness, for it *justifies* the use of the idea of a systematic unity as regulative principle. It is Kant's conviction that any systematic unity has to have a rational origin, and this is how reason's need for unity comes to justify the use of the regulative idea of God, where God is primarily understood as highest intelligence.

Kant justifies the use of this regulative principle in terms of the conative nature of reason and by invoking the justificatory concept of a right of need:

The highest formal unity, which rests solely on concepts of reason, is the *purposive* unity of things, and the *speculative* interest of reason makes it necessary to regard all order in the world *as if* it had originated in the intention of a supreme reason. (KrV, A 686f./B 714f.)¹³

He says that reason's "speculative *interest*, and not its insight, *justifies* it in starting from a point which lies so far above its sphere" (A 676/B 704). The use of the regulative idea of God is permitted, insofar as and because it helps reason to satisfy its need for unity (A 673ff./B 701ff.). In this way, it is possible to give "to reason the most perfect *satisfaction* with respect to the highest unity in its empirical employment, which it *must seek*" (A 676/B 704; *emphasis mine*).

Although Kant ascribes a necessary role to the idea of God, he simultaneously stresses the limited scope of this role. For since an *idea* of God suffices for purposes of systematization, there is *no need* to assume the *existence* of an object that corresponds to the idea and thus *no justification* for doing so (cf. A 676f./B 704f.). We shall see below that Kant claims that the need of practical reason is stronger in this respect and that it has a concomitant right to farther-reaching assumptions.¹⁴

¹³ Kant goes on to justify the use of teleological judgments, but since my aim here is simply to give an example of how the notion of needs of reason plays a justificatory role, I shall not consider that here.

¹⁴ The example given here concerns only the idea of God, but Kant defends the use of the other regulative ideas in a similar fashion. See A 673-75/B 701-703.

2. The second example concerns needs and interests of practical reason. Kant says in the second *Critique* that practical reason seeks the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, which he terms the "highest good" and which he conceives of as the unity of virtue and happiness (KpV V, 108). It is a duty, i.e., it is "objectively practically necessary," to promote the highest good. In acknowledging this as a duty, one necessarily presupposes its possibility. This presupposition is necessary, since it is "practically impossible to strive for the object of a concept which is in principle empty and without object" (KpV V, 143).

Once this primary presupposition has been established, the concept of a *need* of practical reason is introduced. Kant claims it is a *need of pure practical reason* to presuppose not only the possibility of the highest good but *also* to spell out the *conditions* of this possibility and to assume the existence of these conditions (KpV V, 142ff.). According to Kant, these conditions of the possibility of the highest good are the immortality of the soul and the existence of God.¹⁵ In the section entitled "Of Holding-to-be-True out of a Need of Pure Reason" (Vom Fürwahrhalten aus einem Bedürfnisse der reinen Vernunft) (KpV V, 142–146), Kant argues that reason's need "*justifies*" (KpV V, 144n.) assuming the existence of these conditions, i.e., entitles us to assume the actual existence of God and the immortality of the soul. So, he claims, it is "subjectively" impossible—that is, "reason finds it *impossible for itself*" (KpV V, 145)—to conceive of the possibility of the highest good without immortality and God, even though it cannot be *proven* that the highest good is impossible without them. But because it is possible neither to prove nor to disprove the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, here reason's interest is allowed to decide (KpV V, 146). Reason thus has a "choice" (KpV V, 145) and its need is the subjective principle that determines this choice:

the principle that determines our judgment in this regard, though as a need it is *subjective*, yet at the same time being the means of promoting what is *objectively* (practically) necessary, is the foundation of a *maxim* of holding something to be true [*Maxime des Fürwahrhaltens*] from a moral point of view. (KpV V, 146)

Thus, for Kant, in addition to the preliminary requirement that they do not involve a contradiction, the practical postulates of the immortality of the soul and the existence of God are justified by the fact that they satisfy a need

¹⁵For present purposes, my discussion of this example is concentrated solely on the role of the "needs of reason." I discuss neither the issue of whether Kant is right in saying that promoting the highest good is a moral command, nor issues concerning the contents of the two components of the highest good, nor Kant's motivation of the necessity of these two postulates. I discuss these issues in my "What Do the Virtuous Hope For? Re-reading Kant's Doctrine of the Highest Good," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress, Memphis 1995*, ed. Hoke Robinson (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), Vol. I.1, 91–112.

of pure practical reason. Thus, practical reason is entitled to make stronger assumptions than speculative reason, for the latter could legitimate only the use of regulative *ideas*, and not the assumption of the *existence* of objects corresponding to them.

It should now be clear that Kant uses the notion of the "right of need" at crucial points of his arguments. I will not discuss the cogency of these individual arguments, but focus on the more fundamental question of how to interpret the conative character of reason. I begin by investigating the possibility of a literal interpretation of Kant's account, and then go on to examine two types of metaphorical interpretation.

3. TWO TYPES OF LITERAL INTERPRETATION

There are a few passages in which Kant asserts that reason *feels* needs.¹⁶ Now feeling can have many causes, causes that can lie in reason itself (as with, e.g., moral feeling) as well as in inclination. But whatever the cause of a feeling, Kant is clear that feeling *qua* feeling is *sensuous* (*sinnlich*) (cf. KpV V, 75). As he states in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, "feeling, whatever it may be caused by, is always physical" (MdS VI, 377).¹⁷ But if feeling is defined as sensuous and physical, then reason cannot consistently be said to feel. Thus, if one were to give a literal reading to the passages in which Kant claims that reason "feels," he would here be confounding his own distinction between reason and feeling. I see no way to avoid this conclusion.

Importantly, it is not just the *explicit* claim that reason has feeling that generates problems here. In fact, as we saw at the beginning of this essay, the whole cluster of terms that Kant uses to describe the nature of reason—including 'to aim', 'to strive', 'to want', 'to have an end', 'to have an interest', and 'to need'—is inextricably linked to such notions as 'satisfaction', 'feeling of delight', 'feeling of pleasure'. They all *imply a feeling* of delight or pleasure connected with the (conception of the) existence of the object aimed at, wanted, needed, etc. This means that if 'feeling' cannot consistently be predicated of reason, then these other concepts cannot either. So, for instance, the often-used concept of reason's 'satisfaction'¹⁸ is just as problematic, taken literally, as that of reason's 'feeling'. Thus, a literal interpretation of Kant's conative characterization of reason which takes it at face value encounters severe conceptual difficulties.

Now Kant appears to confirm this assessment himself by explicitly denying

¹⁶ Most strikingly: WhDo VIII, 136, 137, 139. See also KrV A 768/B 796; Rel VI, 58; MdS VI, 378; VvT VIII, 400.

¹⁷ Cf. also KpV V, 75; MdS VI, 212n.

¹⁸ Cf. KrV, A 673/B 701; A 676/B 704; Prol IV, 332 and 349; KpV V, 142; WhDo VIII, 136.

that reason feels. In a cryptic footnote in "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" he states: "Reason does not feel; it sees its lack, and produces through the *drive for knowledge* [*Erkenntnistrieb*] the feeling of a need. Here, matters are as with moral feeling, which . . . is caused or produced through moral laws, therefore, by reason" (WhDo VIII, 139n.). Kant here suggests that there is indeed a feeling of a need, but that it is not *felt* by reason, but *caused* by it. The analogy with the feeling of respect that Kant draws here suggests that one should read "needs of reason" as meaning "needs caused by reason" rather than as "needs on the part of reason." The subject experiencing the need would on this account be the human subject as a whole, through the interplay of its mental powers.¹⁹ According to this reading, "need of reason" should be taken as an elliptical literal formulation. In order to distinguish it from the first, face-value, literal interpretation, I call this the "genetic" literal interpretation.

This attempt at clarifying the concept of a need of reason is unsatisfactory, however, for it leaves two problems unresolved. First, it remains unclear how exactly the genesis of this need should be conceived. Kant says reason "sees its lack, and produces through the *drive for knowledge* the feeling of a need." What the role of the "drive for knowledge" is, and whether or not that drive inheres in reason, are important questions that he fails to answer; introducing this drive seems to alter the problem, not solve it.²⁰ What is clear is only that the feeling of a need somehow stems from an effect of the faculty of knowledge on feeling.

If, as Kant suggests, the genesis of this need is to be interpreted as analogous to the genesis of moral feeling, then one would expect him to develop a counterpart to his account of the dynamic that causes moral feeling (KpV V, 72ff.), in order to conceptualize *how* exactly this "need of reason" comes about

¹⁹According to Kant, there are also other feelings originating in the interplay of mental faculties, rather than in physical sensation. These include, e.g., the feeling of pleasure that results from reflection on purposiveness (in each of its different kinds), and the "aesthetic feeling of life." For an original discussion of this last notion, see Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the "Critique of Judgment"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), ch. 5, pp. 88–107. In these cases, as in the case of moral feeling, Kant ascribes the feelings to the human subject, not to reason.

²⁰There is one other passage in which Kant discusses the genesis of a need of reason, and it has the same problems. In a footnote in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant states that the needs of speculative reason spring from reflection on "antecedent necessary problems" (KpV V, 142n.). As an example, he mentions the idea of God: reason finds this idea in itself as an unavoidable but problematic concept that it wants to define more precisely. Unfortunately, he again leaves the exact structure of this process of reflection unexplained. He says that the concept of a necessary being "lies under the eyes of reason," and that "this concept . . . now wants to be defined." He speaks further of a "drive for expansion" (*Trieb zur Erweiterung*) that is supposed to play a crucial role in the emergence of the need of reason (KpV V, 142n.), but this drive, again, never gets discussed.

in the human subject. Such an account would seem necessary, since if the striving and the needs do not inhere in reason itself, it is logically possible to conceive of a finite rational being that (1) has a rational idea of a systematic totality, (2) realizes that its current knowledge is not systematically complete, i.e., is not fully adequate to the idea, yet (3) does *not care* about filling up the difference. Such a being would not perceive the gap between the idea and the current state of affairs as a gap in need of closing. There is an important difference between perceiving that one's current knowledge is not systematically complete and desiring that it should be complete. Only an independently present *desire* for complete systematicity can bridge the two and explain how reason's idea of systematic totality comes to produce a need in humans. Thus, if reason *causes* the feeling of a need in humans, it should be possible to explain which anthropological characteristics lead to this particular effect under the influence of reason. To come back to the parallel case of moral feeling: Kant's account of the genesis of the feeling of respect for the moral law is in terms of anthropological factors. He shows what effect the representation of the moral law has on *human beings*, given their self-love and self-conceit (cf. KpV V, 71ff.). But nowhere does Kant discuss the anthropological structures that would account for the genesis of the feeling of the "need of reason" in a manner parallel to his discussion of the feeling of respect.²¹

A second difficulty with reading "needs of reason" as "needs caused by reason" and treating them as needs of *human beings* rather than needs of reason as such is that this reading would undermine these very arguments by mixing in anthropological peculiarities in what is intended to be a theory of rationality. The problem is the following. Kant argues that it is (subjectively) necessary *for reason* to use the regulative idea of God and to postulate the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. Only in this way can reason supposedly satisfy its essential needs. But if these needs are not conceived as needs *of*, but *caused by* reason, this undercuts Kant's argument. The problem is that whatever anthropological factors Kant might mention to explain the genesis of the feeling of need, he would no longer be able to claim, as he does with regard to the need of pure practical reason, that this need can be ascribed to *every finite rational being in the world* (KpV V, 144n.). This claim can be maintained only as long as the need of reason is explained purely in terms of structures of (finite) *rationality*. If, on the contrary, Kant were to have recourse to anthropological premises, he would have to give up the claim that this need

²¹ If the "drive for knowledge," mentioned in the footnote discussed above, is taken as part of an explanation of how the desire for complete systematicity comes about, this leads to the problem discussed as the second difficulty.

can be ascribed to all finite rational beings as such.²² And although some readers today might not consider this a serious problem, for Kant it is an important matter of philosophical rigor.

In sum, we can say that Kant, in spite of his occasional awareness of the difficulties involved in saying that reason *feels* needs, does not solve them. Taking the terms at face value is impossible, but the analogy with moral feeling does not present a simple solution to the problems. Moreover, when one attempts to work out this supposed analogy, the genetic conception of the "need of reason" runs counter to Kant's own critical program and its execution (at least as far as his moral philosophy is concerned), in that it hinges on anthropological claims.

4. TWO TYPES OF METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION

It might seem that the difficulties connected with a literal reading can be avoided if one supposes that the conative character of reason is meant to be taken metaphorically. Kant's attempts, in the footnotes discussed above, to explain the term 'need of reason' genetically seem to imply that he *was* interested in a literal meaning of the term. But given the many unclaritys remaining in his account, it is worth exploring the possibility of a metaphorical reading.

On a metaphorical reading the complaints about inconsistencies in the last section would miss the point. If one tries to indicate the size of one's house by saying "My house is a castle," it would be beside the point for someone else to object that the house does not have any defensive fortifications. Similarly—so the argument could go—one misses Kant's point if one takes terms such as 'need' and 'satisfaction' literally. Although there have been several commentators who refer to Kant's expressions as metaphors,²³ little has been done to explicate the presuppositions and implications of this claim. A great deal depends on what one means by 'metaphor' and how one regards its cognitive status. Therefore, I first distinguish the different directions in which the metaphorical interpretation could be taken, and then discuss each of these.

As far as I can see, the claim can be formulated in two versions of differing

²² This is why the deflationary reading of the "needs of reason" proposed by Susan Neiman does not fully capture the interpretative complexities involved. Neiman claims that "there is nothing mysterious about the notion [of needs of reason] at all" and that "the needs of reason are just those universal needs which human beings have in addition to those we share with other animals" (*The Unity of Reason*, 165, 166). The simplicity and sobriety of Neiman's interpretation are certainly attractive. However, it leaves the genesis of these needs mysterious, and since Neiman seems to interpret them in anthropological terms, this interpretation does not account for Kant's claim that all finite rational beings have these needs.

²³ See above, note 3.

scape. First, one could interpret Kant's language of needs, interests, and satisfaction of reason as merely decorative, illustrative metaphors with no argumentative force or function of their own. The metaphors could then be viewed as rhetorical devices, in contrast to the true philosophical content to be found in literal formulations. This I call the *weak claim*. This view is very much in keeping with a view of the role of metaphor in philosophy that has traditionally been predominant, namely, of metaphor as lacking cognitive value, as having only a decorative, didactic, or rhetorical function, and as being replaceable by an exhaustive literal paraphrase.²⁴

A second and *stronger* version of the metaphor thesis could be the view that it is *not* possible to formulate a nonmetaphorical version of Kant's justifications of the regulative ideas and the practical postulates, but that his account is fundamentally metaphorical. Yirmiyahu Yovel is one of the people who has most clearly recognized the importance of Kant's conative characterization of reason, and he probably comes closest to defending the strong view when he says that we are here dealing with a "metaphor in the deeper sense."²⁵ But what this entails—both in terms of its meaning and of its philosophical significance—remains unclear in his discussion. I would like to suggest that the vague term "deep" can be taken in two ways: either as referring to a root metaphor, a term I use here for a metaphor which *underlies* and shapes philosophical thought, or as a metaphor that *functions within* a body of philosophical thought and has philosophical import, without being replaceable by an exhaustive literal paraphrase.

I shall first show here that Kant himself distinguishes between different forms of legitimate use of metaphors in philosophical prose, and that his distinctions run roughly parallel to the distinction between the weak thesis and the second version of the strong thesis. As is to be expected, Kant does not conceive of a legitimate place for root metaphors in philosophy. I then examine the prospects of each of these for yielding an interpretation of the conative character of reason.

5. EXCURSUS: KANT ON THE USE OF METAPHOR IN PHILOSOPHY

Kant is not opposed to the use of figurative speech in philosophical prose. On the basis of his scattered remarks, one can distinguish at least three legitimate functions of metaphorical language, only two of which are relevant here. Kant ascribes to it a *didactic* use and says that when conceptual thinking is not yet

²⁴Mark Johnson, "Introduction: Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition" in *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, ed. Mark Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 4–20. For an extensive account of meaning and metaphor, see Eva Kittay, *Metaphor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²⁵Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, 16n.

fully developed, images can serve as vehicles to help get an idea across.²⁶ This is irrelevant here, because it is not a potential candidate to explain Kant's description of reason's nature, since the Critiques are written for a philosophically competent audience.

The first legitimate use of metaphors that is important in the context of the present discussion is ornamental. According to Kant, metaphors can *illustrate* or *decorate* philosophical argumentation and thereby play an enlivening role, without, however, adding anything essential to the argument. He argues, however, that it should not lead to a blurring of the distinction between philosophical argumentation and poetic illustration. Both Kant's insistence on the distinction between poetic and philosophic language and his own employment of metaphors come together strikingly in the following passage from his Herder review:

But just as little do we here wish to consider whether that poetic spirit which enliven[s] [Herder's] expression has not also at times intruded into his philosophy; . . . whether, instead of neighborly transitions from the region of philosophic language to that of poetic language, the limits and possessions of both are not at times completely displaced; and whether the fabric of bold metaphors, poetic images, and mythological allusions does not rather serve in many instances to conceal the body of thoughts as under a *farthingale*, instead of making it agreeably shimmer through as if through a translucent garment. (RezH VIII, 60, cf. VvT VIII, 405)

Kant's illustrative and decorative use of metaphors in the Critiques is well known.²⁷ His talk of the "birth-certificate" of the categories, for example, is clearly metaphorical in this sense (KrV A 86/B 119). The question is whether talk of the "needs," "interests," and "strivings" of reason can be regarded as all being of this kind, which would make it fit the weak interpretation.

Second, in certain cases, indirect, figurative language has an *essential* and *indispensable* function *within* philosophical discourse. Kant's thoughts on this topic require some explanation.²⁸

In §59 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant distinguishes between three kinds of concepts, and mentions the three corresponding ways in which concepts can be "exhibited" (*dargestellt*).²⁹ These are three ways in which concepts can

²⁶ Accordingly, Kant holds that at the beginning of the history of philosophy figurative speech was still the only language of philosophy: *Logic*, IX, 28.

²⁷ See, e.g., David W. Tarbet, "The Fabric of Metaphor in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968): 257-70.

²⁸ For a range of interpretations, see A. T. Nuyen, "The Kantian Theory of Metaphor," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22 (1989): 95-109; Eve Stoddard, "Reason on Trial: Legal Metaphors in the *Critique of Pure Reason*," *Philosophy and Literature* 12 (1988): 245-60; Tarbet, "The Fabric of Metaphor."

²⁹ Aspects of his argument can also be found in several other passages. Cf. Prof. IV, 357-360; Rel VI, 64-65n.; ApH VII, 191-92.

be related to (possible) experience in order to show that a given concept is not empty, but that an object in reality does or can correspond to it, and thus that the concept has meaning (*Bedeutung*), or, as Kant says, objective reality. In the case of empirical concepts, one can give an example; in the case of pure concepts of the understanding, one can give a schema (direct exhibition). Ideas of reason, however, cannot be exhibited adequately by sensible intuitions. Unlike empirical concepts, their reality cannot be demonstrated by an example, and unlike the categories of the understanding, their reality cannot be shown by a schema. No sensible intuition can ever be fully adequate to an idea of reason and thereby establish a direct connection of the idea with experience. Here, says Kant, only exhibition by means of a symbol is possible.

Kant's use of the term 'symbol' is very different from the usual meaning of the term as a 'conventional sign'.³⁰ Kant defines symbolism as the "transfer [*Übertragung*] of our reflection on an object of intuition to an entirely different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond" (KU V, 352f.). Symbolic exhibition is based on *analogy* (KU V, 352).³¹ As an example, Kant mentions that an organism (*beseelter Körper*) can be a symbol for a constitutional monarchy and that a machine, e.g., a handmill, can be a symbol for an absolute monarchy (KU V, 352). The symbolic relation does not turn on a similarity between the symbolizing object of intuition and the symbolized concept. An absolute monarch does not literally grind up his subjects, and there is no direct, observable similarity between an organism and a constitutional monarchy. Rather, as Kant says in the *Prolegomena*, an analogy "does not signify an imperfect similarity of two things, but a perfect similarity of two relations between entirely dissimilar things" (Prol IV, 357). Thus, as the parts of an organism relate to the organism as a whole, so the members of a constitutional monarchy relate to the whole political system. In both cases, Kant assumes, one thinks of a whole in which each member is not merely a means, but also an end, and in which the whole and the parts mutually determine each other. And thus the first can symbolize the second (cf. KU V, 375).

Kant distinguishes the use of analogy in mathematics from its use in philosophy. In mathematics an analogy is a rule which states "the equality of two quantitative relations" (KrV A 179/B 222), of the form A:B::C:D, which makes it possible to know D with certainty when A, B, and C are given. By contrast, in philosophy an analogy is the equality of two *qualitative* relations,

³⁰ Kant explicitly rejects such an interpretation himself, KU V, 352.

³¹ On the issue of symbolism in the third *Critique*, see Rudolf Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*, 111–29; Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1979), 374–76; Felicitas Munzel, "The Beautiful Is the Symbol of the Morally Good": Kant's Philosophical Basis of Proof for the Idea of the Morally-Good," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995): 301–30.

and consequently, Kant says, if three elements are given, one can determine the relation to a fourth, but one cannot determine this fourth element itself. If the analogy stays within the empirical realm, it gives one a rule as to how to search the fourth element, but Kant also uses analogies in cases where the fourth element is noumenal, and then they give a rule as to how to think it (cf. KrV A 180/B 222f.). Kant gives the following example:

By means of such an analogy, I can obtain a relational concept of things which are absolutely unknown to me. For instance, as the promotion of the welfare of children (= A) is to the love of parents (= B), so the welfare of the human species (= C) is to that unknown in God (= x), which we call love; not as if it had the least similarity to any human inclination, but because we can posit its relation to the world to be similar to that which things of the world bear to one another. (Prol IV, 358n.)

The relation A:B is what is being transferred to C:D.

What is important here is that Kant argues that for ideas of reason *only* such an indirect, analogous manner of exhibition is possible. In §59 of the third *Critique* Kant applies this to the idea of God and argues that the only way one can represent God is symbolically (without, of course, adding anything to our theoretical knowledge; KU V, 353). Elsewhere, he calls this "symbolic anthropomorphism" (Prol IV, 357f.; cf. KrV, A 700/B 728). It is very important to Kant to distinguish this from anthropomorphism simpliciter, which involves the claim that there are real similarities between God and humans. Against this view, Kant repeatedly argues that qualitative analogies do not yield theoretical knowledge of God, but that they provide a way—and the *only* way—to show the meaningfulness of the idea of God.³² This, he says, is especially important for moral purposes. Here, symbolism enters philosophical prose in a manner that is both irreplaceable and unavoidable.

One could justifiably call a Kantian symbol a kind of metaphor. After all, Aristotle regarded analogy as one of the possible bases of metaphorical language.³³ Thus, Kant can be said to allow for an important and irreplaceable use of metaphor within philosophy, of the kind necessary for the second version of the strong metaphor thesis to even be possible.

For the sake of conceptual clarity, it should be noted that the term 'meta-

³² Kant does speak of "symbolic cognition" (*Erkenntnis*) of God, but he makes clear that he does not mean this as determinate theoretical knowledge but as a determination of the idea of God from a practical point of view. "If one may already call a mere way of representing cognition (which is surely permissible if it is a principle not of the theoretical determination of the object, as to what it is in itself, but of the practical determination of what the idea of the object should become for us and for its purposive employment), then all our cognition of God is merely symbolic" (KU V, 353). Rudolf Makkreel has clarified the distinction between *Erkenntnis* and *Wissen* at work here, in his "Regulative and Reflective Uses of Purposiveness in Kant," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 30 (1991) Supplement: 49–63, esp. 59.

³³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, Ch. 21, 1457b.

phor' is wider than Kant's notion of a 'symbol', for it also includes aesthetic ideas.³⁴ An aesthetic idea is a product of the free play of the imagination. Whereas an idea of reason is a concept for which no adequate intuition can be given, an aesthetic idea is an "intuition (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept can never be found" (KU V, 342). Although an aesthetic idea possesses conceptualizable content and "prompts much thought," this content can never be exhaustively articulated (KU V, 315).

Aesthetic ideas can be used to exhibit rational ideas. For example, a poet expresses in terms of sense "rational ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, hell, eternity, creation, and so on" (KU V, 314). A poet may make use of analogies, but they are not essential to aesthetic ideas in the way they are to symbols, since the artist also follows "principles that lie higher up in reason" which provide freedom from the law of association (KU V, 314). Genius, which produces aesthetic ideas, is free from the constraint of rules (KU V, 307), whereas symbols are produced exactly on the basis of rules, namely, rules of analogy and rules of reflection. Thus, the manner in which aesthetic ideas present rational ideas is different from that of symbols, although neither kind of exhibition can be fully adequate to the rational idea since, as we saw earlier, such adequacy is impossible. Aesthetic ideas "expand" it and "cause so much thought as can never be brought together in a determinate concept" (KU V, 314). Symbols, on the other hand, are established according to rules, and give us a guiding principle as to how to think the fourth term (A::B::C:D), without being able to determine it.

A final difference between symbols and aesthetic ideas, and one that is especially important in the context of this essay, is that Kant does not seem to attribute to aesthetic ideas an *indispensable* role within philosophy. The power of aesthetic ideas shows itself "properly speaking in the art of the poet" (KU §49, V, 314). That does not amount to a ban on their use in philosophy, and in fact, aesthetic ideas can enliven philosophical discourse. A philosophical author can make a "neighborly transition" in the sense of the quote from the Herder review, a transition into the poet's realm for the sake of making one's prose more spirited. But, in such cases, aesthetic ideas have only an "indirect" relation to cognition, namely, insofar as they "enliven" (*beleben*) the cognitive powers (KU §47, V, 317). They are not strictly necessary for the sake of philosophical argument as such.

The inexhaustibility of content of aesthetic ideas is the reason why they

³⁴For an insightful discussion of the concept of aesthetic idea in Kant, and its relation to judgments of beauty and judgments of the sublime, see Kirk Pillow, "Form and Content in Kant's Aesthetics: Locating Beauty and the Sublime in the Work of Art," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32 (1994): 443-59.

are often called metaphors,³⁵ since inexhaustibility is widely regarded as the hallmark of metaphoricity. For purposes of the present discussion, however, this means that the term 'metaphor' becomes too unspecific to use when only 'symbol' is meant, because both aesthetic ideas and symbols are forms of metaphor. In the discussions that follow I adopt Kant's terminology so as to make clear which of the different kinds of metaphor is meant when necessary.

6. JUST A DECORATIVE METAPHOR?

I now turn to the question of how the conative characterization of reason is best interpreted. Consider first the possibility that the talk of reason's needs and striving is *merely* metaphorical. The term 'metaphor' is here used in a loose and unspecific sense, and the emphasis is on 'merely'. The idea is that the problematic expressions are rhetorical embellishments of literal truths. For this interpretation to work, it should be possible to give a literal alternative. If one *cannot* formulate an appropriate literal counterpart, i.e., if the conative talk cannot be substituted, it becomes impossible to view these terms as merely decorative.³⁶

Thus, although we have already seen some reason to doubt that there is a literal claim to be made, I would like to consider in some more detail the *very possibility* of formulating a literal justification of the use of the regulative idea and the two practical postulates at issue, *without* any recourse to needs, feelings, strivings, etc., of reason, i.e., without any traces of conative terms. I shall argue that this is impossible.

In support of the "merely decorative" interpretation, one might claim that the "need" of using regulative ideas is not interestingly different from the rational necessity or "need" to draw the conclusion Q from the premises P → Q and P. When we say we "need to conclude that Q," the term 'need' is not used as a decorative metaphor to enliven our prose, but it is a conventional, literal way of speaking. This particular way of using the term 'need', someone might argue, may have inspired Kant to play on the connotations of this term for rhetorical purposes.

The problem with this argument is that it depends on an equivocation of different kinds of necessity, and, consequently, of different ways in which the term 'need' is used. In the example given, what is at issue is *logical* necessity,

³⁵ See Mark Johnson, "Introduction," 14.

³⁶ Thus, it is possible to decide whether the conative talk is merely decorative without entering the intricacies of the philosophical debate about the nature of metaphor. Furthermore, I here leave aside the debate about the literal-figurative distinction as such. I am concerned with the question of the status of the conative character of reason within Kant's philosophy, and since he takes this distinction for granted, the attempt to interpret his talk about reason does not require a resolution of this issue.

not the *subjective* necessity Kant speaks of when he appeals to the conative nature of reason. One can see the difference more clearly when one substitutes 'interest' for 'need'. In logic, it is inappropriate to say that the justification for believing that Q lies in the fact that we have an *interest* in believing so. Similarly, in one sense we indeed "need" to hold that every event has a cause. This is not the kind of need that is invoked by Kant's conative characterization of reason, however, but a matter of *objective* necessity. According to Kant, we do not have a choice as to whether or not to employ the principle, and consequently he does not justify this synthetic a priori principle by an appeal to strivings, interests, or needs.

Furthermore, phrases such as "the nature of reason" or "the constitution of our faculties of knowledge" do not provide satisfactory candidates for a literal counterpart to Kant's conative talk in sentences like "Reason's interest makes it necessary to assume that . . ." They are not specific enough. As soon as one tries to spell out exactly *what* it is about this nature or constitution that justifies the regulative ideas and the postulates at issue, the talk of strivings and needs enters the account.

A construction of a literal version should be able to give an account of the insufficiency of logical and objective grounds and highlight the decisive role of the moment of subjectivity. In each of the cases I mentioned as examples in the second section of this essay, Kant's argument is based on the premise that, when objective grounds do not suffice to decide a matter that is of vital interest to reason, *subjective grounds* can tip the scale. In each of these cases, logical and objective grounds are insufficient and so, Kant says, reason is justified in letting its own interest be decisive. I do not know how to talk about subjective grounds except in terms of desires, needs, interests, and the like.³⁷ And as long as we cannot formulate an account of subjectivity that avoids all conative terms, we cannot conclude that Kant's conative characterization is just metaphorical in the sense of a merely decorative, inessential illustration.

7. REASON AND SYMBOLISM

There are still two options left for an interpretation of the conative characterization of reason: as a root metaphor or as a symbol. To say it has to be

³⁷In an attempt to circumvent the conative terms, John Zammito renders *Bedürfnis* as 'requirement'. However, in discussing this requirement, he speaks of a 'propensity' of reason, a term which seems to have no advantage over 'needs' or 'interests' (see Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's "Critique of Judgment,"* 238). Similarly, paraphrasing the justification of the regulative ideas or postulates by saying that they are necessary to fill a 'gap' that would otherwise exist presupposes the antecedent desire or need for closure. Cf. Neiman, *The Unity of Reason*, 95. One has to have recourse to concepts such as those of a 'need', 'striving', or 'interest' of reason to explain why the gap is perceived as a gap to be closed.

understood as a root metaphor, one which underlies the Kantian project, would constitute the more radical claim. It would imply that figurative speech had made its way into the heart of Kant's philosophy, without being able to be accounted for in Kantian terms. It would be a move from the attempt at understanding the text as a philosophical argument to its explanation in external terms. That is no reason to reject this possibility, of course, since it may turn out that this is our only option. But from the perspective of what would constitute the hermeneutically optimal solution, we should first try and see if the concept of symbolism can help us out, and only shift from interpretation to explanation if that fails.

The question, then, is whether the symbolic reading provides a possible interpretation. The notions of analogy and symbolism can be found throughout Kant's work, but he does not apply them to reason itself. Thus, the question is whether he *could* have explained consistently his way of speaking along these lines. More specifically, the question is whether it is possible to read terms such as the 'need' or 'interest' of reason as cases of the *ineluctably* indirect, symbolic exhibition of the kind Kant mentions with regard to the idea of God. If so, this affirms the second, strong reading of Kant's conative characterization of reason, according to which it is a form of irreducibly metaphorical language that functions within philosophical thought.

There are three reasons for an affirmative answer. First, since symbolism can be used in many different contexts, there is nothing in the notion of symbolism that would preclude its application to reason. Second, the concept of reason is of the kind that cannot be exhibited except by means of a symbol. Reason itself cannot be exhibited by an example or a schema. No sensible intuition can be adequate to it. There is an unsurpassable limit to its possible self-understanding, insofar as it is impossible for reason to obtain objective theoretical knowledge of the ground of its own subjectivity.³⁸ In this regard reason itself shares the fate of the ideas, which Kant claims can be exhibited only symbolically. Thus, for it, too, in its reflexive critical undertakings, the recourse to indirect, symbolic exhibition is arguably necessary. Third, as a matter of fact, Kant treats organisms as the symbol of reason.³⁹ Although he does not reflect on its methodological and ontological status, Kant points out a similarity between how the parts (members, organs) of an organism are related to each other and how the principles of knowledge are related to each other. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for example, he says that pure speculative

³⁸ See Henrich, "On the Unity of Subjectivity," in which he discusses Kant's talk of a "common, but to us unknown root" in which sensibility and understanding "perhaps" find their common ground (*The Unity of Reason*, 17-54). Cf. KrV A 15/B 29.

³⁹ The importance of Kant's analogy between reason and organisms has been recognized by several authors, e.g., Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's "Critique of Judgment,"* 173-75.

reason forms a unity "in which every member, as in an organized body, exists for the sake of all the others, and all for the sake of each" (KrV B xxiii; cf. B xxxvii f.).

The analogy between organisms and reason, applied to the problem of the conative characterization of reason, would imply that the relation between reason, on the one hand, and regulative principles and postulates, on the other, should be regarded as analogous to the relation between organisms and that which fulfills their needs. Symbolizing reason in this way would not imply any observable *similarity* between organisms and reason. Rather, it involves an analogy: An organism (A) is to the object of its needs (B) as reason (C) is to the regulative ideas or postulates (D).

Given that reasoning by analogy plays an important role in Kant's philosophy, given that 'reason' itself fits the category of supersensible concepts for which exhibition through analogy is necessary, and given that Kant states that there are analogies between organisms and reason, it is possible to interpret the conative talk as unavoidably symbolic in the Kantian sense. In this way, Kant's talk of the needs, striving, and satisfaction of reason can be seen to be neither "just" a decorative metaphor, nor a literal-denotative ascription of properties, but can be understood as based on analogy.⁴⁰

Thus, it is not necessary to explain the conative characterization of reason as a root metaphor. The symbolic reading is a possible way of reconstructing, or perhaps more accurately of developing the methodological foundation of Kant's characterizations of reason. Although it involves working out an argument Kant failed to develop, his philosophical work provides the conceptual space for doing so.

8. CONCLUSION

Kant does not himself clarify the meaning of the conative description of reason in a satisfactory manner. He describes reason in terms of needs, interests, and a striving for satisfaction without *himself* solving the philosophical quandary connected with these descriptions. The explorations in this essay show both the importance of his characterization of reason as conative and the conceptual quagmire hidden beneath the surface of this characterization.

I have not here aimed at an *evaluation* of Kant's characterization of reason as conative. I have explored the relative merits and disadvantages of four ways

⁴⁰This interpretation can be reconciled with Kant's footnote discussed in the third section above. On this view, reason can indeed be said to produce the feeling of a need in humans, provided one realizes that this production itself cannot be the object of theoretical knowledge and has to be thought symbolically. The problems mentioned in section three arise only if one takes this production as the object of possible determinate theoretical knowledge. I thank Rudolf Makkreel for pointing this out to me.

of making sense of Kant's language. It is impossible to tell with certainty whether one of these four represents his considered view, and indeed, he may not actually have had an articulate view on the matter at all. His characterization of reason, when taken at face value, is hard to make consistent with his distinction between reason and feeling. The genetic interpretation seems to run counter to Kant's program of a critique of *reason*, not anthropology. Attempts to explain this talk as just a decorative metaphor, however, fail to yield a more satisfactory interpretation, because of the impossibility of specifying the subjective moment in other, unproblematic terms. Interpreting the conative characterizations of reason's nature as "symbolic" in Kant's own sense is possible and enables us to make sense of it in his own terms.

This result also highlights an essential aspect of Kant's theory of reason in general. Kant's use of symbolism for *reason* is different from other uses (e.g., with regard to God) in one respect, namely, in that it shows (and results from) the *reflexive* character of Kant's philosophy. This symbolism functions in the critical self-explication of reason, where reason is not given to itself as an object, but nevertheless needs to present itself to itself in the process of gaining clarity about its own workings. Kant's use of symbolism for reason also shows his critical restraint with regard to substantive claims about reason and his denial of the possibility of theoretical knowledge of it. Reason is not given to consciousness, and thus our account of it must at least in part be constructed.⁴¹ All of this is obscured if one regards Kant's conative characterization of reason as merely decorative, as an elliptical way of making an anthropological statement, or as simply inconsistent.⁴²

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⁴¹ Cf. Onora O'Neill: "He denies not only that we have access to transcendent metaphysical truths, such as the claims of rational theology, but also that reason has intrinsic or transcendent vindication, or is given to consciousness. . . . Critique of reason is possible only if we think of critique as recursive and reason as constructed rather than imposed" (*Constructions of Reason* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989], 26–27). O'Neill does not address the question of the epistemic status of Kant's conative characterization herself, but I think the account presented in this essay is compatible with her approach.

⁴² I am grateful to Rudolf Makkreel, editor of this journal, and two anonymous referees for their detailed comments and helpful suggestions. I also thank Joyce Carpenter, Kirk Pillow, and Eric Watkins for valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper.