

Kant and Psychological Monism: the Case of Inclination

[for *Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Analytic Philosophy*, ed. J. Conant and J. Held]

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Abstract:

It is widely assumed that Kant's moral psychology draws from the dualist tradition of Plato and Aristotle, which takes there to be distinct rational and non-rational parts of the soul. My aim is to challenge the air of obviousness that psychological dualism enjoys in neo-Kantian moral psychology, specifically in regard to Tamar Schapiro's account of the nature of inclination. I argue that Kant's own account of inclination instead provides evidence of his commitment to psychological monism, the idea that the mentality of an adult human being is rational through and through. I first consider Schapiro's "intuitions" in favour of dualism: inclination must have a non-rational source, she contends, because they assail us unbidden and are not immediately responsive to volition, and because we are not responsible simply for having inclinations (only for acting on them). I explain how a monistic account of the nature of inclination can accommodate the first two points, and explain why the third neither is a point a Kantian can accept, nor is its denial the affront to common sense that Schapiro supposes. Then I turn to Schapiro's aim to conceive of reflection as non-rational and thus independent of justificatory thought, and yet *such as* to induce rational reflection. I argue that it remains mysterious how inclination, on her account, could be resourced to play this role; and with that criticism in mind, I conclude by making a positive case for Kant's conceiving of inclination in monistic terms, as an expression of rational mindedness.

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1. Introduction

It is widely assumed that Kant's moral psychology draws from the dualist tradition of Plato and Aristotle, which takes there to be distinct rational and non-rational parts of the soul; and this assumption has played a powerful role in neo-Kantian moral psychology and philosophy of action. A prominent example comes from Christine Korsgaard (2008:104), who points to Plato's story of Leontius from the *Republic*: walking past the executioner's field in Piraeus, Leontius found himself drawn to gape at the beautiful corpses, and also disgusted with himself for being so drawn (439e-440a). Plato is standardly interpreted as taking the fact of such psychic conflict to show that there must be rational and non-rational parts of the soul;¹ and for Korsgaard, this inference to psychological dualism yields a distinctive conception of humanity as constituted by a practical problem. Since to be an agent is to be the source of one's own actions, we need to unify the rational and the non-rational parts of ourselves in order to act at all.² Some may object to the idea that to be human is to face, as a constitutive matter, this problem of unification; however, I urge that we start further back.

My overarching aim is to challenge the air of obviousness that psychological dualism enjoys in neo-Kantian moral psychology, and offer instead a preliminary case for how and why Kant should be read as a psychological monist.³ For a monist, the mentality of an adult human being is rational through and through, although this rationality is not normally in a state of health or excellence. I cannot offer here a comprehensive systematic argument for understanding Kant as a psychological monist; rather, I will focus on why this must be the case for Kant's — and, I contend, any plausibly Kantian — account of inclination. Where a dualist takes inclination to arise independently of rationality, a monist takes inclination to be itself an expression of rational mindedness: inclinations are concrete manifestations of a person's commitments about what is a reason for doing what. Now, Tamar Schapiro (2009) claims that the nature of inclination must be understood on dualist terms in order to accommodate certain common-sense observations: first,

¹ See Kamtekar (2017) for a challenge to the standard interpretation of Plato's moral psychology.

² Korsgaard (2008) argues that we are guided by a normative standard internal to agency in responding to this problem, which she finds articulated in Plato's account of justice in the *Republic* and Kant's categorical imperative; we need not consider this point here.

³ The classical exemplar of psychological monism is Socratic intellectualism, as developed in the Stoic tradition; for present purposes, I bracket this historical background.

that intuitions assail us unbidden and can be unwanted; second, we cannot do away with unwanted inclinations by an act of will; and third, that we cannot be held responsible simply for the having inclinations we have. I argue that a monistic account of the nature of inclination can accommodate the first two points, while the third point should be rejected — and that this rejection is no violation of common sense; and that Kant, moreover, is committed to an account of the nature of inclination on these monistic terms.

What could it mean to think of inclination as an expression of rational mindedness, on Kantian terms? It is entirely uncontroversial to observe that Kant takes the characteristic mark of rationality to lie in pure apperception — i.e. the self-consciousness internal to thought, which he expresses in the famous principle “the *I think* must be *able* to accompany all of my representations” (B131). And it is relatively uncontroversial to suppose that the apperception principle manifests in the context of Kant’s moral psychology as “the incorporation thesis”.⁴ For Kant, the incorporation thesis is a reply to critics who misunderstood the *Groundwork* by taking it to claim that a human being is only free when he acts out of respect for the moral law, and otherwise directly impelled into action by desires and inclinations, understood as non-rational causal forces of some kind. The incorporation thesis explains that we act as imputable persons, and thus freely, even when we act from inclination. For Kant, intentional action is the expression of commitment to maxims — to views about what is a reason for doing what — even if we do not explicitly consider these practical commitments and whether they are sound. Thus Kant suggests that when a person acts on inclination, he “incorporates” the “incentives of his sensuous nature [...] into his maxim” (Rel 6:36): he takes inclination as a consideration in favour of going on in a certain way.

What we make of the incorporation thesis nevertheless depends on whether we take Kant to be a psychologist dualist or a psychological monist. If he is a dualist, the act of incorporation is the business of bringing non-rational inclination into rational mindedness. Thus for Schapiro, inclinations are commands put forward by the non-rational part of us — indeed, our “inner animal” — for our “outer human” to endorse or reject.⁵ Reflective endorsement, on her interpretation, is an act of incorporation on the terms just sketched. Moreover, it is important to her view that inclination, while *as such* independent of rationality, is nevertheless *such as* to stimulate appropriate reflection: for, she suggests, it is this dual-facing quality that makes it responsive to the Korsgaardian problem of unification. Now, Schapiro’s account of the nature of inclination rests on the premise that dualism is needed to save the phenomena as indicated

⁴ See Allison (1990:40).

⁵ This kind of language figures in both Schapiro (2009) and (2011) — but here I am looking at (2009:254).

above. But if we don't accept that premise, then we also don't have the problem of unification to which this conception of incorporation is the answer. Hence the argument of this chapter comes in two parts. The first argues that we don't need to accept Schapiro's premise that dualism is needed to save the phenomena. In this way, I reject the setup that introduces the problem to which Schapiro's conception of incorporation is meant to be the answer. Second, I argue that it remains mysterious how inclination, on Schapiro's account, could indeed be appropriately resourced to stimulate reflection. In the wake of that objection, I explain why Kant's conception of inclination is not simply compatible with his being committed to a monistic moral psychology, but indeed may require such a commitment.

At any rate, the monist, who does not set out with the idea that we face this problem of unifying the rational and non-rational parts of ourselves, naturally sees the incorporation thesis in a different light. Here we might recall the misapprehension it is designed to correct: namely, that to act as a rational being, an imputable person, would itself be to act in a way that meets a normative standard of rationality. Kant intervenes to say, in effect, that we need to distinguish (1) what is rational in the sense of requiring the resources of a rational mind, from (2) what is rational in the sense of meeting a normative standard of rationality. For a monist, everything about the mentality of an adult human being is rational in the first sense. This would include simply having an inclination. Of course, the monist has no interest in denying that pre-rational human beings and non-rational animals have desires, and also "habitual desires", which is how Kant consistently explains "inclination" (*Neigung*) in his later practical philosophy (Rel 6:28, MS 6:212, Anth 7:251).⁶ For the monist, coming into the use of reason transforms human mentality in a thoroughgoing way, so that inclinations are themselves manifestations of a person's evaluative commitments, or views about what is a reason for doing what. As we will see, the monistic view can perfectly well accommodate psychic conflict; but it denies that unwelcome desires should be understood as thrust upon us independently of how we commit ourselves in the ongoing activity of thought.

The monistic psychology that I aim to attribute to Kant will raise questions about the relation of my account to recent discussions of Kant's having a "transformative" conception of reason. This terminology, which draws from Boyle (2016), distinguishes a conception of reason as transforming human mentality through and through, from a conception of reason as an additional faculty "tacked on" to a set of powers we might share with non-rational animals.

⁶ I point to an old objection — i.e. that since non-rational animals and pre-rational human beings evidently have desires and inclinations, these states cannot be understood to require the resources of a rational mind: see Galen versus Chrysippus (*De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 2.1.1, 3.7.11-12, and 5.5.1-3) for an ancient example, and Copp and Sobel (2002:258) on Scanlon (1999) for a contemporary iteration.

Discussion of the issue among Kant scholars has turned on questions about the implications of the apperception principle for Kant's account of sensible intuition in the wake of the first *Critique's* Transcendental Deduction. However, variations on the idea that Kant endorses a transformative conception of reason can be outlined independently of that context. Conant (2016) argues that while we attribute "sensibility" to both non-rational animals and human beings, we do so in highly abstract and generic terms that do not entail that these sensibilities share a common nature, or that there is any kind of metaphysical continuity between the two: Conant identifies his view as "disjunctivist" in this sense. Schafer (2020) offers a teleological version of the transformative conception of reason, whereby we suppose that "[t]he presence of reason does not leave the *ends or standards of proper exercise* of sensibility in human beings 'untouched'" (14). Schafer stresses that this teleological version needs to be adopted without Conant's disjunctivism: combining the two would risk too radical a transformation — namely, one rendering sensibility *ipso facto* "harmonious with the principles and the ends of reason" (Schafer 2020:15). The point is that any transformative reading should be able to accommodate psychic conflict, and thus Kant's conception of conception of human virtue as requiring the "capacity to master one's inclinations when they rebel against the law" (MS 6:383; cited by Schafer 2020:14). A viable transformative conception of reason should not have the implication that sensibility would thereby conform perfectly to the principles and ends of reason.

Psychological monists since the Stoics have distinguished the aforementioned senses in which a mental state could be said to be "rational": (1) if it requires the resources of a rational mind; and (2) if it accords with a normative standard of rationality, or "right reason". Inclinations that "rebel against the law" cannot be rational in sense (2); but it could still be the case that inclinations in adult human beings are, simply as such, rational in sense (1). Although I see no reason why a disjunctivist view like Conant's should be unable to accommodate this distinction, nevertheless disjunctivism looks to be unwarranted on another basis. Since human beings start off in a pre-rational condition, we should doubt that the sensibility of an adult human being would share no fundamental continuity with that of pre-rational infancy and childhood. Therefore, when we think about the difference that rationality makes to human mindedness — for that is what is at stake here — we might do well to think in developmental terms.

Indications that Kant thinks along such lines can be found in the opening section of the *Anthropology*, where he points to a watershed moment in human development. Our rationality may develop gradually, as Kant indicates when he observes that "the child who can already speak fairly fluently" does not yet begin "to talk by means of 'I'" until somewhat later. But when that

happens, “a light seems to dawn on him [...] and he never again returns to his former way of speaking” (Anth 7:127). Kant thus indicates that he takes the coming online of apperceptive thought to be a transformation, which he marks in this context as going from latent to fledgling personhood. Nothing is ever the same again. Kant then plausibly supposes that inclination, on the other side of this transition, is different in nature, as it would now require the resources of a rational mind — i.e. apperceptive thought. Inclination will then be an expression of personhood; and so there should be some non-trivial sense in which we are responsible for it. That is the view that I aim to explain and defend as Kantian here.

2. Schapiro on inclination

My aim in §2 is to rebut Schapiro’s assumption that psychological dualism is required in order to do justice to common-sense observations about inclination, and in this context to outline how Kant’s explication of inclination as “habitual desire” is plausibly interpreted on monistic terms. With this in mind, it is appropriate to indicate how Schapiro seeks a “middle way” between two “extreme” views that she identifies as dualist and monist respectively (2009: 232, 239, 246).

Schapiro starts with the “pretheoretical” idea that inclination is a way of being “passively motivated” (2009:230). As a kind of *motivation*, inclination must have some essential connection to the will; but it cannot, as a *passive* motivation, itself be an exercise of the will or practical reason. Nor can it be akin what has come to be known as a “motivated desire”, such as the “desire” I might have to get a root canal, once I recognise that my future well-being depends upon it. By Schapiro’s lights, rational monism fails to accommodate the characteristic passivity of inclination: hence she stakes her ground on the side of dualism — but on territory that she marks off from the dualism of the “extreme anti-rationalist” who takes inclination to be “effects of causal processes working through us” (233). For inasmuch as inclination is then conceived as mere happening, we’ve lost our handle on it as *motivation*, which is “a form of self-movement” (230).

My interest lies in how Schapiro develops her account of inclination as a response to the perceived failings of the rational monist, who is represented in these essays (Schapiro 2009 and 2011) by T.M. Scanlon — and not in how she positions herself within dualism, against contemporary versions of extreme anti-rationalism. Yet we must register her remark that “Kant is sometimes caricatured” as an extreme anti-rationalist about inclination (2009:233), i.e. the sort who likens inclination to a mere happening. For this, we can recall, is the very caricature that Kant meant to dispel with the incorporation thesis, less than a decade after he wrote the *Groundwork*. It is a very old caricature, in other words, and not a serious contender for a Kantian

view. Yet it shows how deeply the assumption runs that Kant must be some kind of psychological dualist — we just need to figure out what sort. In this spirit, Schapiro presents her own account of inclination as both Kantian and rooted in the dualist psychology of Plato and Aristotle (2009:232). It does not even figure on the radar of possibilities that Kant’s own understanding of the nature of inclination — and thus the one that most deserves to be called Kantian — might be closer kin to the monistic account that, as we are about to see, Schapiro suggests we should reject as a violation of common sense.

2.1 Preliminary doubts about Schapiro’s intuitions for dualism

Now let’s look at the move Schapiro makes, when she takes a position on the dualist side of her map. This move rests on three related “intuitions” that, she contends, “support the idea that inclination stems from a source external to reason or will” (2009:233): they are indications of the essential passivity of inclination which, she supposes, the rational monist cannot explain. Let’s consider each in turn.

The first is an appeal to the characteristic phenomenology of inclinations: they “bubble up in us, seize us, wash over us, and assail us” (2009:232). I would like to express some suspicion that this phenomenological claim might, at least in some measure, be philosophical lore. We certainly do sometimes have unwelcome inclinations, as Leontius did that day in Piraeus; and such inclinations will seem intrusive, perhaps even assailing. The inclination to gape at the beautiful corpses might, to Leontius, seemed to have come out of nowhere, or to bubble up in him like the excrescence of some insidious pathogen. But inclinations, for the most part, are not unwelcome: they are ordinary elements of psychological architecture, features of our everyday smooth sailing — a point that Kant appears to recognise by defining inclination as “habitual desire” (Rel 6:28, MS 6:212, Anth 7:251). Indeed, if we bear this definition in mind, we will be able to see that none of the intuitions Schapiro mentions are the obvious indicators of the correctness of dualism that she takes them to be.

Schapiro’s second intuition is that inclinations “are not directly responsive to volition”: they can be unwanted; and when they are, we can neither alter nor expunge them “simply by changing our minds” (2009:232-3). But the conception of rational control invoked here looks like a caricature: “changing one’s mind” is not, normally, the work of an instant as her remark appears to imply. We change our minds by altering, over time, patterns of attention; and inclinations, as I will be arguing, should be understood as modes of the direction of attention. Now, Schapiro takes “changing one’s mind” to be an alteration in one’s practical commitments: her point is that such alterations will not, simply as such, make any difference to one’s

inclinations. But it is plausible to suppose that a person's practical commitments vary considerably in how "thick" or concretely action- and attention-guiding they are. How we pay attention is, moreover, at least part of what gives substance to these commitments, what makes them something more than mere avowal. We can then acknowledge the recalcitrance of inclination — they can be impervious to certain changes of mind — without taking this point to provide any support for dualism. Inclinations are recalcitrant because they are habitual; and the habits they involve are essentially habits of thought. Let me elaborate, and further defend, this point as we examine Schapiro's third intuition.

Schapiro's third intuition is that "we normally don't hold ourselves responsible for having our inclinations in the same way that we hold ourselves responsible for acting on them" (2009:233).⁷ There is some sense in which we are not responsible "in the same way" for simply having an inclination as we would be for acting on it: to have committed adultery in one's heart many times⁸ — and perhaps, then, to be so inclined — is not to have actually committed adultery. But that "in the same way" is a loose way of speaking; and it is not at all obvious that, should we recognise *some* sense in which we are responsible for having our inclinations (as Schapiro seems to allow), that the terms of this responsibility could be fundamentally different from those applicable to our *acting* on inclination. To see how this holds from a Kantian point of view, return to the conception of inclination as habitual desire: the desire is habitual because it has been repeatedly gratified in a certain manner. These acts of gratification, in human beings who have come into the use of reason, express commitment to maxims by Kant's lights: to satisfy this type of need or longing in this type of way, or with this type of object. They have a history of (typically tacit) practical commitment behind them. Of course, I can have an inclination without renewing this practical commitment: this time I might not act on it. But the inclination itself is formed of accretions of past assent to maxims. Therefore it does not follow that we are responsible for having an inclination on terms that are fundamentally different from the terms on which we are responsible for intentional action: namely, through our commitment to maxims.

Although Schapiro presents her account as Kantian, she develops it in dialogue with contemporary moral psychology, not Kant; and she is only prepared to vouch that her view is "arguably compatible with Kant" (2009:232). And she does not acknowledge, much less draw upon, Kant's definition of inclination as "habitual desire", as Wilson (2016) also points out.⁹ Yet

⁷ See also Schapiro (2011:154-5).

⁸ Paraphrasing the memorable line from Jimmy Carter; see Mohr (1976).

⁹ Although Wilson (2016) argues that Kant does not take inclination to stem from a non-rational source, he nevertheless assumes that Kant must be a psychological dualist (2016:232-3, n31). He does not

if we reason from what it can mean, for Kant, to explain inclination as “habitual desire”, then we cannot avoid the result that we — by which I mean human beings who have come into the use of reason — are responsible for simply having our inclinations. The terms of this responsibility cannot be, from a Kantian point of view, fundamentally different from the terms on which we are responsible for intentional action, even though simply having an inclination is not itself an action.¹⁰

2.2 Kant and contemporary monism

I’ve noted that Schapiro develops her dualist account of inclination partly as a response to the perceived failings of the monistic conception of desire presented by Scanlon (1999). Scanlon classifies desire as a “judgment-sensitive attitude”, i.e. one for which reasons can sensibly be asked for or offered (1999:20). But he insists that this classification does not commit him to the view that “all desires arise from prior judgments” (39), such as the “motivated desire” to get a root canal. Such desires are penumbral cases — and indeed, not the sort of thing an ordinary person will be disposed to call “desire” at all. The focal case, Scanlon proposes, is captured by what he refers to as the “directed-attention sense” of desire: “what is generally called a desire involves having a tendency to see something as a reason”, and to have one’s “attention [...] directed insistently toward considerations that present themselves as counting in favour of P” (39). A desire, on this view, is constituted by a certain insistent direction of one’s attention — where the insistence, and the being-directed, is meant to capture ordinary ideas about the passivity of desire, e.g. “that they ‘assail’ us unbidden and can conflict with our considered judgment of what we have reason to do” (39).

To underscore that it is not the penumbral “motivated desire” that is at issue here, Scanlon relies on examples where there is some distance or lack of accord between how one finds one’s attention drawn in given circumstances and what one would avow as one’s relevant evaluative commitments, or take as one’s considered judgment about what one has reason to do.

explain the basis of this assumption, but context suggests it rests on Kant’s division of “all faculties of the mind” into those of feeling, desire and cognition (see KU 5:196-7 and 20:245), where Wilson assumes that rationality must be a function of the cognitive power, rather than the other two (2016:223-4). However, none of these three faculties *is* reason; and there are grounds to suppose that, just as non-rational animals presumably have powers of feeling and desire, they should also have some cognitive power as well — just not a rational one (see McLear 2020). Thus the threefold division has no direct bearing on whether Kant takes adult human mindedness to involve separate rational and non-rational powers, since each of the three powers can be “rational” (as in an adult human being) or “non-rational” (as in a non-rational animal or pre-rational human being).

¹⁰ Allen Wood draws a similar conclusion: for Kant, inclination “is already something in which we are rationally complicit and for which we are responsible” (2018:100).

One example involves a Jones whom I know to be an “artful deceiver” despite his “pretensions to be a loyal friend” (35). When I am actually with him, my attention fixes on “the appearance of warmth and friendship” that I “find [...] so affecting” (35): I take the pleasant feeling that his attentions on this occasion now arouse as relevant to my own conduct — a reason to be unreserved — and fail to recall as relevant the times Jones betrayed my trust (and so on). So conceived, the desire is rational in the sense of requiring the resources of a rational mind; but it is not rational in the sense of meeting an appropriate normative standard of rationality — for my attention is fixed with an insistence that leaves much of what’s relevant to my present conduct recessed. This insistence moreover captures the passivity proper to desire in its focal sense: I just find my attention thus drawn — in no manner that I have set out to achieve or that is otherwise guided by my considered judgment.

If desire, in the focal sense, is a matter of having one’s attention directed along certain lines, there is surely something passive about it. But it is not clear how Scanlon thinks of what (as it were) does the work of *directing* one’s attention — of what we are to think of as acting on us in the relevant way. Moreover, since it is not the “directed-attention” point that makes this a monistic account of desire — a dualist could invoke this idea as well — it matters how we answer that question. Kant has a good answer to this question, through which we can further elaborate on how he thinks of inclination in monistic terms. In preparation, it is appropriate to note an ambiguity in Scanlon’s account, between speaking of desire as a tendency for one’s attention to be directed along certain lines, and the activation of this tendency in a particular instance of having one’s attention thus drawn. A similar ambiguity arises with Kant’s conception of inclination: as *habitual* desire, we naturally think of it as a tendency of some kind; but as habitual *desire*, we naturally think of it as an episodic manifestation of that tendency.¹¹ I do not find this ambiguity problematic; and it is relevant to how we should respond to Schapiro’s doubts that (a) any monist can account adequately for the phenomenology of assaillment, and (b) her readiness to dismiss, as a violation of sound common sense, the idea that we can be held responsible simply for having inclinations.¹² If Schapiro identifies a tension here, it is this: to suppose that we are assailed by inclination is to cast it outside the scope of what’s subject to immediate rational control; but to suppose that we are responsible simply for having them — that we bring them upon ourselves — entails their being subject to rational control. But if we

¹¹ Cf. Wilson (2016:213-5), who by my lights overstates his case about Kant’s favouring a “dispositional” conception of inclination.

¹² See Schapiro (2009:244), on Scanlon.

can see how the inclination that assails is the activation of a tendency that has been formed through habits of thought, the tension dissolves.

The beginning of Kant's response to this problem has already been presented above, in response to Schapiro's third intuition for dualism (§2.1). A desire that is habitual has been repeatedly gratified in a certain way; and these acts of gratification, in human beings who have come into the use of reason, express commitment to maxims. Thus with each act of gratification, we renew a practical commitment, to satisfy this type of need or longing in this sort of way, with this kind of object. To have an inclination here and now (i.e. an episode) is not itself to renew the practical commitment (since I may not act on it); nevertheless, my being so inclined here and now has a past history of gratification, and thus practical commitment, behind it. Here we can further adduce the simile that Kant offers to capture how passion (*Leidenschaft*) — a kind of inclination (Anth 7:251) — might be understood to be assailing and not subject to immediate rational control. (We will consider how inclination and passion are differentiated, as genus and species in §3; the simile in question evidently holds of the genus, i.e. inclination as habitual desire.) The appropriate image of assailment, Kant explains, is not "water that breaks through a dam", but rather "a river that digs itself deeper and deeper into its bed" (Anth 7:252). The water moves as it does, and with the force it does, owing to contours in the terrain: it *is carried*, we might say, *by* the lay of the land. And yet the movement of water, over a great span of time, has made the land lie as it does. As a tendency, inclination is like the lay of the land; as an episode, it is like the water that is carried along a particular line and with a certain force by the lay of the land. We have made ourselves a certain way through the habits of our own thought: we are plainly responsible for the tendencies (the lay of the land). Therefore, our being carried or directed by these tendencies — i.e. episodes of being inclined — is not something that just happens to us; we have made it happen. At the same time, any such episode is a certain mental movement that is in some important sense passive, with all that this implies: it may bubble up in us without warning, may be unwanted, and may not be subject to immediate rational control.

Here my first line of argument draws to a close: I've explained why we do not need to assume dualism in order to accommodate common-sense observations about inclination, and have shown how Kant's conception of inclination as "habitual desire" can plausibly be interpreted on monistic terms. To show that a monistic interpretation of Kant's conception of inclination is available is not yet to see why it might be required. The aim of my second line of argument is to make a case for that stronger claim. Again, it is not possible to offer a comprehensive systematic argument for Kant's commitment to psychological monism here. So what I have to say about why Kant might need to conceive of inclination on monistic terms will,

in this context, be offered as a response to what I will now identify as an instructive failure in Schapiro's account of the non-rational nature of inclination.

2.3 Schapiro on inclination and reflection

I began the chapter with an indication of how Schapiro's account of inclination is a development of the Korsgaardian problem of unification. Inclination must have a dual-facing nature, she supposes, in order to address this problem: it must be both independent of justificatory thought, and yet, in its very nature, such as to stimulate appropriate reflection. This leads her to conceive of inclination as an "unreflective experience of practical necessity" and the expression of a "primitive normativity" that we share with non-rational animals (2009:247) — *primitive* because it is "object-based" rather than "principle-based" (250). Inclination is a matter of seeing certain "objects as calling for certain responses, independent of any justification" (246). Her initial example is of being thirsty on a hike: where "Scanlon would claim that [...] I am insistently seeing the dryness in my throat as a reason to drink water and this is what is motivating me", Schapiro contends that "a more primitively normative thought" is doing the work here — something "more like an imperative — 'Drink!' or 'Drink this!' or 'Drink water!'" (246-7). While she allows that this may involve attending to the thirst-quenching features of water — rather than, say, its slippery features — it is not a matter of doing so in a way that "involve[s] consciousness" of those features as *justifying* "the felt imperative to drink" (247).

Schapiro's thirsty hiker example is liable to mislead one into thinking that, if inclination is the expression of a primitive normativity we share with non-rational animals, then its proper objects will be things we need to sustain life, like water. No: her idea is rather that inclination is something *simple*, a tug. It involves no act of combination, no seeing x as a reason for doing y . That's the important contrast with the monist, who conceives of inclination as a particular drawing out of a rational point of view, and thus, in that sense, as *complex*. "The thought is not 'Drink! because ...'; it is simply 'Drink!'" (Schapiro 2009:247). One can be inclined to read novels on the same terms, Schapiro insists: "My inner animal's motivation does not go by way of deliberation about why reading this novel right now is something it has reason or justification to do. It is direct and non-rational, based on an 'instinct' that may be the product not simply of biology, but also of associations formed as a result of socialisation and experience" (Schapiro 2011:156). But the scope of the phrase "does not go by way of" is uncertain, rendering Schapiro's claim unclear. Does it mean that my being inclined, here and now, to laze away the afternoon reading *Anna Karenina* is not the result of my having deliberated about how I should spend my day? That would not be outlandish. Yet Kant has shown us how my being so inclined

nevertheless has a history of (typically tacit) assent to maxims behind it: by these lights, my being so inclined does “go by way of” justificatory thought. Schapiro must have in mind a stronger claim: namely, that my being so inclined is, simply as such, unconnected to any view about what is a reason for doing what. Hence she proposes that inclinations may be products of “associations formed as a result of socialisation and experience” *rather than* a rational point of view: my being inclined to read a novel is a mechanical reflex — the output of such associations, given a triggering stimulus.

Schapiro’s conception of inclination as a simple tug is meant to show in one stroke how inclination could be both essentially non-rational and yet also such as to stimulate rational reflection. Elaborating, she likens having an inclination to being tugged by your leashed dog, whom you are walking through an open field (2011:163). The tug announces itself as a pull *on* your deliberative power: it announces itself thus with its very simplicity. For any expression of rational mindedness involves combination, and is, as such, something complex. So the simple tugs of inclination strike rational mindedness with their sheer alienness — as it were reminding us that we are rational, and calling us to the formative work of unification. For Schapiro, this begins with our asking ourselves whether or not to go along with our “inner animal” (163). In this way we register, moment by moment, the problem of unification that she and Korsgaard take to be constitutive of being human. By contrast, Schapiro supposes, if we take inclination to be itself the expression of a rational point of view, it becomes impossible to understand how inclination would have any reflection-inducing power internal to it.¹³

In characterising the role of inclination in our mental life, Kant variously speaks of its “promoting” things (*was durch Neigung angepriesen wird*, G 4:403), pressing “claims” (*Ansprüche*, KpV 5:74), and indeed “always” getting “the first word” (KpV 5:146) — he speaks, that is, in terms that invite us to suppose that he takes inclination, in us, to be an expression of rational mindedness. In effect, Schapiro wants to retain the idea that inclination lodges claims, while denying that these claims are an expression of rationality. Allen Wood raises the obvious objection to this aspect of her view: it is a mystery how the putative inner animal “can make ‘nominations’ a rational agent can understand” or “exert nonrational ‘pressure’ on a rational agent” (2018:96).¹⁴ But again our complaints might start further back: the primitive normativity of inclination is invoked as the solution to the problem of unification; and the reason we are given to accept this problem as genuine rests chiefly on appeal to the fact that we sometimes

¹³ See §4 of Schapiro (2011:158-62), which she aims not only at monism but also moments in Korsgaard that she considers insufficiently cleareyed about the implications of dualism.

¹⁴ The objection is akin to the “interaction problem” Boyle (2016) presses on “additive” conceptions of rationality.

experience psychic conflict as Leontius did that day in Piraeus. The closing argument of Schapiro (2009:254-5), which revisits her claim that we need dualism for a convincing account of psychic conflict, may indeed be aimed at assuaging lingering doubts one might have about this setup. However, what I think this argument more clearly shows is why inclination, on Schapiro's account, is incapable of stimulating meaningful reflection.

The particular mode of psychic conflict at issue in Schapiro's closing argument is that involving recalcitrant inclinations. For an example, we can lightly rework one considered earlier, of my being inclined to be open and unreserved around Jones, despite knowing him to be an artful deceiver. The inclination is recalcitrant if it keeps coming back in my interactions with Jones, when nothing has altered my considered judgment that he is untrustworthy. Schapiro finds the monist hard-pressed to account for this recalcitrance: if the inclination is itself the product of judgment about what I have reason to do, then I should be able to work on any recalcitrant inclinations just by being more careful in the exercise of my power of judgment. If monism were true, in other words, there really wouldn't be recalcitrant inclinations; since there plainly are, the monist is forced to understand this recalcitrance as a kind of stubborn stupidity, or obtuseness (Schapiro 2009:254). And that is the sort of thing for which a person is at fault. But, Schapiro continues, there are many examples of such recalcitrance for which we are plainly not at fault — such as the inclination to flee while standing in line for a roller coaster. On Schapiro's analysis, what is going on is that “my inner animal tells me to flee while my outer human tells me to stay put” — the impulse to flee remains, even though “my outer human has judged the situation differently” (254). The two cannot see the situation in the same terms: the inner animal just sees the situation as calling for flight, not fleeing for some reason — and so “it cannot be corrected simply by being shown a stronger reason to stay put” (254).

Intuitively, if we want to understand the relationship between inclination and reflection, we need to understand how inclination can be unwanted in a way that makes us *uncomfortable*. But this is precisely what Schapiro's primitive normativity account rules out. The demands of your “inner animal” do not say anything about who *you* really are, unless you agree to go along with these demands. When you don't agree, the inclination is presumably unwanted; and such inclinations will be, by the design of Schapiro's account, unresponsive to this lack of endorsement — i.e. recalcitrant. But these recalcitrant inclinations do not say anything about who *you* are. Therefore, by her lights, they shouldn't make you uncomfortable.

This result makes it hard to see how inclination could spur reflection in any ordinary sense of what that means. The possibility of being made uncomfortable by an inclination turns on its power to say something about who I am — what my practical commitments are. There is

something wrong with a person who is not made uncomfortable by her recalcitrant inclinations. Next I want to consider how this thought plays out as Kant develops his account of inclination in the *Anthropology*, to draw a qualified conclusion about why he might need to understand inclination on monistic terms.

3. A lesson from the normative failure of passion

It is not uncommon for philosophers to suppose that Kant vaguely thinks of inclinations as something “bad” about us — an impression presumably borne of his tendency to speak, in his most widely read ethical works, of inclination as “always *burdensome* to a rational being” (KpV 5:118; also G4:454). Such a remark does not, of course, entail that inclinations are bad as such, nor anything from which we could coherently aspire to free ourselves. Moreover, as I have noted, Kant consistently explains inclination as “habitual desire” in his later, somewhat less widely read, practical works — a designation that, as I have been elaborating, shows it to be simply a fact about how our minds work, or a feature of our psychic architecture. Nevertheless, Kant does suppose that there is a kind of inclination — namely, “passion” (*Leidenschaft*) — that is “without exception evil [*böse*]” (Anth 7:267).¹⁵ What makes passion categorically bad is a large question that I cannot attempt to answer fully here. But a partial answer can be drawn from the passage in which he says this, through his example of a “*passionately* ambitious person” (7:266), whom I hereafter refer to as P.

Let me indicate why these further details of Kant’s account are worth our while. My account of Kant’s conception of inclination in this chapter is a product of critical engagement with Schapiro; and Schapiro, as we just saw (§2.3), takes it to be a merit of her account that it shows the recalcitrance of inclination (when they are such) to be nothing for which we are at fault. By her lights, then, the mere recalcitrance of inclinations is nothing that ought to bother us. This is where P comes in. As we will see, P is someone who is unbothered by his recalcitrant inclinations. And Kant holds him up as an example of normative failure. My aim is to identify the failure that P illustrates, and explain how it warrants the conclusion that Kant needs to understand inclination in monistic terms.

Let’s look at the example. Kant attributes the passion of ambition to P, along with some other inclinations, which I will refer to as “mere inclinations” in order to mark them as instances of the genus *inclination*, but not the species *passion*. Kant imagines that the passionately ambitious P, who as such wants to win tokens of honour and success, nevertheless “also wants to be loved

¹⁵ On the sense of *böse*, see (KpV 5:58-60).

by others, needs pleasant social intercourse with others, [and] the maintenance of his financial condition” (Anth 7:266). P has these other ends. But, Kant continues:

[...] he is blind to these ends, though his inclinations still summon [*einladen*] him to them, and he overlooks completely the risk he is running that he will be hated by others, or avoided in social intercourse, or impoverished through his expenditures. It is folly (making *part* of one’s end the *whole*), which directly contradicts the formal principle of reason itself. (7:266)

Let me first underscore that Kant does not merely say that P has these other ends — e.g. being loved by others, and so on — but rather that P is “summoned” or “invited” (*einladen*) to these ends by his inclinations. So the sense in which P cares about being loved by others (etc.) is not a matter of mere avowal: it is rather a practical commitment of some thickness. Kant speaks metaphorically in this context of the passionate person as someone who “please[s] one inclination by placing all the rest in the shade or in a dark corner” (7:266). This metaphor, Kant indicates, concerns the relation of general practical commitments to particulars — and thus to the direction of one’s attention to considerations relevant to acting on those commitments. I will help myself to the metaphor in my analysis of the case. For it allows us to see that P does have these considerations — the ones relevant to the ends of his mere inclinations — in view, but dimly and peripherally. Second, Kant presents P’s mere inclinations as *recalcitrant*: for they continue to issue invitations to which he is unresponsive. So there is a summons, a practical commitment of some attention-directing thickness or specificity; yet their summons must, at the same time, be distracting to P. For P’s passionate ambition is also an inclination: and it, too, issues a summons. P, we might imagine, always has his pulse on the social status of others in a room; he tends to find such considerations *interesting*, as he’s primed to respond in honour-seeking ways.¹⁶ These are the considerations in the spotlight, as it were, of P’s consciousness.

What’s wrong with P? Kant’s diagnosis is that he *makes part of his end the whole*, violating a formal standard of practical consistency. It is not the case that caring to be honoured by others is, simply as such, or in virtue of its content, incompatible with caring to be loved by others and so on. It is presumably possible in principle to care about all of these things in a coherent way: but P fails at just that, owing — Kant implies — to his *passion*. However, I would like to come at P’s normative failure from a different angle. Recall that the mere inclinations in this example are the recalcitrant ones. The example illustrates a person who is not made appropriately uncomfortable by his recalcitrant inclinations. Let me elaborate on how I understand the significance of this point.

¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, Kant notes in this context that passions always involve commitment to maxims (7:266).

It is fair to suppose that there is normally some kind of distance between what a person would avow as her practical commitments, on the one hand, and the manifestation of her practical commitments in how she comports herself, on the other. It is also plausible that normal human development involves some negotiation of that distance. We can, for example, be surprised by how we find our attention drawn in a given circumstance; and such surprises, some of which may be uncomfortable, ought to stimulate reflection in a familiar sense — i.e. to wonder what it says about me, that I dwelt on this, or found myself looking at that. But P does not appear to be engaged in the negotiation of that distance. If he were, he'd be responsive, in the first place, to the summons of his mere inclinations: perhaps not by renewing the practical commitment at issue, but at least by registering what the summons says about him. Moreover, to negotiate this distance, a person needs to be oriented towards having her ends in a consistent way. To be so oriented is to have one's attention drawn, moment by moment, in a way that is appropriate to, or suits, one's comprehensive practical outlook as a person — and to be troubled by signs that it is not. P thus lacks a certain power of self-regulation: the ability to redirect one's attention on the fly, so that it might be appropriate to, or suitably express, one's comprehensive practical outlook.

Again, the normative standard at issue is not a substantive one: nothing that Kant says here could equip us to take a stand on which summons he ought to accept — though it is plausible to suppose, by Kant's lights, that his mere inclinations are not calling him to ends (being loved by others, etc.) of which he ought to divest himself. So it is not the content of his mere inclinations that ought to trouble him, but rather their very *recalcitrance*. For the invitations they issue come from himself, and are issued to himself, as a rational being. They insistently raise questions about who he is and means to be. But P is not taking their question: that is what is most fundamentally wrong with P. However, it is only as expressions of rationality that our inclinations *can* make us uncomfortable in this way, and spur us to reflect in the ordinary sense that I have been considering here.

4. Conclusion

My overarching aim has been to challenge the air of obviousness that psychological dualism assumes in recent work on Kantian moral psychology. We do not need dualism, I argued, to save the phenomena of our being assailed by our inclinations, of their being sometimes unwanted and recalcitrant. But I conclude that we must instead understand the nature of inclination on the principles of a monistic moral psychology. For if we understand inclination on dualist terms, as something that would assault rational mindedness from the outside, then we

cannot understand the possibility of our being made uncomfortable by inclinations, in such a way as to spur us to worry, in appropriate ways, about who we are — what we have made of ourselves — and who we mean to be. Intuitively, this is a central problem of human life. We must therefore understand the nature of inclination on monistic terms, as itself an expression of rational mindedness.¹⁷

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Anth=*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*; **G**= *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*; **KpV**=*Critique of Practical Reason*; **KU**=*Critique of the Power of Judgment*; **MS**=*Metaphysics of Morals*; **Rel**=*Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone*. Quotations generally follow those available in the following volumes of Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), modified on occasion:

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