

Robert Johnson

Interest of morality

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

An **interest** is a psychological principle whose content contains the condition under which some faculty of the mind is exercised. 5:119 An interest of **morality** is a practical interest, or an interest in action, that contains the condition under which we act when our **will** is exercised by being determined by the **Moral Law**.

Wichtige Stellen: 4:413n, 4:461, 5:119-20, 5:79-80, 4:449-53

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2. *Related keywords in Kant's work*

Incentive, interest of inclination, moral interest, motive, pathological interest

3. *Philosophical function in Kant's philosophy*

Kant held that the Moral Law of itself must provide an interest, since we are to be able to do what morality demands no matter what we desire to do, and no action is possible for human agents without an interest. 4: 461 Unlike every other kind of interest, however, a moral interest is not an interest that impels us to act and is not empirically discernible prior to acting. The interest we have in conforming to moral demands is an interest we *take* in doing so, and is a consequence of, rather than an explanation of, the moral law's determination of our wills. 4:413n In particular, a moral interest in an action is an interest in the action itself and the principle on which it is decided, not what results from the action. When we act *from* an interest, the representation of some object causes pleasure in its existence, thus leading to a desire to bring about that object through action. Such an interest Kant dubs **pathological**. It determines the will by means of empirically discernible feeling. Kant argues that the Moral

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Law must determine the will immediately, not by means of any feeling. The direct determination of the will subsequently produces a feeling of respect, which in turn produces an interest in compliance. The interest in compliance with the law that follows upon the Moral Law's determination of our wills and the subsequent arousal of respect in us is moral interest. 5:79-80

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The possibility of a moral interest in action requires, according to Kant, that we be members of, or view ourselves as members of, both an intelligible world and a sensible world, the world insofar as it is a possible object of experience and the world as it is apart from being a possible object of experience. 4:449-53 As members of the former world, every interest that attaches to an action is an observable interest explicable by prior causes. However, we are also aware of the moral law and its authority over us, and it demands that we act regardless of whether we have any empirically discernible interest in doing so. 5:31 Thus although we observe no interest in morality as such, either in ourselves or in others, we nevertheless must act under the Idea that we can take an interest in it.

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4. *Secondary Literature*

1. "Kant's Theory of Moral Sensibility," Kant-Studien, Vol. 80, No. 3, 1989
2. Rawls, John. "Kant, Lecture II, §2" in Lectures on the Hist of Moral Philosophy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).