

Robert Johnson

Interest

1. *Meaning and location in Kant's works*

The general definition of an “interest” is a principle whose content is the condition under which the exercise of some faculty of the mind is promoted. 5:119 This general definition yields narrower concepts of interest once a faculty of the mind and the condition of its exercise are specified. The concept can be found throughout the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, as well as in the *Critique of Judgment*.

Wichtige Stellen: 4:413n, 4:460n, 4:449, 4:460, 4:460n, 5:79, 5:119, 5:204-5

2. *Related keywords in Kant's work*

Incentive, interest of inclination, interest of morality, moral interest, motive, pathological interest, practical and pathological love, will

3. *Philosophical function in Kant's philosophy*

One can attribute an interest to every faculty of the mind. Reason is the mind's faculty of principles, and so reason is the source of every faculty's interests. However, reason is itself also a faculty. So reason in general determines its own interests. 5:119 In particular, practical reason can be said to possess an interest as well. 5:79 Following the general definition, this would be a principle whose content contains the condition of reason's determination of the will. The nature of practical reason's interest is an important element of Kant's answer to the central question of his moral philosophy: How can reason be practical? Since reason is the faculty of principles, it must itself provide the condition under which it exercises itself in

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determining the will. Thus, reason can be practical only if and because reason itself provides the condition under which it determines the will. 4: 460n

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The human will, unlike a divine will, requires an interest in an action (or end) that the principle represents as to be done (or pursued) in order to be determined by practical principles. 4: 413n A divine will needs no interest since it is "of itself always in conformity with reason". However, this does not imply that the human will must always act *from* an interest, and so must always be determined by practical principles that are valid because of an antecedent interesting in some object of inclination. Kant argues that a rationally determined will can *take* an interest in the action itself. So when the Categorical Imperative represents an action as necessary *in itself*, apart from whether it produces something desired, our wills can still be determined by this representation because, even though there is no interest *from* which it could operate, it can nevertheless *take* an interest in that action. 4:449

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Kant admitted the difficulty of "discovering and making comprehensible an *interest* which the human being can take in moral laws". 4:460 Reason has intellectual interests in such things as logic, of course. But those interests are "never immediate but presuppose purposes for its use." 4:460n Thus, they could never explain how the will is determined by a Categorical Imperative.

The notion of an interest also plays an important role in Kant's aesthetics. Aesthetic judgment, as a faculty of the mind, is *disinterested* in a particular sense. We often have a particular interest in beautiful things. That interest, according to the third *Critique* is "a delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object." 5:204-5

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Kant distinguishes sharply this interest from the disinterested pleasure involved with the judgment that something is beautiful. 5:204f This usage of 'interest' is just an application of the general definition above to a particular case, the case of taking pleasure in beautiful objects.

4. *Secondary literature*

1. Grenberg, Jeanine. "Feeling, Desire and Interest in Kant's Theory of Action" *Kant-Studien: Philosophische Zeitschrift der Kant-Gesellschaft*, (2001) 92(2), 153-179.