

Rationality: What difference does it make?

Colin McLearn

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Correspondence

Colin McLearn, University of
Nebraska–Lincoln.
Email: mclear@unl.edu

Abstract

A variety of interpreters have argued that Kant construes the animality of human beings as ‘transformed’, in some sense, through the possession of rationality. I argue that this interpretation admits of multiple readings and that it is either wrong, or doesn’t result in the conclusion for which its proponents argue. I also explain the sense in which rationality nevertheless significantly differentiates human beings from other animals.

the human being, as an animal endowed with the capacity of reason (*animal rationabile*), can make out of himself a rational animal (*animal rational*)

Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, 7:321 (1798)

IMMANUEL KANT¹

How should we conceive of the possession of rationality? At the least, in asking this question we need to distinguish between the property of being rational (or of acting rationally), which one seemingly can have or not at different points in one’s life, and the *capacity* to have such a property or act in such a manner, which may more plausibly be said to be integral to the normal maturation of a human being. So understood we can now make sense of the point Immanuel Kant makes in

¹Quotations from Kant’s work are from the *Akademie Ausgabe*, with the first *Critique* cited by the standard A/B edition pagination, and the other works by volume and page. Where available, translations generally follow *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, general editors Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. References to other primary texts follow available English translations where possible. For a complete list of abbreviations see the end of the article.

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2022 The Authors. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of Philosophy and Phenomenological Research Inc.

the epigraph above – the human is not so much a rational being (as the view of Greek antiquity is often stated) but rather a being that is able to become or achieve rationality in its various acts.

While distinguishing between possession of a capacity for rational activity, and the actualization of that capacity in one or another way is useful, it also raises a difficult question. Is the possession of rationality a capacity like others, or is it one that radically changes the manner in which all of the person's or agent's capacities function? Versions of the former view have been called "additive" theories of rationality (AR), while versions of the latter have been called "transformative" theories of rationality (TR).²

In this paper I critically discuss TR. I do this by way of a critical exposition of the interpretation of one of its supposed central proponents—Immanuel Kant.³ I argue that, on at least one way of interpreting TR, it cannot work as an interpretation of Kant, being more suited to Kant's successors, particularly Herder and Hegel. I argue further that Kant's conception of rationality can be "transformative" without being so in the particular sense advocated by contemporary interpreters. Discussing the question of how best to characterize the capacity for rationality in this historical context is not at all to say that this is solely or primarily a question of history, much less of a very specific period of history—namely, German Idealism. On the contrary, I take the question and its resolution to be very much one with which contemporary philosophy is and should be concerned. But it is nevertheless worth pursuing this question in its historical context, both because of the outsized role Kant has played in our reception of this question, and because I think the correct interpretation of his view offers a philosophically attractive position that is distinct from those offered in recent discussion of these issues.

I first discuss the "transformative" conception and how it should be understood. Section two then addresses whether there is logical space for an intermediary position between the putatively objectionable "additive" theory and the interpretation of "transformation" on offer from most of its contemporary proponents. I distinguish between an essentialist and a more moderate "actualist" version of TR. I then present, in section three, four difficulties for ascribing the essentialist version of TR to Kant. Finally, section four elucidates Kant's conception of the difference rationality makes to the mental life of a rational subject by virtue of his conception of the exercise of rational control in attention.

1 | RATIONALITY AS TRANSFORMATIVE FORM

The transformative conception of rationality (TR), succinctly stated, is that "rationality is not a particular power rational animals are equipped with, but their distinctive manner of having powers."⁴ Thus, in describing the human being as a rational animal, one specifies the specific—viz. rational—way in which the human being is an animal. Rationality differentiates human

² For an influential statement of TR, though not under that moniker, see (McDowell, 1996, ch. 6). Other important statements include (Boyle, 2012, 2016, 2017; Conant, 2016; McDowell, 2010).

³ Note that it is not entirely clear the extent to which all of the advocates of TR attribute the view to Kant. McDowell presents the view in the context of an argument that is purportedly drawn from Kant. Boyle is somewhat less obviously committed to reading Kant in this way, though see (Boyle, 2012, pp. 425 n38) for at least some suggestion that he does. (Conant, 2016; Land, 2018; Pendlebury, 2021) explicitly attribute TR to Kant. Korsgaard (2009, 2018) interprets Kant as endorsing a view according to which non-rational animal minds are of a "different kind" from rational minds, but it is not clear to me that she construes this "difference in kind" in the terms offered by TR. For further discussion of this idea of a "different kind" of mind see (Boyle, 2017) and the essays collected in (Kern & Kietzmann, 2017).

⁴ (Boyle, 2012, p. 399).

beings from other kinds of animal and provides the basic principle through which to understand all of its non-accidental animal properties.⁵

Boyle (2012) argues that the specific difference that sets one species apart from another “transforms” what it is to be a member of the genus of which both are species. He bases the source of this idea on the following passage from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,

What is other in species is something other than something, and this must belong to both of them. . . . Therefore it is necessary that things that are other in species be in the same genus. For I call ‘genus’ such a thing, i.e. the one and same thing which both are said to be and which has a difference not incidentally, be it as matter or in another way. For not only must what is common belong (for instance, they are both animals), but this very thing—the animal—must also be other for each of them. . . . For this reason they are this common thing, other in species than each other. . . . Therefore, it is necessary that the difference be this otherness of the genus. For I call ‘difference of the genus’ an otherness which makes this same genus other.⁶

Boyle understands Aristotle’s position as one according to which different species share a generic sameness, but are ‘other’ to one another in the sense of their generic sameness being manifest in a specifically different way in each species. So if human beings are different from other animals by virtue of the possession of a capacity for rationality, then the difference rationality makes to the human species is not merely ‘incidental’, but rather *essential*, in at least the sense that it is part of what characterizes the nature or being of any rational animal. Let’s set aside the question of whether this interpretation of Aristotle is sound.⁷ How should we understand the claim that what is animal in human beings differs from what is animal in non-rational beings?

Boyle argues that

“rational” specifies the sort of frame that undergirds any concrete description of what it is to be a human being. For *it does not specify a particular characteristic that we exhibit but our distinctive manner of having characteristics*. This, I believe, is the significance of saying that “rational” characterizes the form of human being.⁸

The key claim here is that rationality “does not specify a particular characteristic that we exhibit but our distinctive manner of having characteristics.” This means that, in rational beings, acts of perception, cognition, desire, choice, etc., will all be *different in kind* from those acts in non-rational animals. Hence, according to TR, the “transformative” nature of rationality entails that

⁵ Note that the focus here is on the non-accidental properties of the rational being qua <animal>, and not some more basic genus, such as that designated by <physical being>.

⁶ *Metaphysics Iota* 8, 1057b35–1058a7, quoted in (Boyle, 2012, p. 409). Interpretation of this passage, as well as its place in Aristotle’s overall view of the genus-species distinction, is a source of significant controversy. See (Aristotle & Castelli, 2018) for discussion.

⁷ For detailed discussion and commentary on *Metaphysics Iota* see (Aristotle & Castelli, 2018). As Castelli notes (2018), 174ff Aristotle is not always consistent in the way in which he presents the notion of a specific difference, and sometimes indicates (e.g. *Topics* I) that the genus specifies what the species *is*, while the specific difference indicates a quality or determination of the species. Such qualitative determination, while necessary for the species, need not entail an *essential* difference in its animal capacities. If this were Aristotle’s considered view it is not clear that he would endorse TR as Boyle conceives of it.

⁸ (Boyle, 2012, p. 410).

there is no univocal sense to the claim that both a human and an ape (or dog, or crow, etc.) *perceives* the fruit hanging from the tree, or *desires* to take a bite of it, etc..⁹

A contemporary of Kant's, and clear proponent of this view, is Johann Gottfried von Herder, who argues for a similar position in his treatment of language in human beings.¹⁰ In the *Treatise On the Origin of Language* (1772), Herder advocates for a purely secular explanation of the origin of language in human beings. In doing so he articulates a similarly "transformative" conception of human reason, though tied to a more specific thesis than that advocated by Boyle, which is that it is the capacity for *language* in particular that sets humans apart from other animals. Herder claims that "the human species does not stand above the animals in *levels* of more or less, but in *kind*."¹¹

Let one name this whole disposition of the human being's forces however one wishes: understanding, reason, taking-awareness [*Besinnung*], etc. It is indifferent to me, as long as one does not assume these names to be separate forces or mere higher levels of the animal forces. It is the "*whole organization of all human forces; the whole domestic economy of his sensuous and cognizing, of his cognizing and willing, nature.*" Or rather, it is "*the single positive force of thought, which, bound up with a certain organization of the body, is called reason in the case of human beings, just as it becomes ability for art in the case of animals, which is called freedom in the case of the human being, and in the case of animals becomes instinct.*" The difference is not in levels or the addition of forces, but in a *quite different sort of orientation and unfolding of all forces*. Whether one is Leibnizian or Lockean, Search or Knowall, idealist or materialist, one must in accordance with the preceding, if one is in agreement about the words, concede the matter, "*a distinctive character of humanity*" which consists in this and nothing else.¹²

Herder goes on to claim that a human being, as rational, cannot have merely animal drives or senses. Instead the presence of rationality in a creature is an "orientation of all forces that is distinctive to his species"¹³ and changes all aspects of the human being's mental powers.

Similarly, Hegel argues that,

the *human being* distinguishes itself from the lower animals by thinking, [so] everything human is human because it is brought about through thinking, and for that reason alone. (EL §2)

Hegel goes on to say that,

Religion, right, and ethical life belong to man alone, and that only because he is a thinking essence. For that reason, *thinking* in its broad sense has not been inactive in these spheres, even at the level of feeling and belief, or of representation; the activity and productions of thinking are *present* in them and are *included* in them. (EL §2 Z)

⁹ For discussion of this point, especially as it applies to the interpretive debate concerning Kant's conception of an 'intuition' see (McDowell, 1996, ch. 6; Conant, 2016; Corti, 2021; Land, 2018).

¹⁰ This is clearly noted by Boyle (2012, pp. 415–16).

¹¹ (Forster, 2002, p. 81).

¹² (Forster, 2002, pp. 82–3).

¹³ (Forster, 2002, p. 85).

Hegel here not only indicates that thinking (or the capacity thereto) differentiates humans from other animals, but that it “permeates” or “penetrates” (*durchdringt*) all aspects of human representation, even feeling.¹⁴

What about Kant? Several interpretive arguments have been advanced for reading Kant as endorsing a transformative view. Consider the following five points.¹⁵

1. Kant is explicit that humans and mere animals belong to the same genus, but constitute distinct species of it (KU 5:464).
2. Kant is generally sensitive to the distinction between specific identity and generic identity, and equally sensitive to the problematic nature of species-to-genus inferences (A299/B355; JL 9:98).
3. Kant makes a distinction between sensible and intellectual intuition (A51/B75), and so recognizes the difference between a generic similarity and specific distinctness between forms of intuiting.
4. The proper reading of the argument of the Transcendental Deduction requires us to construe Kant as endorsing a transformative view.
5. Sensibility must, by its own nature, be directed toward cognition.

I grant (1)-(3). Kant clearly distinguishes humans from other animals while allowing that they are all members of the same genus <animal>. He also denies that the identity conditions of a species may be simply inferred from those of another species within its common genus, and that we can't always validly move from species-specific features to features of their genus. And he quite clearly construes sensible and intellectual intuition as distinct species of the genus <intuition>. However, what is not at all clear is whether accepting (1)-(3) requires reading Kant as endorsing a transformative conception of rationality, at least on one reading of that position. I address these points further in section three.

Point (4) can only be fully put to rest by an exhaustive account of the argument of the (B) Deduction, which goes beyond the scope of what I can accomplish in the present essay. But I take the issue raised by (4) to at least in part concern how we should understand the cognitive and epistemic contributions of sensibility to the understanding's synthesizing activity. I provide the basis for a positive sketch of this challenge in section four.

Finally, point (5) is one that, for the purposes of this discussion, I think we can accept. Once again though, the question is whether (5) requires reading Kant according to anything more than what I call a “moderate” version of TR.¹⁶

If one were to accept that Kant's view of the role that rationality plays with respect to one's animal capacities is not like that of Herder and Hegel, then what would that mean for Kant? Boyle argues that an ‘additive’ theory of rationality (AR) rejects TR in the following manner.

¹⁴ For further discussion and defense of a “transformative” reading of Hegel's theory of cognition see (Corti, 2021).

¹⁵ Points (1)-(3) are advanced in (Land, 2018). Point (4) is advocated by (Conant, 2016), and point (5) by (Pendlebury, 2021).

¹⁶ (Pendlebury, 2021, p. 21) puts the contrast between rational and non-rational sensibility not in terms of transformation, so much as in terms of sensibility's being teleologically “internal” to the understanding and its acts. But as Pendlebury there notes, the options are between a sensibility that is essentially the same as that in non-human animals, but transformed through the activity of the intellect, and alternatively, of sensibility in and of itself as essentially different from that of any non-rational animal. This is enough to get the question of “transformation” off the ground. Pendlebury contends that which of these options is the correct one cannot be settled apart from a close reading of the B-Deduction. However, and irrespective of the issue of whether these issues will ever in fact be “settled”, in the rest of this paper I aim to show that there is considerable evidence in favor of the first option.

Additive theories of rationality... are theories that hold that an account of our capacity to reflect on perceptually-given reasons for belief and desire-based reasons for action can begin with an account of what it is to perceive and desire, in terms that do not presuppose any connection to the capacity to reflect on reasons, and then can add an account of the capacity for rational reflection, conceived as an independent capacity to ‘monitor’ and ‘regulate’ our believing-on-the-basis-of-perception and our acting-on-the-basis-of-desire¹⁷

Additive theories thus reject the distinctive claim of TR that one’s sensible or “lower” cognitive capacities are, in some sense, dependent on one’s capacity for rationality. Would it then be the case that reading Kant as rejecting the position of Herder and Hegel would mean ascribing to him an “additive” theory? Answering this question is complicated by the fact that it isn’t entirely clear how we should frame the distinction between TR and AR, since it isn’t entirely clear what sense of dependence or “connection” is at issue between sensibility and understanding (or the appreciation of reasons, etc.).

I think we can make headway by specifying more clearly the various possible commitments of TR. The view articulated by Boyle and expressed in the work of figures like Herder and Hegel has at least the following three commitments:

1. **No Addition:** Rational capacities are not simply “added” to an independent stock of non-rational capacities.
2. **Individuation:** If an animal is rational then all of its essential animal capacities (e.g. sense, desire, feeling) are either themselves rational or are dependent on the presence of rational capacities for their individuation (i.e. they are not “self-standing” capacities)¹⁸
3. **Actualization:** Possession of the capacities constitutive of rationality affects one’s other faculties/capacities (e.g. sense, desire) at least in terms of (a) their conditions of actualization; (b) the content of such acts

I take commitments (1)-(3) to be individually necessary and jointly sufficient for the conception of rationality as “transformative” in the sense required by Herder, Hegel, and Boyle.¹⁹ Call this an “essentialist” transformative theory (ETR). I’ll say more about this view in the next section. However, I think there is reason to reject the presentation of the “transformative” effect rationality has on a being’s capacities as a monolithic commitment to (1)-(3). There is a moderate position available that can appropriately be understood as a kind of “transformative” view of rationality.

¹⁷ (Boyle, 2016, p. 527).

¹⁸ See (Conant, 2016, p. 79; Land, 2018, p. 1276)

¹⁹ Note that while I distinguish these three commitments there are clear implication relations between them. For example, (2) implies both (1), since non-rational capacities are not independent, and (3), since a specification of the conditions or content of a capacity’s actualization is going to be affected by the conditions for individuating that capacity. Should one think that the appeal to individuation is too strong, consider Conant’s (2016, p. 79) remark (fully quoted further below) that an animal’s “sensory equipment” might be “physiologically indistinguishable” from our own. I take Conant’s point here to be that while we might “physiologically” individuate the “sensory equipment” of rational and non-rational animals in similar (or even identical) ways, when it comes to individuating their sensory capacities, understood as *mental capacities* rather than mere physiological equipment, we are doing radically different things. In contrast, I argue that one might accept (1), and specify the sense in which non-rational capacities are “dependent” on rational ones in the sense of (3), while yet rejecting (2). I discuss and defend this position below.

In the next section I look at this question of whether ETR, interpreted in terms of the conjunction of (1)-(3), and an objectionable “additive” theory of rationality (AR) are the only two options to which we might appeal. I articulate some reasons for thinking there is space for a moderate intermediary position. I then turn to an examination of the various reasons for thinking that Kant rejects ETR. Section four then looks at the moderate form of transformative theory that I take him to accept.

2 | DIFFERENCE OR DICHOTOMY?

Proponents of a transformative view of rationality typically present it as the only alternative to an objectionable additive view. But one may question the cogency of presenting this opposition in terms of a absolute dichotomy. The worry about the cogency of the dichotomy stems at least in part from the somewhat vague way in which additive theories are often characterized. For example, Thomas Land argues that,

The additive interpretation assumes that the presence of reason in humans leaves the character of their sensibility untouched. Reason, on this interpretation, is something that is “added on” to a capacity that is in all relevant respects the same as in non-rational animals.²⁰

But what does it mean to say that the “character” of sensibility in rational beings is left “untouched” by the presence of rational capacities? Similarly, Conant argues that the reading of Kant advocated by proponents of AR must claim that sensory experience in rational animals cannot “radically differ in its internal character” from that of non-rational animals.²¹ For Conant, as an advocate of TR,

The possibility of something’s being given to the sensory consciousness of a rational animal, if that animal’s awareness thereof is to be conceived as an integral moment in the exercise of its overall capacity for rational cognition, requires that *that* capacity for sensory affection radically differ in its internal character from that of any nonrational animal.²²

And just slightly later,

We might term the resulting conception a *disjunctivist conception of the relation between sentience and sapience qua cognitive capacities*—for, on this conception, our sentient cognitive faculty, as we encounter it *in act* (say, in an exercise of, say, *seeing that such and such is the case*) represents a faculty whose form is utterly distinct in character from any whose exercise might manifest itself in the sensory life of a nonrational animal—even if, when investigated from a merely physiological point of

²⁰ (Land, 2018, p. 1276).

²¹ (Conant, 2016, p. 79).

²² (Conant, 2016, p. 79).

view, that animal's sensory equipment might reveal itself to be in countless respects physiologically indistinguishable from our own.²³

Conant clearly means here to be indicating a kind of bright line between positions that accept that rationality makes for a constitutive difference with respect to one's other capacities, and positions (i.e. "layer-cake" positions) that reject this claim. This is what it is to accept a "disjunctivist conception" of our cognitive capacities.²⁴ Again though, the claim here as to what counts as a faculty that "radically" differs, or is "utterly distinct" in character is somewhat obscure.

In my view the conception of a "transformative" theory of rationality is ambiguous between at least two different notions of "transformation". According to the first, the *essences* of the animal's other capacities are changed by virtue of the presence of rational capacities. Insofar as we understand any claim about essence to be one that concerns conditions of identity, the essentialist claim entails that a rational animal's sensible capacities cannot be individuated without reference to its "higher" intellectual capacities, or even that they are themselves rational. Moreover, since the nature of the animal's sensible capacities is different by virtue of its capacity for rationality, the acts and content of its "merely animal" capacities (e.g. sensation and desire) will be different from their non-rational counterparts. Call this option an "essentialist" transformative theory of rationality (ETR). I take ETR to endorse *No Addition, Individuation, and Actualization*, as discussed in the previous section.

Essentialist Transformative Rationality:

The possession of rational capacities changes the essence or nature of an animal's other capacities

In contrast, according to an alternative conception of "transformation", the essences of a creature's "merely animal" capacities do *not* change by virtue of the presence of a capacity for rationality (or its exercise). But this doesn't require thinking that the creature's animal capacities are thereby "untouched", or that the creature's perceptions and desires are *exactly the same* as those of a non-rational being. On this moderate reading, a rational animal's capacities may differ in the conditions and content of their actualization, even though the capacities themselves are not essentially changed. This would mean, contra ETR, that there is a more than merely generic sense in which humans and non-rational animals share the same sensory or conative capacities. But it rejects the position attributed to AR that the capacities marking sensibility must operate in exactly the same fashion in non-rational and rational animals alike. Call this an "actualist" transformative theory (ATR). I take ATR to endorse only *No Addition* and *Actualization*.²⁵

²³ (Conant, 2016, p. 79); original emphasis.

²⁴ Similarly, Conant (2016, p. 80) claims that the choice between and additive or "layer-cake" view and the transformative view is exhaustive—"one can be a proponent of the transformative conception only by being a critic of the layer-cake conception."

²⁵ For an alternative account of a moderate version of TR see (Schafer, 2020). Schafer's account of the way in which the presence of reason engenders a teleological reorientation of interests on the part of the other faculties is an attractive way of cashing out how Kant might endorse *No Addition* and *Actualization* without endorsing *Individuation*. However, given Schafer's connection of the ends of a faculty with its individuation (see Schafer, *Forthcoming*, ch. 2), worries remain as to whether he can really avoid endorsing a version of ETR. That said, much of what I argue below concerning the way in which Kant's conception of rationally guided attention explains changes in the actualization of a creature's animal capacities is intended to be compatible with a more broadly teleological version of ATR. For a recent defense of a more thoroughgoing teleological link between reason and the other faculties that is sympathetic to ETR see (Pendlebury, 2021).

Actualist Transformative Rationality:

The possession of rational capacities changes the conditions of actualization and/or the content of the acts of an animal's other capacities

One might object here that ATR is not in fact a possible option, for the essence of a capacity and its actualizations are inextricably linked. If the character or content of the actualizations change, then the essence of the capacity also changes. In reply, I think it certainly correct that essence and actuality are linked in the sense that a difference in essence will entail a difference in the total set of actualizations of which a capacity is capable.²⁶ However, the reverse is not true. The conditions of a capacity's manifestation, as well as its content, might differ without any change in the essential nature of that capacity. Consider a simple example, the disposition that a crystal glass has to crack when handled (i.e. its *fragility*). The conditions (e.g. striking) under which that disposition manifests will change, as will the "content" (e.g. shattering) of this manifestation, when the glass is wrapped in bubble wrap. This kind of dispositional "masking", as well as related conditions like "mimicking", indicate how the manifestations of a capacity might change in all sorts of ways without the intrinsic nature of the capacity having altered in any way.²⁷

At this point I merely hope to have shown that ATR is a genuinely moderate position between ETR and AR. In the final section of this paper I'll show that there is much to say in favor of reading Kant as accepting ATR rather than either ETR or AR. First, however, I want to look at various reasons for thinking that ETR is incompatible with a variety of Kant's commitments.

3 | KANT & THE TRANSFORMATIVE THEORY

In this section I look at whether it is plausible that Kant endorses TR, and specifically, ETR. I first examine whether he has to endorse ETR simply by virtue of his recognition of a genus-species relation, where species are differentiated by appeal to a specific difference. I argue that his recognition of this distinction does not, by itself, commit him to ETR. I then look at three reasons for doubting that Kant endorses ETR. The first is that Kant's descriptions of the levels of cognition and of consciousness often feature animals in a way that belies any commitment to ETR. Second, Kant consistently presents the animal and rational faculties as being in tension or conflict, which would make little sense if he considered the animal faculties as themselves essentially transformed by rationality. Third, and to my mind most importantly, Kant's conception of the difference between our faculties of receptivity and spontaneity prohibits the possibility that rationality could transform perception or desire in the manner required by ETR. I'll discuss these in turn.

²⁶ This does assume that we differentiate essences at least in part by the actualities that they explain. This is not an uncontroversial position. See, e.g., (Hawthorne, 2001; Shoemaker, 1984). However, it seems plausible to me that Kant endorses this position, and moreover that it is endorsed by all participants to this debate.

²⁷ Note that I am in no way assuming here that capacities (or abilities) are identical with dispositions. For reasons to reject any such identification see (Vetter & Jaster, 2017). All I am assuming here is that capacities, like dispositions, are susceptible to being affected in ways that discussion of masking, mimicking, etc. bring out. If this is correct then we can accept *Actualization* even if *Individuation* is rejected.

3.1 | Species & genus

We've seen that ETR is explicated in part by referring to Aristotle's conception of a *specific difference* between species of a genus. According to this interpretation of Aristotle, the specific difference that marks out one species from another of a common genus characterizes something about the essence of that species—of what it is to *be* that kind of being.²⁸

Now, if Kant accepts that humans are specifically different from other animals by virtue of the possession of a capacity for rationality, does this fact alone require him to endorse ETR?

I don't see that it does. The main reason for this is that Kant is only committed to denying that the difference between the animality of the human being and that of a non-rational being (e.g. a horse) is merely *incidental* to being human. But it isn't obvious that he has to accept that the *identity* of an animal capacity (e.g. sensibility) itself essentially depends on the human being's rational capacities.²⁹ All that Kant need accept is that the human's animal capacities are, in non-incidental ways, *different* from the animal capacities of a non-rational being. In particular, it is in keeping with the idea of a specific difference that Kant hold that the presence of rational capacities in an animal entails that (i) the conditions of the actualization of its existing stock of non-rational faculties can or will differ from those of non-rational animals, and (ii) the content of the acts of such non-rational faculties can or will also differ. In section four I describe in more detail what differences Kant ascribes to the animal capacities of human beings, and how rationality non-accidentally explains those differences. Here I merely point out that accepting that humans are specifically different from other animal species does not, in and of itself, entail that ETR is the correct way to conceive of this difference.

3.2 | Texts on representation in animals

Kant is reported as discussing the sensory states, or intuitions, of non-rational animals in a variety of his lectures on logic, anthropology, and metaphysics. If one wanted evidence that he thinks of human sensory representation, cognition, or consciousness as radically different from its animal counterpart, these texts would be an obvious place to look.³⁰ Here are some relevant remarks:

²⁸ See (Boyle, 2012, p. 410).

²⁹ Indeed, this seems true even of Aristotle. For a conception of 'brute' or animal desire as affected by the presence of rationality but not as *essentially different*, see (Lorenz, 2006, ch. 13).

³⁰ One important note about these lecture texts is that they are not directly from Kant's own hand. Hence their evidential status with respect to what view Kant actually held is clearly inferior to his own published works. In general, my attitude towards adjudication of the evidence offered by these texts is as follows. We should always privilege what Kant says in published work over that stated in lectures or in Kant's personal notes (the "*reflexionen*"). Nevertheless, repeated statements in *reflexionen*, as well as in lecture notes, especially when these latter are repeated over a variety of years and by multiple students, should provide sufficient evidential basis to take the statements seriously as expressing Kant's own mind, so long as they do not explicitly contravene positions Kant holds in his published writings of the same era. The lecture texts examined here come over a span of years, from different students, and are nevertheless largely consistent in their expression. This strikes me as licensing some confidence in their content. Moreover, this content is not itself such as to contravene independently plausible readings of Kant's published texts. In any case, it is of course up to the reader to assess whether the overall account is one that makes good sense of Kant's philosophical commitments.

With intuition the representation of a thing is always particular; an animal can also have intuition, but the animal is not capable of having general concepts, which requires the capacity [*Vermögen*] to think. (*Menschenkunde* 206 (1781/2))

Now how can we conceive animals as beings below human beings? We think higher beings without having need of the hindrance or support of matter, on the other hand we can think of things which are *below* us, whose representations are different in species and not merely in degree. We perceive in ourselves a specific mark [*Merkmal*] of the understanding and of reason, namely consciousness, if I take this away there still remains something left yet, namely, sensation, imagination, the former is intuition with presence, the latter without presence of the object[.] (*Metaphysik Volckmann* 28:449 (1784/85))

Animals cannot make concepts, there are sheer [*lauter*] intuitions with them (*Metaphysik L₂* 28:594 (1790/91)).

Animals are not capable of any concept – intuition they do have (*Logik Dohna-Wundlacken* 24:702 (1792)).

I must have objects of my thinking and apprehend them; otherwise I am unconscious of myself (cogito, sum: it cannot read “ergo”). It is *autonomia rationis purae*, for, without that, I would be thoughtless, even with a given intuition, like an animal, without knowing that I am. (OP 21:82)

Kant here compares in various ways the capacities and representations (specifically, intuition and concept) they generate. Of note in these different discussions is the fact that Kant nowhere mentions any specific difference rationality might make to the intuition (as representational kind) itself. Instead he repeatedly focuses on the fact that animals lack concepts or the capacity for thought. This is surprising if Kant endorses ETR, for one would expect more emphasis on the fact that animal sensory representation (intuition) is altogether different from human representation, and not simply that it is not a form of thinking.

However, there are at least two texts that might suggest ETR. First, in the *Volckmann* lecture text quoted above Kant is described as saying that animal representations “are different in species and not merely in degree.” This remark is notable because it might seem that Kant here points out a difference in the *species* of representation had in non-rational animals. Relatedly, in an initial draft of the *Anthropology* Kant writes,

The cow, lacking understanding, may well <perhaps> have something similar to what we call representations (because, in terms of effects, they coincide <greatly> with representations in humans) but which might be completely different from them. (H 7:397)

Kant here allows that animal representation might be radically different, at least in some ways, from rational human representation. Plausibly, he might say this because he thinks that rational human representation, in all its forms, is different from that of non-rational representation. Moreover, he can say this even while allowing that both animals and humans might have sensible intuitions in some suitably generic sense.

However, reading such texts as supporting ETR is not the only, nor even the most plausible, way that the texts may be read. First, Kant's remark in the *Volkmann* lecture that animal representations are different in species and not merely in degree could be in defense of his longstanding position that the representations of sensibility (in all creatures) are different in kind than those of the intellect. For example, *pace* Leibniz or Wolff, sensible representations are not merely more obscure or confused than intellectual ones. Thus the intellectual representations of discursive rational beings are not merely going to be different in degree of clarity or distinctness from those of non-rational beings, they are going to be an altogether different kind or species of representation. Indeed, in the *Volckmann* lecture Kant raises the issue of representational difference in the context of describing animals as "below" humans and purely intellectual beings that are "higher" than humans. He does not discuss any difference in the species of representation of such "higher" beings, noting only that such beings would lack any "need of the hindrance or support of matter". Though Kant's point about such "higher" beings is not altogether clear, it seems that he construes them as possibly similar to us in their cognitive acts, at least insofar as we all possess *discursive* intellects.³¹

As for Kant's note in his draft of the *Anthropology*, Kant's point that the sensible representations in the cow might be very different from those in a human does not at all obviously count as an endorsement of ETR as opposed to merely allowing that there could be great differences in the way in which sensible representations work in a non-rational being.³²

Besides his explicit discussions of representation in animals, Kant also mentions animals in his discussion of the various 'levels' or degrees of cognition. Again, if Kant endorsed ETR, one would reasonably expect him to give some such sign of it in these discussions, but this does not happen. For example, he says,

1. The lowest degree is to represent something. When I cognize that which relates to the object, I represent the object.
2. To cognize, *percipere*, is to represent something in comparison with others and to have insight into its identity or diversity from them. ... animals also cognize their master, but they are not conscious of this. (Wiener Logic 24:845-6 (1780-1))

Kant here indicates animals have "cognition" (*Erkenntnis*), but without the consciousness present in rational beings. He notably does not mention that their cognition is different in kind in the sense required by ETR.

Similarly, in the more extensively enumerated "ladder" passage in the *Jäsche Logik* Kant says the following,

³¹ It is worth noting that if Kant's intent in this passage is to signal a point about a non-discursive, or intuitive, intellect then such a mind would be different in kind from our own. The fact that he makes no such claim at least suggests that he does not have an intuitive intellect in mind.

³² I discuss some of these differences in greater detail in the next section.

In regard to the objective content of our cognition in general, we may think the following degrees, in accordance with which cognition can, in this respect, be graded:

- The first degree of cognition is: to represent something [*sich etwas vorstellen*];
- The second: to represent something with consciousness, or to perceive (*percipere*) [*sich mit Bewußtsein etwas vorstellen oder wahrnehmen*];
- The third: to be acquainted with something (*noscere*), or to represent something in comparison with other things [*etwas kennen oder sich etwas in der Vergleichung mit anderen Dingen vorstellen*], both as to sameness and as to difference;
- The fourth: to be acquainted with something with consciousness, i.e. to cognize it (*cognoscere*) [*mit Bewußtsein etwas kennen, d.h. erkennen*]. Animals are acquainted with objects too, but they do not cognize them [*Die Thiere kennen auch Gegenstände, aber sie erkennen sie nicht*] (JL 9:64; see also DWL 24:730-1; Notes on Logic 16:342-4 (mid/late 1760s))

There are two noteworthy (at least for our purposes) features of this text. First, Kant does not here indicate that there is any important difference between the kinds of representation had in non-rational beings and those had by humans. Second, Kant presents each level as building on the previous, such that, e.g., one cannot be acquainted with anything if one cannot perceive, and one cannot perceive if one cannot represent. This suggests that the specific difference between the rational and non-rational animal is not that they have incommensurably different kinds of sensory representations, but rather that rational beings are capable of more sophisticated or complex kinds of representation. Indeed, if Kant endorsed ETR one would expect him to say that animals are acquainted with objects in a wholly different kind of way than rational beings are. After all, according to ETR, the “ladder” of cognition should really be bifurcated into a rational and a non-rational form, and non-rational animals should only be mentioned on the non-rational side. Since Kant doesn’t do this, and instead presents human cognition as simply a higher rung on a single continuous ladder of cognition, which also includes merely animal acquaintance, it seems reasonable to explain this by his rejecting ETR.

Hence, while there is good textual evidence indicating Kant’s agnosticism concerning the exact character of sensible representations in non-rational beings, he nevertheless seems to allow that they have intuitions—i.e. particular and immediate sensory representations of objects—and he gives no clear indication in lectures or notes that these intuitions are different in kind from those in rational beings. Instead, Kant’s conception of the levels of cognition and the progression in complexity of one’s conscious states in such cognitive activity indicates that he conceives of non-rational beings merely as lacking the ability to attain “higher” or more complex cognitive states.

3.3 | The conflict between rational and animal capacities

In a wide variety of Kant’s published writings and lectures, he emphasizes the tension and conflict between the “animality” (*Thierheit*) and the “humanity” (*Menschheit*) of human beings. Animality is specifically connected to our sensible faculties, and especially our basic “predispositions” or instinctual desires, such as the desire to reproduce (Rel 6:26).³³ For example, in a variety of published works Kant juxtaposes the animality of the human being with its rationality.

³³ For discussion of this point see (Frierson, 2013, p. 75 and 127; Kain, 2003, p. 242ff).

The predisposition to animality in the human being may be brought under the general title of physical or merely mechanical self-love, i.e. a love for which reason is not required. It is threefold: first, for self-preservation; second, for the propagation of the species, through the sexual drive, and for the preservation of the offspring thereby begotten through breeding; third, for community with other human beings, i.e. the social drive. (Rel 6:26-27)

when reason began its business and, weak as it is, got into a scuffle with animality in its whole strength, then there had to arise ills and, what is worse, with more cultivated reason, vices, which were entirely alien to the condition of ignorance and hence of innocence. (CBHH 8:115)

Discipline or training changes animal nature into human nature (LP 9:441)

Kant also makes extensive appeal to the opposition between animality and rationality in his anthropology lectures.

The human being has two determinations [*Bestimmungen*], one with regard to humanity, and one with regard to animality. These two determinations conflict with one another. We do not achieve the perfection of humanity in the determination of animality, and if we want to achieve the perfection of humanity, then we must do violence to the determination of animality. (*Anthropologie Friedländer* 25:682 (1775/6); see also *Anthropologie Pillau* 25:736 (1777-8))

Evil [*Böse*] originates out of the opposition between humanity and animality, or between the physical, natural predispositions and the moral ones; the inevitable evil in the determination of the human being is the spur toward the good that the human being must perform. (*Anthropologie Mrongovious* 25:1420 (1784-5); see also 25:1342-3)

In all these discussions Kant portrays animality as either in conflict with humanity, or as something to be overcome by it.³⁴ And while it is obviously true that Kant allows the possibility that our rational faculties may be in conflict with themselves (e.g. CPrR 5:121), it is unclear, if he endorsed ETR, why he would make such conflict a centerpiece of his discussion of rational human beings. One would think that if he endorsed ETR, human animality would *not* be a central threat to our rational action, because it would itself be informed—or rather transformed—by our rationality. Instead, the most plausible reading of the texts is that our animality is in *opposition* to our rational nature, not an *expression* of it.

Moreover, as we saw in Kant's explanation of error in judgment, he conceives of error as a result of the influence of sensibility on the understanding.

³⁴ See also his discussion of the basis of evil in human nature in the *Religion* (6:32, 36) and the progress of our animality towards humanity in the *Conjecture* (CBHH 8:115).

Error is neither in the understanding alone, then, nor in the senses alone; instead, it always lies in the influence of the senses on the understanding, when we do not distinguish well the influence of sensibility on the understanding. (LL 24:825 (1780/81); cf. A294/B350; JL 9:53-4; R2142 16:250 (1776-1781))

This account of error is also consistent with his conception of the three natural sources of prejudice: habit or custom (*Gewohnheit*), inclination (*Neigung*) and imitation (*Nachahmung*). All three prejudicial sources constitute principles for associating representations, are forms of a merely animal combination of representation, and must be constantly guarded against lest they result in the irrational (i.e. “animal”) acceptance of an unwarranted judgment. If Kant accepted ETR it is again unclear why he would set up such an opposition between sensible and intellectual capacities, since, according to ETR, both sets of capacities would be expressions of the individual’s rationality. At the very least, it is unclear how sensibility could represent an external hinderance or influence on our rational faculties in the way Kant seems to claim if he also accepts ETR.

3.4 | Receptivity & Spontaneity

A further problem for ETR derives from the combination of Kant’s views concerning the difference between receptivity and spontaneity and ETR’s commitment to *Individuation*.

I’ve argued elsewhere that Kant understands sensible acts as the products of our receptivity as opposed to our spontaneity.³⁵ It is worth briefly reviewing his conception of the difference between receptivity and spontaneity, in order to see how it presents a problem for ETR.

On Kant’s view any act of a substance is due to an exercise of its causal powers.³⁶ So in one sense nothing merely “happens” to a substance—any property it has (anything that “inheres” in the substance) depends on an act of that very substance. But Kant wants to distinguish between things that “happen” to a substance and things the substance “does” in a way which conforms to a distinction between passivity and activity. His explanation of the passive/active distinction thus hinges on his basic dichotomy between the receptive and spontaneous powers of a substance.

A receptive power is one whose actualization is ultimately grounded in something whose existence and nature is itself independent of that power. The clear example here is that of a sense modality. An actualization of one’s visual capacity in seeing a table is ultimately due to something whose existence and nature is entirely independent of that capacity or its exercise (and so on for all the other possible sense modalities).³⁷

A spontaneous power is one whose actualization is ultimately grounded in something whose nature is *not* independent of the power so exercised. For example, what makes the mental tran-

³⁵ See (McLear, 2020, pp. 50–52).

³⁶ Here all we need to accept in reference to “substance” is the idea that acts are engaged in by beings that substand, in the sense that their properties depend on them and not vice versa, and subsist, in that they do not inhere in anything else. For defense of such a substantialist reading of Kant see (McLear, 2020; Watkins, 2005; Wuerth, 2014).

³⁷ The table, on Kant’s view, is a configuration of matter, which is fundamentally a locus of attractive and repulsive forces. In Kant’s view various facts follow necessarily from this, such as that the attractive force of a material body will vary to a degree directly proportional to its mass and inversely proportional to its distance from other masses. Visibility of a material body is not obviously such a derivable fact, but even if it is this would put visibility among the “attributes” of material body, but not part of its *essence*.

sition from holding true the premises of an argument to holding true their conclusion a case of *inference* is that the rational agent recognize the support relation between premises and conclusion, a support relation which is itself understood in terms of the capacity for reason. Hence the nature of the ground of the inferential act itself appeals to the very rational capacity of which it is an instance.³⁸

Kant's distinction between receptivity and spontaneity is thus a distinction between two different types of causal power and the laws of their actualization. Because the characterization of the principles of activity of these two powers oppose one another there is no sense in which they could be embodied in the activity of any single capacity. In Kant's exposition in the CPR of the nature of our receptive and spontaneous capacities at the beginning of the Transcendental Logic he says,

If we will call the receptivity of our mind to receive representations insofar as it is affected in some way sensibility, then opposed to it [*so ist dagegen*] is the faculty for bringing forth representations itself, or the spontaneity of cognition, the understanding. (A51/B75)

Receptivity and spontaneity stand "opposed" to one another as fundamentally different capacities of the mind. Indeed, this is partly what motivates Kant to say that "these two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions" (A51/B75). In other words, there cannot be a *single* capacity that *both* exemplifies a form of receptivity *and* spontaneity in its acts. A "spontaneous receptivity" or a "receptive spontaneity" is a contradiction in terms.

If that is correct then we need only one further assumption to reject ETR as a plausible interpretation of Kant. Namely, the assumption that all and only rational acts are spontaneous. If that is right, and given the above characterization of the difference between receptivity and spontaneity, it would be contradictory to claim that acts of sensibility are rational, or have the form of rationality, since this would be to claim that they are *both* receptive *and* spontaneous. It would thus be the claim that two opposed causal principles are operative in the actualization of a single causal power, which is, for Kant, (both logically and really) impossible.³⁹

Let's examine the argument in a more explicit form:

1. The determining ground of the actualization of a receptive capacity is independent of the capacity itself [def.]
2. The determining ground of an (absolutely) spontaneous capacity is *not* independent of the capacity itself [def.]
3. All rational/intellectual capacities are spontaneous and all sensible capacities are receptive [Kant's opposition thesis]
4. In a rational being, the actualization of a sensory capacity is itself the actualization of a rational capacity [commitment of ETR]

³⁸ Another way to put this is that the very same formal cause is appealed to both in the individuation of the capacity and in the individuation of the determining grounds of its actualization or exercise.

³⁹ Note that the objection here is *not* that the notion of a "passive act" is problematic. Kant conceives of all of a substance's properties as due to its activity. So Kant obviously accepts that "passive" sensory acts are still activities. The problem, rather, is that ETR requires conceiving of acts of perception or desire as *both* receptive and spontaneous, which is impossible given Kant's conception of the causally opposing nature of receptivity and spontaneity.

5. ∴ In a rational being, the actualization of a sensory capacity is both determined and not determined by an independent ground [1-5]
6. If ETR is true then the actualization of a sensory capacity is both determined and not determined by an independent ground (6, Conditional introduction)
7. It is not the case that the actualization of a capacity can be both determined and not determined by an independent ground
8. ∴ ETR is false (Modus Tollens, 6–7)

Concerning premises (1) and (2) we need to answer a couple of questions. First, what is a “determining ground”? It is best to understand this notion within its broader German philosophical context. According to Christian Wolff a determining ground is “that through which one can understand why something is” (*Deutsche Metaphysik*, §29; see also Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* §14). Kant rejects this as circular (NE 1:393) but maintains the general notion of that through which one understands or explains the existence of an object or its possession of some property (i.e. its being determined by some predicate).⁴⁰

Second, how are determining grounds related to the individuation of types of capacities? In the case of passive or receptive acts (i.e. of a receptive capacity) the determining ground of the act is something whose existence and nature is *independent* of the capacity’s actualization. In contrast, in the “active” acts of our spontaneous intellectual capacities, the existence and nature of the determining ground of the act is *dependent* on the intellectual capacity being exercised. The acts of a substance are thus fundamentally distinguished by whether they are acts of a receptive or a spontaneous capacity. This opposition is problematic for the proponent of a reading of Kant as embracing ETR because a capacity is (at least partially) individuated by what it is a capacity for, or to do; that is to say, by the circumstance that is the outcome of its successful exercise. But the characteristic circumstances of receptive acts concern the existence of an independent ground in virtue of which they are exercised. In contrast, the characteristic circumstances of spontaneous acts concern the dependence of the ground of activity on the spontaneous capacity so exercised. Because this distinction marks a condition of the individuation of the two kinds of capacity this distinction between receptivity and spontaneity is one in which, in this sense, they are “opposed” to one another (A51/B75).

This way of understanding the difference between a receptive and a spontaneous capacity is the basis of the inference from (4) to (5). Here the proponent of ETR might object as follows.⁴¹ Why not think that the acts of a sensory capacity *S* may depend on those of a rational/spontaneous capacity without the acts of *S* being themselves spontaneous? This is clearly an option for the proponent of a more moderate position that rejects **Individuation**.⁴² But it is not open to the proponent of ETR. This is because ETR construes all of the cognitive capacities of the animal as essentially defined in terms of rationality. *What it is* to be a sensory capacity in a rational animal

⁴⁰ For discussion see (Hogan, 2009; Stang, 2016, ch. 3.2; Stang, 2019; Stratmann, 2018; Watkins, 2019).

⁴¹ My thanks go to an anonymous referee for pushing me to answer this objection.

⁴² For example, the kinds of teleologically motivated positions advocated by (Schafer, 2020) and (Pendlebury, 2021) do not obviously commit themselves to the position that sensible capacities in rational beings are individuated via their relation to the higher intellectual capacities. In part, their vulnerability to this objection hinges on the relation of the end of a capacity to its essence. If the end for which a capacity is exercised is (partly) constitutive of its essence, and the ends of our sensory faculties depend on the ends of our intellectual capacities then a similar problem arises. Both Schafer and Pendlebury appear to acknowledge the possibility of a position according to which they are kept separate, but they largely demur concerning its prospects e.g. (Pendlebury, 2021, p. 21).

is for that capacity to be individuated in terms of its rationality (i.e. in terms of <rationality> as the specific difference to a human's animality). This leads to the incoherence marked by (5), that the acts of one and the same capacity are both (as a form of sensible receptivity) determined by an independent ground and (as a kind of rational capacity) exemplary of spontaneity, which is marked by precisely *not* being so determined.

The proponent of ETR may also wish to reject the view that all rational acts are so in virtue of being acts of spontaneity. Two approaches along these lines strike me as unpromising. First, a proponent of ETR might argue that rational acts are unified not by their spontaneity, but by some other characteristic that does not require spontaneity. However, I don't see any plausible textual grounds for what such an alternative unifying characteristic could be. Kant consistently treats all rational acts (whether in a discursive or an intuitive intellect) as spontaneous. Indeed, he often simply characterizes intellectual laws as those causal laws that are not themselves laws of sensibility (e.g. GIII 4:446), where the assumption seems to be that if a law is not a sensible law it is a spontaneous one. Thus I do not see what, in Kant's view, could plausibly unify sensible and intellectual acts as both instances of a kind of "rational" power when, even in the most generic sense possible of being exercises of causal powers, such acts were otherwise fundamentally causally different in virtue of being either receptive or spontaneous.

A second strategy the proponent of ETR might try is to show that one and the same capacity may be receptive in one respect (or aspect) and spontaneous in another. But this seems open to two worrisome questions. First, why would Kant so starkly individuate sensibility and intellect by virtue of their being either receptive or spontaneous, and (as we saw above) characterize these features of the faculties as "opposed" or "contrary" if he also thought that one and same capacity could be both receptive and spontaneous? Granted, Kant does think that, e.g. the faculty of cognition has both a receptive side (viz. sensibility) and a spontaneous side (viz. intellect), but he typically talks of these in terms of "lower" and "higher" forms of cognition and at no point speaks in terms of one and the same cognitive capacity (i.e. one and the same "lower" or "higher" capacity) as both receptive and spontaneous. Second, and textual considerations aside, what would unify these different aspects as aspects of *one and the same faculty/capacity* if the aspects themselves were, as Kant seems to think, fundamentally contrary or opposed? It is not at all clear to me how either of these questions might be answered.

4 | KANT ON THE DIFFERENCE RATIONALITY MAKES

If the discussion thus far is correct Kant does not endorse ETR. However, this needn't mean that he doesn't think of the rational capacities of human beings as, in some sense distinct from that used by ETR, "transformative" of their animal powers. Here I discuss Kant's conception of attention to show how pivotal rational capacities are to virtually all of a rational subject's mental life. In this way I also hope to show below how Kant avoids the putatively problematic nature of the so-called "additive" conception of rationality.

I focus on two important differences between rational and non-rational beings. There are plausibly many other differences as well, but these should serve to illustrate the radical difference between rational and non-rational forms of animality, even if ETR is rejected. First, I discuss the way in which the rational control in attention allows a rational animal the freedom to attend to

things beyond what is dictated by its instincts and inclinations. Second, I link this account of attention to Kant's discussion of self-mastery or the "autocracy" of the rational mind.⁴³

4.1 | The determination of attention

An important feature of Kant's conception of attention in non-rational beings is that such beings are determined in their acts of attention by their instincts and inclinations. Kant considers the power of choice in animals to be "pathologically" determined by its instincts (innate dispositions for desire) and inclinations (acquired dispositions for desire). Hence, though an animal may be capable of representing a wide variety of things, that toward which it attends, and thus strives to be conscious of (An 7:131), is fixed by its environment plus its instincts and inclinations.

A mere animal has instincts (*Triebe*; innate propensities for desire) and pathologically determined inclinations (*Neigungen*; non-innate propensities for desire) that entirely determine its desires, and thus its choices, in various ways.⁴⁴ For example, Kant discusses the natural determination of the power of choice (*Willkür*) in non-rational animals in the first *Critique* as follows.

Freedom in the practical sense is the independence of the power of choice from necessitation by impulses of sensibility. For a power of choice is sensible insofar as it is pathologically affected (through moving-causes of sensibility); it is called an animal power of choice (*arbitrium brutum*) if it can be pathologically necessitated. The human power of choice is indeed an *arbitrium sensitivum*, yet not *brutum* but *liberum* because sensibility does not render its action necessary, rather, in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses (A533-4/B561-2; see also *Metaphysik L₁* 28:255 (c. 1778–1781); *Metaphysik Mrongovius* 29:896 (c. 1782/3); *Metaphysik L₂* 28:589 (c. 1790); MM 6:213)

Kant construes the animal power of choice (*arbitrium brutum*) here as "pathologically necessitated", in contrast to the free (*liberum*) power manifested by rational beings. Kant's conception of a free power of choice in rational beings is thus one that allows rational beings "leeway" in their choices in the sense that they are not entirely necessitated, but rather only "influenced" by sensible causes (i.e. sensible desire and pleasure).⁴⁵ What ties together both the pathological choice of animals and the free choice of human beings as instances of *choice* is that they are cases of doing or refraining based on internal actualizations of the creature's faculty of desire (and thus their choices depend on representation), rather than acts based entirely on mechanical (i.e. non-representational) reactions to external influences.

⁴³ See also (McLear, 2011, 2020) for extensive discussion of ways in which rational capacities influence the manner in which rational beings experience the world and how we might best distinguish such forms of experience from those of non-rational animals.

⁴⁴ See (Frierson, 2014, ch. 2.2; McCarty, 2009, chs. 1-2).

⁴⁵ Both rational human and non-rational animal choice are compatible with necessitation, and thus with a lack of true "leeway" in the sense of alternate possibilities for action. The difference is that rational choice involves necessitation by reason, while animal choice involves "pathological" or sensory necessitation. For defense of the sense in which action relates to necessitation and freedom see (McLear, 2020; Pereboom, 2006).

However, only the human (rational) being can determine itself from itself, unlike the non-rational animal, which is subject to thoroughgoing causal necessitation by the “mechanism of nature” (CPrR 5:97). In his anthropology lectures Kant allows that while “[a]ll attention and abstraction can be voluntary [*willkürlich*] and involuntary” it is only voluntary (i.e. self-determined) abstraction and attention that “constitutes the principle of self-control” (*Anthropologie Mrongovius* 25:1240). In other lecture notes, Kant makes this connection between choice and control even more explicit.

The greatest perfection of the powers of the mind is based on our subordinating them to our power of choice, and the more they are subjugated to the free power of choice, all the greater perfection of the powers of the mind do we possess. If we do not have them under the control of the free power of choice, all provisions for such perfection are thus in vain, if we cannot do what we want with the powers of the mind. For this sake, attention and abstraction, as the two formal capacities of our mind, are only then useful for us, if they are under the free power of choice, so that involuntary attentiveness and abstraction produce much harm. (*Anthropologie Friedländer* 25:488 (1775-76); see also *Metaphysik L₁* 28:256 (mid-1770s); *Metaphysik Mrongovius* 29:888 (1782/83); *Metaphysik L₂* 28:589-90 (1790/1?))

Hence, in rational beings attention is under (at least in principle, and to some degree) the control of the cognitive subject. Since attention is a form of striving—viz. the striving to be conscious of one’s representations—rational subjects can control their strivings in acts of attending. Moreover, Kant denies that non-rational animals can be conscious of themselves.⁴⁶ Kant thus seems to think that such animals cannot attend to their own mental acts, but only to external objects. His reasoning here seems to be that no biological purpose (e.g. of maintaining or promoting the organism’s health) is served by an organism’s ability to attend to its mental acts. Instead, the animal’s attention is always directed outward, towards opportunities for food, shelter, and reproduction. This is also precisely what one would expect Kant to say if he thinks that animal attention is entirely driven by instinct and inclination, for that is tantamount to saying that attention in non-rational beings is entirely determined by their biological and environmental imperatives. In this sense the scope of an animal’s attention is entirely determined by the so-called ‘mechanism of nature’ not only in its being determined by preceding temporal events (as Kant often signals when using that phrase) but also by virtue of the animal’s biological drives or imperatives, both innate and learned.

Kant’s account of how attention works in rational beings is in stark contrast to his view of non-rational animals. Rational beings can exert discretionary control in their acts of attention in ways not governed by biological imperatives, or indeed any sensible imperatives at all. It’s important to note here that such control is not to be construed in terms of a higher-order act of monitoring and regulating an independent and lower act of attending. Rather, the control is exercised *in* the act of attention itself, in much the same way that a skilled athlete exercises their control in an act of dribbling a basketball or a skilled musician exercises their control in an act of striking the keys of their instrument.⁴⁷ The rational control exerted in acts of attention allows for a broadening of the scope of the objects of attention in two ways. First, “outer” attention to the world distinct from the attending subject is radically broadened. The subject can attend to things beyond what is dictated by its biological needs or drives. This means that a rational subject can attend not only to the differences between things, but also their *grounds* of difference.

⁴⁶ For discussion see (McLear, 2011).

⁴⁷ For defense of a related notion of skill in rational acts see (Merritt, 2018, ch. 6).

Second, rational beings can attend to their own mental acts. This opens up the possibility, for the rational being, of generating concepts from those acts. Most important of these are the fundamental concepts of an object—the categories—and the logical acts (i.e. the “forms of judgment”) from which they are derived. Thus, the very same power that allows one’s attention to range beyond that to which one is biologically driven also provisions one with a new subject matter—viz. one’s own intellectual acts—from which the kind of structured intellectual representation necessary for the cognition of objects derives. Hence, possession of an intellectual faculty amongst the stock of a subject’s mental powers allows the possibility of controlled attention and an entirely different subject matter, from that available to non-rational animals, to which the subject can attend.

Thus, according to the view I attribute to Kant, the intellect, as a free faculty, allows for the exertion of control over and in various mental acts, most notably attention. It is the capacity for such control that explains the ability to attend to things other than as determined by one’s biological drives, including one’s (intellectual) mental acts. And it is in virtue of this sort of control that one can engage in acts of reasoning both practical and theoretical. This conception of controlled attention thus naturally leads to an understanding of the way in which a rational subject’s mental life exhibits a form of self-mastery that Kant puts at the center of his account of the virtuous or “autocratic” rational agent.

4.2 | Attention & self-mastery

Kant often speaks of being the “master” (*Meister*) of oneself, or having “command” in or over oneself (*imperium in semetipsum*). There is a straightforward relationship between Kant’s conceptions of self-mastery and self-affection. To be master of oneself, in Kant’s view, is for one’s intellectual capacities to have causal influence on the course of one’s sensible acts.

two things are required for inner freedom: being one’s own *master* [*Meister*] in a given case (*animus sui compos*), that is, subduing one’s affects, and *ruling* oneself [*über sich selbst Herr zu sein*] (*imperium in semetipsum*), that is, *governing* one’s passions. (MM 6:407)

This conception of mastery and rulership involves rational control over one’s affects and passions. But in various lectures Kant is also presented as using similar language to describe rational control over one’s imagination, or in sensibility more generally.

Now whoever has sensibility and the understanding in his control, so that sensibility does not become predominant, he has self-mastery <*imperium in semetipsum*>. (*Metaphysik L₁* 28:256 (mid-1770s))

Voluntary abstraction and attention constitutes the principle of self-control. (*Anthropologie Mrongovius* 25:1239 (1784/85))

The self-mastery of a human being <*imperium hominis in semetipsum*> is the faculty for freely disposing over the free use of all one’s powers but primarily for ruling over sensibility according to one’s representations. (*Metaphysik L₂* 28:589-90 (1790/91?))

Whoever can, as it were, govern his power of imagination, he is master [*Meister*] over himself [and] dictates his own happiness [*ist Herr seiner Glückseligkeit*] (*Anthropologie Starke*₂ VWe:13 (1790/91))

Kant thus seems to view self-mastery as extending beyond rule over one's passions and affects, to the workings of sensibility itself, including the course of one's imaginings, etc.⁴⁸

In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant links self-mastery, or what he calls the "autocracy" of practical reason, to virtue.

[virtue] is also autocracy of practical reason, that is, it involves consciousness of the capacity to be the master of one's inclinations when they rebel against the law, a capacity which, though not directly perceived, is yet rightly inferred from the moral categorical imperative. Thus human morality in its highest stage can still be nothing more than virtue, even if it be entirely pure (quite free from the influence of any incentive other than that of duty) (MM 6:383)

Kant here speaks of the autocracy of specifically *practical* reason, to control inclination. But the point is actually quite general, and can be applied to reason as a whole—i.e. to reason in both its theoretical and practical uses. This autocracy is not merely the enkratic or controlled exercise of one's rational capacities. It is the exercise of one's rational capacities with respect to one's sensible capacities. This is the self-rule of the rational being, and given attention's prominent role in sensory consciousness, Kant's view seems to be that autocracy is made possible through the controlled (rational) exercise of attention.

We can see further evidence of the link between autocracy and attention in Kant's various discussions of mental illness in the published *Anthropology* and related lectures. There he often describes forms of mental illness in terms of relinquishing mastery over sensibility, or over oneself. For example, he says of "melancholia", a form of what he calls "mental illness" that with it the subject's reason "has insufficient control over itself to direct, stop, or impel the course of his thoughts" (An 7:202).⁴⁹ Kant doesn't specifically mention attention here, but we can see an explicit link with attention in his famous discussion of his own hypochondria, where Kant reports that "I have mastered its influence on my thoughts and actions by diverting my attention from this feeling, as if it had nothing to do with me" (CF 7:104). Here again we see a discussion of mental illness as a loss of control, the reassertion of which Kant specifically links, in his own case of hypochondria, to controlled attention.

The role of attention with respect to illnesses of the mind also strongly indicates that the controlled exercise of attention is necessary to achieve what Kant describes as a "healthy human understanding" (Pr 4:369; see also *Logik Blomburg* 24:21), whose exercise is free of influence by sensible grounds. Kant describes healthy understanding (*gesunder Verstand*) as "nothing other than" the "correct use" of the power of judgment (CPJ 5:169). This requires, at the least, that the exercise of one's intellect is free from prejudicial grounds—habit or custom (*Gewohnheit*), inclination (*Neigung*) and imitation (*Nachahmung*)—and that one's intellect is otherwise

⁴⁸ One might object here that several of these texts are from student lecture notes. However, the point that these texts are making is stable over time and across different lecture subjects (e.g. *Anthropology* and *Metaphysics*). Moreover, Kant's purported claims here are not in conflict with (indeed, they support or expand on) his published statements. These facts help validate placing genuine evidential weight on those texts.

⁴⁹ For discussion of various aspects of Kant's view on mental illness see (Frierson, 2014, ch. 6).

functioning normally.⁵⁰ We've seen, from Kant's discussion of hypochondria, the way he thinks one's controlled attention can free one from an otherwise unhealthy tendency to focus on one's own state. In my view this same position is generalizable to the operation of all of one's intellectual faculties.

A virtue of this way of understanding the sense of rationality as "transformative" is that such transformation is a genuine cognitive *achievement*, in virtue of the subject's developing their ability to control or master their animal tendencies. Thus rational transformation is a cumulative or progressive task. One in which the subject, through education and self-discipline, becomes ever more autocratic in their activity. This moderate conception of transformation strikes me as making the best sense of Kant's remarks on virtue, self-rule, and the self-discipline one develops through education.

Kant's account of self-mastery or autocracy raises a variety of questions.⁵¹ For example, one might find Kant's emphasis on the importance of the rational being's striving for self-mastery as "precious, hyper-deliberate and repugnantly moralistic",⁵² or at the least as problematically privileging one form of mental life over others. As Nick Zangwill puts it,

there still seems to be something wrong with Kant's ideal of the rational person. This person is always in control. Reason is always holding onto the reins of the soul, ensuring that mental processes are in accord with rational requirements. But, as Nietzsche complained, such a person is not necessarily an admirable ideal of a human being, since there are other forms of thought, such as creative, imaginative and instinctive thought, that we should admire.⁵³

Zangwill's objection to Kant is one that presumes rational control must always be exhibited in the form of some sort of (perhaps higher-order) monitoring or checking of first-order representation, to see if it is deficient in some way, and to rein it in if so.⁵⁴ However, if my discussion so far is correct, Kant in no way denigrates creative, imaginative, or instinctive thought. Nor does his view require regarding rational activity or control as always entirely reflective or deliberative in nature—i.e. as a kind of monitoring. Instead, Kant is concerned to show that the rational being is one who can marshal their various mental acts at their own discretion, and thus *control* the way in which they think creatively, imaginatively, etc. In my view, the most basic way in which this is accomplished is by the exertion of cognitive control in acts of attention. We've seen the importance of attention for consciousness, and the way in which acts of attention must be understood as instances of self-affection, and in the case of rational beings, as enabling "self-mastery." Controlled acts of attention need not be self-directed, and they need not be instances of monitoring to still count as exemplifications of the rational agent's control over their own condition—i.e. in the way in which their attention is exercised, and not just whether attention

⁵⁰ For discussion of the notion of a "healthy" understanding see (Frierson, 2014; Hatfield, 1992, 1997; Merritt, 2018).

⁵¹ For defense of Kant's view of autocracy as virtue see especially (Baxley, 2003, 2010).

⁵² (Merritt, 2018, p. 2). Merritt ultimately denies the correctness of this 'caricature' of Kant's view of rationality, and helpfully emphasizes the importance of attention for doing so.

⁵³ (Zangwill, 2012, p. 357).

⁵⁴ This assumption is obviously related to characterizations of "additive" rationality. For example, in his characterization of additive theories of rationality, Matt Boyle (2016, p. 528) equates such theories with "the capacity to monitor and regulate" independent first-order states. But if my interpretation is correct we need not think that Kant's view of rationality, though it rejects ETR, must take such a "monitor and regulate" form.

is directed to oneself as opposed to something else.⁵⁵ It isn't just that Kant thinks that we can exert rational control in *monitoring* that to which we attend. Rather, we exert rational control *in attention itself*, by virtue of the fact that we can attend to things (e.g. the justificatory relation between two judgments) that we would not otherwise be able to if we were driven solely by our animal instincts and inclinations.

Given the pivotal role that attention plays in all aspects of Kant's account of a rational subject's mental life, the capacity for controlled attention has a genuinely transformative effect over the kinds of activity in which one can engage. Notably, however, this "transformation" effected by the power for rational control is not one that need be construed as changing the essential nature of one's sensible or animal capacities. Kant can thus plausibly be read as endorsing a moderate transformative view, one that I have labeled an "actualist" version of transformative rationality, rather than the more extreme "essentialist" version, which generates a variety of conflicts with Kant's other commitments.

Given that the actualist position rejects the claim that the essential nature of our sensible capacities is changed by virtue of our possession of "higher" rational capacities, why call it a "transformative" view at all? Terminological quibbles aside, I think that proponents of TR, whether in essentialist or actualist mode, all agree that there is something very importantly *different* about the mind of an animal possessed of the capacity for rationality (i.e. an *animal rationabile*). The aim of this essay has been to show that Kant is best understood as advocating for a particular way of understanding this difference, and what a difference it makes, even though he also holds fast to the position that our animality maintains its independence. Indeed, it is this very point for Kant that makes the "crooked timber" of humanity so wondrous and tragic to behold.⁵⁶

Translations & Abbreviations

References to specific Cambridge translations of Kant are abbreviated as follows:

An	Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View
C	Correspondence
CPJ	Critique of the Power of Judgment
CPR	Critique of Pure Reason
CPrR	Critique of Practical Reason
G	Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals
JL	Jäsche Logic
MM	Metaphysics of Morals
NE	A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition
Pr	Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics
Rel	Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone

⁵⁵ For a useful contemporary discussion of the wide range of ways and objects toward which attention may be exercised see (Peacocke, 1998). For overview and important contemporary discussion of the significance of attention see (Campbell, 2002; Mole, 2010, 2021; Mole, Smithies, & Wu, 2011; Watzl, 2011, 2017; Wu, 2014).

⁵⁶ I benefitted from a variety of sources in writing this paper. I got lots of useful feedback from a meeting of the Boston Area Kant Society in 2019. Thanks to all who attended. I'd also like to thank the participants in my graduate seminar in 2020 on Kant on rational agency – Trevor Adams, John Paul Del Rosario, Janelle Gormley, Eunhong Lee, and Chen Xia – for lots of interesting and helpful discussion of issues related to this paper. An anonymous referee for PPR provided particularly clear and thoughtful feedback. I'd especially like to thank Rafeeq Hasan, Karl Schafer, and Nick Stang for their comments and encouragement on earlier versions of this paper.

REFERENCES

- Aristotle, & Castelli, L. M. (2018). *Metaphysics: Book Iota* (p. 336). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baxley, A. M. (2003). Autocracy and Autonomy. *Kant Studien*, 94(1), 1–23. <http://doi.org/10.1515/kant.2003.003>
- Baxley, A. M. (2010). *Kant's Theory of Virtue* (p. 206). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Boyle, M. (2012). Essentially Rational Animals. In G. Abel & J. Conant (Eds.), *Rethinking Epistemology* (pp. 395–427). Berlin: Walter De Gruyter.
- Boyle, M. (2016). Additive Theories of Rationality: A Critique. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 24(3), 527–555.
- Boyle, M. (2017). A different kind of mind? In K. Andrews & J. Beck (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Animal Minds* (pp. 109–118). New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, J. (2002). *Reference and Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Conant, J. (2016). Why Kant Is Not a Kantian. *Philosophical Topics*, 44(1), 75–125.
- Corti, L. (2021). Hegel's Later Theory of Cognition: An Additive or Transformative Model. *Hegel Bulletin*, 1–27. <http://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2021.13>
- Forster, M. (Ed.). (2002). *Philosophical Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Frierson, P. R. (2013). *What is the human being*. New York: Routledge.
- Frierson, P. R. (2014). *Kant's empirical psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hatfield, G. (1992). Empirical, Rational, and Transcendental Psychology. In P. Guyer (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (pp. 200–227). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hatfield, G. (1997). The Workings of the Intellect: Mind and Psychology. In P. A. Easton (Ed.), *Logic and the Workings of the Mind: The Logic of Ideas and Faculty Psychology in Early Modern Philosophy* (pp. 21–45). Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company.
- Hawthorne, J. (2001). Causal structuralism. *Noûs*, 35(s15), 361–378.
- Hogan, D. (2009). How to Know Unknowable Things in Themselves. *Noûs*, 43(1), 49–63.
- Kain, P. (2003). *Prudential reason in Kant's anthropology*. In B. Jacobs & P. Kain (Eds.), (pp. 230–265). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Kern, A., & Kietzmann, C. (Eds.). (2017). *Selbstbewusstes Leben*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Korsgaard, C. M. (2009). The Activity of Reason. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 83(2), 23–43. <http://doi.org/10.2307/25656201>
- Korsgaard, C. M. (2018). *Fellow Creatures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Land, T. (2018). Conceptualism and the Objection from Animals. In V. L. Waibel & M. Ruffing (Eds.), *Natur und Freiheit: Akten des XII. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses* (pp. 1269–1276). Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Lorenz, H. (2006). *The Brute Within* (p. 229). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCarty, R. (2009). *Kant's theory of action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDowell, J. (1996). *Mind and World: With a New Introduction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell, J. (2010). Autonomy and its Burdens. *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, 17(1), 4–15.
- McLear, C. (2011). Kant on Animal Consciousness. *Philosophers' Imprint*, 11(15), 1–6.
- McLear, C. (2020). Animals and Objectivity. In L. Allais & J. Callanan (Eds.), *Kant and Animals* (pp. 42–65). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McLear, C. (2020). On the Transcendental Freedom of the Intellect. *Ergo*, 7(2), 35–104. Retrieved from <https://philarchive.org/archive/MCLOTTv1>
- Merritt, M. M. (2018). *Kant on Reflection and Virtue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mole, C. (2010). *Attention Is Cognitive Unison: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mole, C., Smithies, D., & Wu, W. (Eds.). (2011). *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mole, C. (2021). Attention. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 ed.). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/attention/>
- Peacocke, C. (1998). Conscious attitudes, attention, and self-knowledge. In C. Macdonald, B. C. Smith, & C. Wright (Eds.), *Knowing Our Own Minds: Essays in Self-Knowledge* (pp. 63–98). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pendlebury, T. A. (2021). The Shape of the Kantian Mind. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. <http://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12767>
- Pereboom, D. (2006). Kant on Transcendental Freedom. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 73(3), 537–567.

- Schafer, K. (2020). A system of rational faculties: Additive or transformative. *European Journal of Philosophy*. <http://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12612>
- Schafer, K. (Forthcoming). *Kant's Reason: The Unity of Reason and the Limits of Comprehension in Kant's Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shoemaker, S. (1984). *Identity, Properties, and Causality* (pp. 321–342). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stang, N. F. (2016). *Kant's Modal Metaphysics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stang, N. F. (2019). A Guide to Ground in Kant's Lectures on Metaphysics. In C. D. Fugate (Ed.), *Kant's Lectures on Metaphysics: A Critical Guide* (pp. 74–101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://philpapers.org/archive/STAAGT-3.pdf>
- Stratmann, J. (2018). Kant, Grounding, and Things in Themselves. *Philosophers' Imprint*, 18(7), 1–21.
- Vetter, B., & Jaster, R. (2017). Dispositional accounts of abilities. *Philosophy Compass*, 12(8), e12432. <http://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12432>
- Watkins, E. (2005). *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watkins, E. (2019). What real progress has metaphysics made since the time of Kant? Kant and the metaphysics of grounding. *Synthese*. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02180-2>
- Watzl, S. (2011). The Philosophical Significance of Attention. *Philosophy Compass*, 6(10), 722–733.
- Watzl, S. (2017). *Structuring mind: the nature of attention and how it shapes consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wu, W. (2014). *Attention*. New York: Routledge.
- Wuerth, J. (2014). *Kant on Mind, Action, and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zangwill, N. (2012). Rationality and moral realism. *Ratio*, 25(3), 345–364. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9329.2012.00546.x>

How to cite this article: McLearn, C. (2022). Rationality: What difference does it make? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12905>