On the Crusian Aspects in Kant's Theory of Moral Agency

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I will attempt to explicate some of the main affinities between Kant's theory of moral agency and that of one of his most prominent predecessors, Christian August Crusius. This, I believe, is in itself a worthy endeavor and, despite the fact that it is relatively often said in a general fashion that Kant was influenced by Crusius, an area in which there still seems to be plenty of work to be done.[1] Among other things, this will allow me to argue against those who have rejected (like David Forman) or at least downplayed (like Henry Allison) the affinity between Crusius' notion of the freedom of the will and Kant's challenging notion of *Willkür*,[2] a cumbersomely translatable term standardly rendered as "the power of choice."

2. The nature and constitution of the Crusian will

When dealing with anything mental, early modern German philosophers display a strong tendency to begin with the notion of faculty.[3] In this they follow Wolff, who developed an ethical theory that builds on the thesis that the two

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[1] Michael Walschots (2021, 189–90) has recently lamented the shortage of extensive accounts of the Crusian theory of freedom, and even those that exist he assesses "at best, only partial and, at worst, inaccurate." Also Steven Tester (2021, 229) estimates that "Crusius' thoughts on freedom have made an important if largely unacknowledged historical contribution to the discussion of the will."

[2] David Forman (2013, 216) states that "Kant never accepts the Crusian idea that freedom of the will is the indifferent ability to choose among motives. For Kant, the will is practical reason itself [...]—something unthinkable on a Crusian view," while Allison (2006, 391–2) suggests that the Crusian notion of free will is connected to Kant's idea of freedom as autonomous law-giving. However, Allison's position is not entirely clear. Shortly after he states that idea of an autonomous will draws on Crusius, Allison (2006, 393) discusses the Kantian distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür*, in no way implying that the latter notion would have been influenced by Crusius. Yet while Allison later talks about "Kant's essentially Crusian conception of freedom" (p. 398) and states that with regard to compatibilism "Kant stands firmly with Crusius rather than the Leibnizians" (p. 399), he is referring to the possibility of indeterminist voluntary action, which for Kant certainly involves *Willkür*. Thus, at the very least, the issue demands proper clarification.

[3] For a recent volume on faculties, see Perler 2015 and in it especially the chapters by Stephan Schmid and Johannes Haag.

traditional basic faculties of the mind, those of cognition and conation, are at essence one, namely the power of representation (*Vorstellungskraft*). I think it can be safely said that, in general, faculties are powers, or more precisely, central loci of intrinsic causal efficacy. While also Crusius endorses faculty ontology, he famously, and influentially, rejects Wolffian faculty monism and rehabilitates the traditional duo: there are two foundational or basic powers (*Grundkräfte*) irreducible to each other, namely understanding and will.[4] In keeping with the importance of faculties but nevertheless somewhat strikingly, *Guide to Living Rationally* of 1744—the work that presents Crusius' moral philosophy—begins with what Crusius, inspired by his teacher Adolph Friedrich Hoffmann, calls Thelematology, the doctrine of the will, for the following reason:

> [S]ince the guide to a rational life includes solely those rules that are prescribed to the will, and which must therefore be derived, for the most part, from the constitution of the will, it is easy to see that one must first know how the will is constituted and works by nature before one can sufficiently explain how it ought to be. (*Guide* §1)[5]

Given that, as Crusius later puts it, ethics is a normative "doctrine of how the human will **should** be and act" (§155),[6] the primary precondition of proper moral philosophy is knowledge of the nature and constitution of the will,[7] the foundational faculty of conation.

Crusius defines the will as "the power of a mind [*Geist*] to act according to its representations" so that "one makes a represented actual or strives to do so" (§2). Here the underpinning general idea—the importance of which can hardly be overstated—is that any effect presupposes both something causally efficacious and a determination according to which the efficacy is exercised; neither a mere determination nor undifferentiated power amounts to anything. Accordingly, although Crusius focuses on the human will, he argues that all minds, whether rational or not, have a will, for otherwise they would not "be able to act according to their representations" (§4); and the other way

[4] For helpful recent discussions of Crusius' argument for this, see Hahmann 2021, 91–7; 2023, 70–7; Tester 2021, 244.
[5] I use the Walschots translation, with slight modifications.
[6] A few lines later he elaborates: "I understand the **guide to living rationally** to be the science containing the rules of how the human will should be constituted and how it should act according to the prescription of reason" (§155).
[7] As Walschots (2021, 191) observes, "ethics presupposes certain features about the will." See also Lyssy 2021, 176–7.

round, without representations provided by the understanding, the causal efficacy of the will would remain directionless or, as Crusius puts it, "blind" (§5). Thus striving that, if unimpeded, leads to action requires the combination of the two main faculties: the will must be determined by representations to produce anything specific.

Slightly later, Crusius specifies his definition of the will in an important albeit difficult manner:

> [The will] is an overarching concept [*Inbegriff*][8] of particular foundational powers that one brings together under one name due to their common essence[.] (§6)

The metaphysical work of 1745, *Sketch of the Necessary Truths of Reason*, puts the point as follows: "[I]n the human soul the will is a special power, or rather a sum of special powers [*ein Inbegriff besonderer Kräfte*]" (*Sketch* §78).[9] This idea is somewhat difficult to discern, but read together with the ensuing discussion in the *Guide*, the point can be put as follows: there is no "pure" or "plain" will in itself but rather only different forms of willing (which as such are of the same "willing" essence),[10] the most basic of which are *desire*, *aversion*, and *freedom*. Here we can take a quick look at the first two; they are defined as follows:

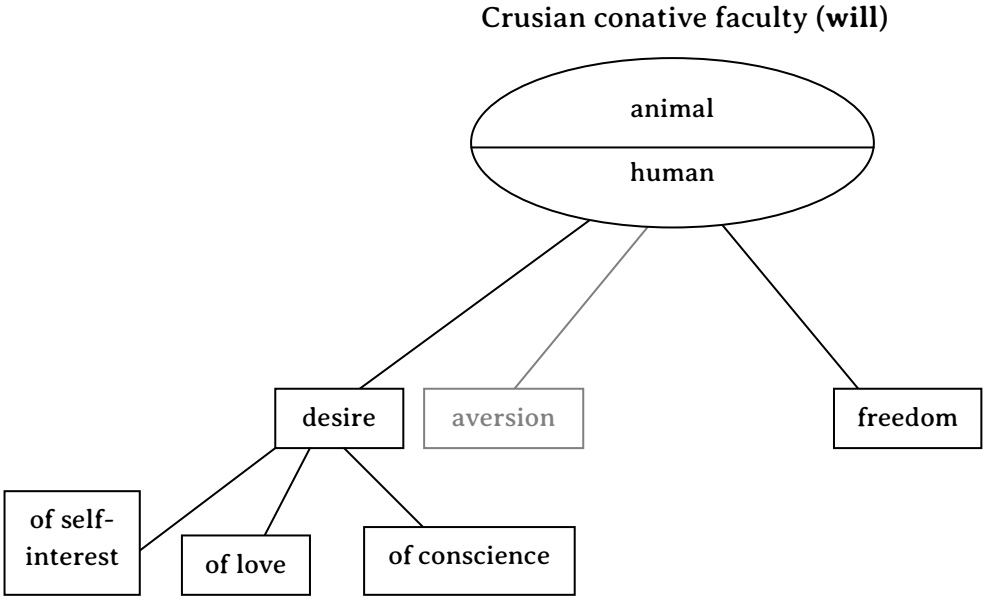
> That volition, by means of which we try to make something actual that does not yet exist or try to unify ourselves with this thing, insofar as one regards it as an action within the willing spirit, is called a **desire** [*Begehren*]. On the other hand, an **aversion** [*Verabscheuen*] is when we try to prevent the actuality of a thing or, more particularly, when we try [*in Bemühung sind*] to avoid unifying with it. (*Guide* §9)

Crusius says much more about desires than about aversions, presumably because, as he defines them, aversions are in fact desires to avoid something and as such reduce to desires.[11] For instance, an aversion to a particular odor is in fact a desire to avoid olfactory contact with it. Moreover, like all willings, de-

[8] As Walschots observes, this term is notoriously difficult to translate, and opts for a conceptual gloss while noting that the standard Cambridge translation is 'sum total.'
[9] I am using the Watkins translation.
[10] Although there are grounds to hold, given the ambiguity of *Inbegriff* and as Sonja Schierbaum (2021, 255) does, that the will "is a *bundle* of powers," I do not understand the relationship between the will, desire, aversion, and freedom quite this way.
[11] According to Crusius' definition (§9), when we have an aversion toward something, we are endeavoring (*sind bemüht*) to avoid or prevent something.

sires and aversions involve representational content: they are always about something represented.[12]

There are both animal and human desires (§95).[13] Crusius focuses on the latter and famously holds that there are three basic (or "essential") types of human desires he calls foundational drives (*Grundtriebe*):[14] (1) the drive for our perfection, (2) the drive for unification with that in which we perceive perfection (with no relation to our own advantage), and (3) the drive of conscience (§§111, 122, 132). The distinction between different types of desires will prove to be important for the Crusian theory of moral motivation; here it suffices to note that we can not only seek perfection (either with or without aiming at our own advantage) but also have an intrinsic drive to "cognize a divine moral law" (§132).[15] The drive of conscience cognizes the obligations without which there would be no ground for acting morally, or "in accordance with our dependence on God" (§133):[16] we would only act on self-interest or, at best, from love (§176). What we have thus far discovered about the Crusian will can be schematically presented as follows.



[12] For an instructive recent account of this, see Schierbaum 259–69.
[13] Only the latter concern abstract ideas (§95).
[14] Crusius defines *Trieb* as a subclass of desire, "which even without intention continues with some permanence" (§23). It is, however, doubtful whether the terminology he uses consistently upholds this distinction, for foundational drives seem to be very much intentional.
[15] For a detailed analysis of the basic desires, see Lyssy 2021, 182–5.
[16] The drive of conscience thus latches onto the deontic aspect in the Crusian theory, as it cognizes "those universal obligations that one must observe even if one does not wish to take into consideration the advantage or harm resulting from them" (§133). In fact, Crusius attempts to accommodate both deontic and eudaimonistic intuitions; however, a proper analysis of this merits a separate study.

3. Crusius on freedom as a power

For Crusius, freedom is "a natural power of the will" (*Guide* §37) whose concept is foundational, *ein Grundbegriff* (§38). It seems safe to say that freedom is thus causally efficacious in character—which makes sense given that it is a subfaculty of the will—and that its notion is not derived from something more fundamental. Crusius thinks there are three uncontroversial properties of free volition any proper theory of freedom must be able to accommodate (§38): (1) being neither externally nor internally necessitated; (2) being the ground of imputation; (3) being subject to a law. Without further argument, Crusius states that considering these desiderata leads to the following definition of freedom: it is a power to determine oneself to doing or omitting something in the same circumstances, or to doing something different (§§38–9).[17] The idea here is that *both* the relevant causal efficacy *and* the determination must come from the agent alone; given that faculties are intrinsically powerful, the real challenge lies in self-determination.[18] Crusius protests that defining, like Leibnizian-Wolffians do, freedom as spiritual self-activity is a mistake because if one's actions are determined by antecedent causes, the nature of these causes matters little: also being determined by antecedent representations or desires only allows for one outcome. For our actions to be genuinely imputable to *us*, there must be something in us that is determined by *nothing* but ourselves; should our actions ensue from the dispositions we are born with coupled with the circumstances in which we find ourselves, virtue and vice are reduced to mere fortune and misfortune in which there is nothing worthy of praise or blame (§40). Later Kant of the second *Critique* expresses the same point in a memorably poignant manner: [I]f the freedom of our will were none other than [that of an *automaton spirituale* driven by representations], then it would at bottom be nothing better than the freedom of a turnspit [*Freiheit eines Bratenwenders*], which, when once it is wound up, also accomplishes its move-

[17] This formulation combines two ways in which Crusius defines freedom in consecutive sections: "[A] **free being** can be nothing other than one that can do or omit something at a single time and in the same circumstances, or can do one thing instead of another, and the power, by means of which one is capable of this, must be called **freedom**" (§38). "[Freedom] is a power to determine oneself to an action [*sich zu einer Handlung selbst zu determinieren*] without being determined by something else, whether within us or outside of us" (§39). The relationship of Crusius' definitions to the first two properties of free volition is fairly straightforward, but the same does not seem to hold of the third property.

[18] According to Crusius, "determination is the actual establishment [*Setzung*] of one of the possible ways of existing [*Arten zu existieren*] that can be attributed to a thing [*welche der Sache zunommen können*]" (§39).

ments of itself (KpV 5:97).[19] The critical point is clear and intuitive enough, but it is a tall order to give a substantive account of an alternative.

Fortunately, Crusius is unafraid to tackle the challenge head-on. He first discusses the conditions of "a perfect, internal activity" (§41). This requires "that there are efficient causes which can initiate one of their possible activities and which are sufficiently capable of initiating more than one activity at one time" (§41). Here Crusius' earlier metaphysical writings pave the way: in fact, the main thing he wants to prove in the informatively titled *Philosophical Dissertation on the Use and Limits of the Principle of Determining Reason, commonly called the Principle of Sufficient Reason* of 1743 is that all causes are sufficient—in them "there is nothing lacking that is required for the effect" (*Dissertation* §XLIV)[20]—but not necessarily determined, as an unrestricted Principle of Sufficient Reason would dictate.[21] And precisely those causes that are sufficient but not determined are called free:

> *[E]verything the non-existence of which can be conceived comes to be from a sufficient cause and, if it was not a free action, then it came to be from that cause in such a way that it could not fail to come to be or take place otherwise under the posited circumstances.* (*Dissertation* §XLIV)
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> In free actions, therefore, a sufficient reason in the sense that I assign to the word finds a place, namely there is merely a *sufficient* cause, but not one that beyond this is also *determined to only a single way of acting*. For a free substance, when it acts freely, is provided with sufficient powers for an action but insofar as it acts freely it is no less provided with powers sufficient to omit that action. (*Dissertation* §XLV)

Needless to say, Crusius' position can, and has been, criticized;[22] but at the very least he does his best to carve out a metaphysical domain for freedom. Moreover, already the *Dissertation* directly connects these metaphysical considerations to moral ones: given that not everything is determined by antecedent causes, "[i]f I devote myself to virtue, then I choose what is best. However,

[19] Crusius is by no means the first thinker to present this type of criticism on Leibnizian-Wolffians; for instance Joachim Lange, another Pietist thinker, had argued already in 1724 that the mind is not a clockwork; for discussion, see Dyck 2024, 176–7.
[20] I am using the Dyck translation.
[21] For another formulation of the argument, see *Sketch* §84; see also Dyck 2016, 631.
[22] For a recent discussion, see Tester 2021, 246–8.

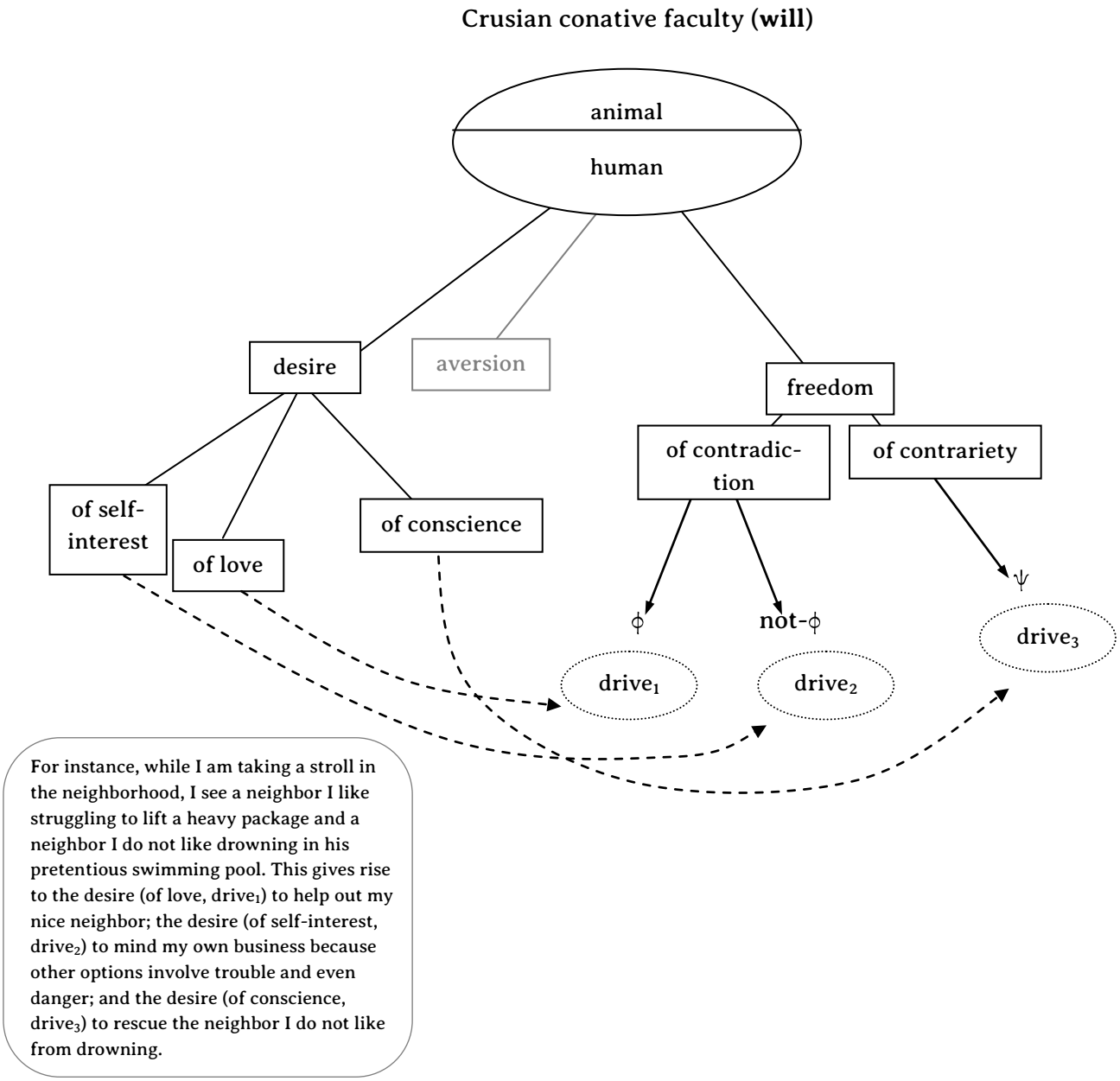
since I could still renounce the greater good and choose the lesser, one will still offer me praise" (*Dissertation* §XLV).

An act of freedom concerns establishing the preferred course of action, which Crusius calls an intention (*Vorsatz*) or a decision (*Entschluss*) (*Guide* §22). It is nothing less than "the highest degree of activity [*Thätigkeit*] in a will" (§41) to be able to "itself initiate, direct, and also stop being effective, notwithstanding the fact that this is no more than made possible by all the required conditions" (§41). *Initiating*, *directing*, and *stopping* refers to what was already contained in the definition of freedom and what Crusius is strikingly comfortable to specify in terms of faculties; both the freedom of contradiction (*libertas contradictionis*), namely "the capacity of being able do or omit something in the same circumstances," and the freedom of contrariety (*libertas contrarietas*), namely "the capacity to undertake a difference action instead of the present one," are *faculties* (§38).[23] Given this, a free being can either ϕ, not-ϕ, or ψ. Understandably, this does not—could not—happen in a vacuum; rather, as Crusius explains, when "we freely will something we always resolve to do something, for which one or many desires [*Begierden*] are present in us" (§43). More precisely, freedom is "a power that can choose [*wehlen*] one among our many desires, according to which it acts or with which it wants to connect [*verknüpfen*] its activity" (§43). And so we arrive at "the most complete concept of freedom":

> [F]reedom consists in an internal, perfect activity of the will, which is capable of connecting its efficacy [*Wirksamkeit*] with one of the currently aroused drives [*Trieben*] of the will, or of omitting this connection and remaining inactive, or of connecting [*verbinden*] it with another drive instead of the previous one. (§43)

The precise nature of the connection between the will and the drives is not altogether easy to discern, but it seems that although we are morally obligated to do what the drive of conscience dictates, as free beings we are nevertheless at liberty to pick up and incorporate any of the present drives into our will so that it comes to be the occurrent desire—the satisfaction of which requires that we set ourselves to do something specific, such as ϕ. The previously presented picture thus expands to be as follows.

[23] More precisely, they are subfaculties of a subfaculty of a foundational faculty (or perhaps even sub-sub-subfaculties of a foundational faculty, if the human side of the will counts as a subfaculty). For discussion, see Schierbaum 2021, 256.



4. Crusius on the preconditions of freedom

This is, however and fortunately, far from the whole thelematological story. The picture thus far only captures what Crusius calls *perfect* freedom, which "obtains where the omission of something or the performance of another, with which it is presently compared, would be just as easy [*leicht*] for us" (*Guide* §49). It is the Crusian variant of *libertas indifferentiae* and takes place "only in those cases where two objects are indifferent towards an end, at least as far as we know, or when we determine ourselves to one of two ends that we desire with an equal degree of strength" (§50). Crusius is adamant on the complete

freedom that results from this equilibrium of forces: there is absolutely nothing other than ourselves to determine us so that we can even choose what we know to be evil.[24] Often if not most of the time we are not free like this; instead, we are in a state of *imperfect* freedom, which "obtains where it would not be just as easy for us to choose the alternative" (§49). This prompts Crusius to elaborate a fascinatingly compelling and original theory of the preconditions of freedom.[25]

The first thing to note here is that our freedom is a finite power (§53) and as such can be overcome:

> If the opposition, which [freedom] must overcome with the election of the opposite amounts to more than the capacity of freedom's activity, and it has no assisting causes whereby its capacity would be strengthened [...], then it cannot make the opposite actual. (§53)

In other words, should a desire be considerably stronger than freedom and other desires, our will comes to be determined by the desire and we set ourselves to act accordingly. This implies, strikingly enough, that at the base level, the determination of our conative faculty is a contest of forces—desires and freedom—that can be uneven to the extent that we inevitably desire what the strongest contestant, which often enough is a desire, determines.

Fortunately, despite its finitude, freedom has strength that can make a real difference; precisely this equals imperfect freedom, which Crusius characterizes as follows:

> Imperfect freedom is when one must overcome an opposition when resolving to do the alternative (§49). Since the opposition can be greater or smaller, imperfect freedom varies greatly in degree. (§51)

Again a contest of forces but one in which we have a fighting chance. The way in which Crusius illustrates it is easy to neglect because of the apparent crude-

[24] I thus agree with Walschots (2021, 204) that Crusius is not an ethical intellectualist. Tester (2021, 243) notes that fundamental activities of freedom "are absolutely free in the sense that they are neither hypothetically nor absolutely necessitated," and Lyssy (2021, 179) puts the idea in normative terms: "[T]he will may take its orientation from moral convictions or deliberations, but it should not be grounded in or determined by them." All this does not, however, mean that even evil things would not be considered good in some respect (see Schierbaum 2021, 256–7), most notably from the viewpoint of self-interest (Crusius arguably refers to this when he says [§55] that we can freely choose to avoid what is burdensome but noble). For a differing view, see Forman 2013, 325.

[25] As far as I know, the thinker closest to the Crusian position is, in certain respects, Locke, as I interpret him. To the extent his holds true, it is quite clearly a coincidence.

ness, of which he is well aware (§55). However, this should not keep us from seeing that he is boldly trying to capture something profound. Michael Walschots helpfully presents Crusius' examples as follows:

> The first is of a person who wakes up in the morning and considers that it would be much better to get up and do their chores than to continue sleeping. If we posit that the strength of this person's desire to do their chores is 100, the strength of freedom is 20, but the desire to remain sleeping is 200, then this person "will be passionately determined to remain sleeping" (§55) despite the fact that they would regret this given they think it better to get up and do their chores. The reason for their being determined is that the strength of the desire to remain sleeping (200) far outweighs the *combination* of the desire to do one's chores and the power of freedom (120). In a variation of this example, if we assume that the desire to remain sleeping is 80, the desire to do one's chores is 100, and the capacity of freedom is still 20, then this person "can also freely decide to remain sleeping" (§55).[26]

I would like to make three points about these examples. First and again, if one contestant is greatly stronger than the others, we inevitably act on it. Second, freedom can be combined with desires so that an equilibrium of forces results, in which case we are free to choose on which desire we act. Third, freedom seems to be often the weakest contestant, but there is no principled reason why this would always be the case: for instance, if I have a very weak desires to both raise my arm and let it rest, freedom can be by far the strongest contestant, in which case I am at completely liberty to choose whether to raise my arm or not.

These examples do not, however, mention the most important point: in many cases freedom may be *assisted* (*zustattenkommen*):

> If we want to do the alternative [to the strongest desire], it is often necessary that we first think of motives for doing it and that we take control of and utilize all sorts of auxiliary causes, by means of which we can pit the otherwise all too weak power of freedom in the position of being equal to the opposition. [...] When one assists, in this way, one's all-too impotent resolution to accomplish that which one is not immediately capable of doing through contemplation

[26] Walschots 2021, 202.

> [*Nachsinnen*], the representation of motives, and other means of assistance, then sometimes more and sometimes less time, effort, and prudence [*Klugheit*] are required before one is in a position to actually put the resolution we have made into practice. (§51)

This leaves us quite a bit of interpretative leeway. Here is my take on what Crusius has in mind.[27] There are many cases in which the contestants are neither in an equilibrium nor in such an imbalance that we are prompted to act immediately; this opens up time and space for a reflective state in which we can, first and foremost, consider different desires and strengthen the ones we consider the best. For instance, let us say that while I am struggling with a workshop paper I am presenting the next day, a neighbor of mine invites me to quickly join one of his famously raucous garden parties. I thereby have two competing desires, one to work in order to come up with a paper that would make at least some kind of contribution to the scholarship, another to go and have fun with my merry neighbor. One may well imagine that both desires are fairly strong, the desire to go partying being the stronger one but not to the extent that I would be immediately determined to act on it. While feeling its attraction, I may begin to consider the consequences of acting on the competing desires, and it is easy to see that although acting on the desire to party would alleviate my present stress, it would also guarantee an embarrassing workshop performance. This, in turn, gives rise to a desire to avoid embarrassment, which assists the desire to continue work to the point in which the intensity of the two desires (combined with that of my freedom) matches the desire to go partying, and thus I am free to choose which desire to act on. In fact, it might well be that even a brief consideration of the relevant desires intensifies the desire to work and weakens the desire to go partying to the point in which I no longer have free choice but instantly return to my work! Imperfect freedom clearly resides in an area between perfect freedom and immediate determination by a desire; there is a point in which the contest of forces results in us attaining at least some control, or freedom, over our desires. Understandably enough, Crusius abstains from assigning even illustrative threshold values,[28] realizing that we simply do not know how to measure the contestants (§55).

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[27] For an interpretation that emphasizes intensifying the idea of our dependence on God, see Schierbaum 2021, 273.

[28] Walschots (2021, 203) similarly notes: "Although Crusius suggests [...] that action is possible as soon as the strength of freedom plus another desire is *equal* to an opposing desire, he gives no indication as to what the threshold might me."

5. Crusius and Kant on moral agency

We are now in a position to discern the Crusian view of moral motivation. We have self-interested, other-regarding, and moral drives or motives; the ethical challenge is to occupy a position of freedom and determine ourselves as we ought so that we act as the divine law dictates. To help us in discerning what exactly this demands, Crusius offers us a formulation of the highest law:

> [D]o everything that is in accordance with the perfection of God, the essential perfection of your own nature and that of all other creatures, and finally also the relations of things to each other that he has established, and omit the opposite, out of obedience to the command of your creator, as you natural and necessary sovereign. (*Guide* §174)

Here Crusius' theological tendencies come to the fore but do not keep him from making a number of philosophically weighty points. First, we should be motivated to do the right thing *for the right reason*, namely out of obedience to God; mere conformity with the divine law—which may also follow from self-interest or other-regard—is not enough (§173).[29] Second, knowing what God commands requires little to no revelation, for we have a natural drive (of consciousness) to rationally cognize the primary, or rather the *unique*, morally relevant feature in the world, namely perfection (§§133, 137, 156).[30] Third, although seeking our own perfection is often in order, all other drives, "even the desire for our advantage and the aversion to our harm," "should be subordinated [*subordiniret*]" (§176) to the drive of conscience that motivates us to act morally; indeed, we may fail in this to the extent that we become *accustomed* to evil and only "choose among possible evil deeds," which equals "a disgraceful *corruption* [*Verderben*] of a free mind" (§52, emphasis added). Fourth, it seems clear that the following applies to the foundational concept of freedom:[31]

> [There are] concepts that we cannot at all think in their true constitution [*Beschaffenheit*], but [for which we] must rather rest satisfied

[29] Cf.: "However, we are not permitted to make happiness the end of obedience, because the latter would thereby lose its essence" (§176).
[30] God's will "is revealed to human beings through the nature of created things themselves and the use of their reason" (§168). See also Lyssy 2021, 184.
[31] As examples of concepts to which this characterization applies, Crusius (*Sketch* §102) mentions foundational powers; although the *concept* of freedom is foundational, it is not a foundational *power* but, as we have seen, one of the three main forms, or subpowers, of a foundational power.

> with symbolic cognition. In [their] case, namely, the absolute that we attribute to them is only something indeterminate, but we do not know the true constitution of its determination [*Determination*] and, for that reason, represent it as merely relative and negative. [...] In that case, we have a true and usable cognition of the object, yet not an intuitive, but rather merely a symbolic cognition. Its concept can thus be distinct to the extent that it can be distinguished from all others. However, it is only not yet complete, namely, insofar as we are not familiar with everything attributed to it that is positive. (*Sketch* §102)

It thus appears that the "inner constitution" of freedom is, as is that of the foundational powers, "unknowable to us" (*Sketch* §102). We can distinguish it from other powers and know *what* it does, but we cannot know *how* this happens—cognition of "the true constitution of its determination" is simply not available to us. Thus, freedom is in a very real sense *inscrutable* to us.[32]

Kant of the second *Critique* classifies Crusius as a "theological moralist" (KpV 5:40); this is certainly not incorrect but easily occludes the subtlety of his view on moral motivation, which in turn builds on an original theory of the determination of our conative faculty. When these are taken into consideration, it is easy to see that there are quite a few—probably astonishingly many—affinities between the theories of the two thinkers.

To begin with, Kant the faculty theorist states that one of the three foundational faculties—those of cognition, conation, and feeling (KU 5:196–8)—what he calls the faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*) "is a being's faculty to be by means of representations the cause of the objects of these representations" (KpV 5:9n). It thus matches the Crusian will as the mental power to make represented objects real. As this indicates, Kant endorses the very same fundamental power–determination scheme as Crusius (together with many others) does; ultimately, morality requires the right kind of determination of the conative faculty.[33] Moreover, just as the Crusian will has a non-rational ("animal") and a rational ("human") side, the Kantian faculty of desire divides into the lower and higher faculties (KpV 5:22), the lower being determined by pleasures

[32] Cf. Lyssy (2021, 188): "[F]reedom can never be fully comprehensible for a finite being."

[33] Crusius opts for a term derived from Latin and says that one is to "determine oneself to an action [*sich zu einer Handlung selbst zu determinieren*]" (§39), whereas the mature Kant famously calls for self-determination (*selbstbestimmung*). The question thus concerns, to use Kant's favorite expression, "der Bestimmungsgrund des Willens" (4:401). The second *Critique* (5:30) declares that also free will must be determinable.

and displeasures connected to desires (MS 6:211). And just as Crusius focuses on the human side of the will, Kant focuses on the higher faculty. Thus basically the very same multi-tiered faculty ontology forms the bedrock of their respective moral philosophies.

For Kant, the will equals the *higher* side of the faculty of desire which, somewhat confusingly, has two major components—or perhaps rather subfaculties—, the will (*Wille*) and the power of choice (*Willkür*):[34]

> In man the latter is a free choice [*Willkür*]; the will [*Wille*], which is directed to nothing beyond the law itself, cannot be called either free or unfree. [...] Only *choice* can therefore be called *free*. (MS 6:226)

Despite the terminological ambiguities,[35] the idea is clear enough: the human faculty of desire consists of the self-legislating will (aka practical reason) and *Willkür* that freely chooses between maxims. Although for Crusius what is morally right can be rationally discerned, even at its most rational our will is not self-legislating—after all, God is the ultimate legislator—so he has nothing corresponding to the self-legislating *Wille*. However, freedom of choice is a different matter, for already at the outset and despite the fact that Crusius does not talk about maxims, the Kantian *Willkür* brings to mind the Crusian power of freedom. A close look at the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* reveals that this first impression is far from mistaken.

In line with the earlier thesis that our freedom must be something more than that of a turnspit, Kant of the *Religion* stresses that morality requires a radical type of liberty:

> But this subjective ground [of the exercise of the human being's freedom in general] must, in turn, itself always be a deed [*Actus*] of freedom (for otherwise the use or abuse of the human being's power of choice with respect to the moral law could not be imputed to him, nor could the good or evil in him be called "moral"). Hence the ground of evil cannot lie in any object *determining* the power of choice through inclination, not in any natural impulses, but only in a rule that the power of choice itself produces for the exercise of its freedom, i.e., in a maxim. [...] [T]he first ground of the adoption of

[34] The mature Kant seems to have consistently endorsed the distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür*; see Timmermann 2022, 107–8.
[35] As Allison (2006, 393) points out, there seem to be "two senses of *Wille*." For an informative account of the notion of *Willkür* in Kant's predecessors, see Dyck 2016, 628.

> our maxims [...] must itself again lie in the free power of choice [*Willkür*]. (RGV 6:21–2)

Here we have something endowed with, as Kant expresses it, "absolute spontaneity" (RGV 6:24) and freedom radical to the extent that we can also choose what we know to be evil:

> [Good and evil characters] must be an effect of [the human being's] free power of choice [*Willkür*], for otherwise they could not be imputed to him and, consequently, he could be neither *morally* good nor evil. [...] [T]he human being [...] brings it about that he becomes either good or evil, according as he either incorporates or does not incorporate into his maxims the incentives contained in that predisposition [for the good] (and this must be left entirely to his free choice [*Wahl*]). (RGV 6:44)

For both Crusius and Kant, moral imputability thus requires that *we* have an absolutely free choice over good and evil. But, given the causal determination of the world, where could that kind of freedom reside? Although their specific answers to this question differ, the *Fragestellung* is for both exactly the same, which is why both are at pains to show that their respective systems can accommodate a radical kind of freedom. As we have seen, Crusius argues that there is a domain beyond the antecedent determining causes for true freedom, while Kant, equipped with the revolutionary distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal, argues that the higher faculty of desire, and thus also *Willkür*, resides in the noumenal realm beyond spatio-temporally determined events (RGV 6:40). Moreover, similarly to Crusius, given that we have knowledge strictly speaking only of the latter domain, Kant refers to *Willkür* as "this inscrutable property [*diese unerforschliche Eigenschaft*]" (RGV 6:49n); "the depths of [the human being's] own heart (the subjective ground of his maxims) are to him inscrutable" (6:51). This falls in line with the general thrust of his critical project: Kant wants to distinguish the limits of our knowledge, acknowledge what is incomprehensible, and designate its proper place. The problem of evil raises especially thorny questions for both thinkers. It is hard to see how the non-moral Crusian desires, as they are for perfection, could have anything intrinsically evil about them; Kant explores the same territory with a considerable vehemence and states that "[t]he rational origin, however, of [...] this propensity to evil, remains inexplicable to us" because all of our predispositions are for the good and so "there is no conceivable ground

for us, therefore, from which moral evil could first have come in," which is why "[t]he absolutely *first* beginning of all evil is thereby represented as incomprehensible [*unbegreiflich*] to us" (RGV 6:43–4).

The affinities do not end here. Crusius holds that all other drives ought to be *subordinated* to the moral drive of conscience, and Kant famously develops this theme further within his framework. Now whether we are, as a whole, good or evil, depends on which type of maxims we *prioritize*. If those based on incentives of self-love instead of the incentives of the moral law, we are evil; in fact, precisely here lurks the famous radical evil of ruining "the ground of all maxims" (RGV 6:37). Already for Crusius, evil choices can result in a corrupted mind, but Kant develops the idea of *Verderbtheit* in much more detail:

> [T]he *corruption* [*Verderbtheit*] (*corruptio*) of the human heart is the propensity of the power of choice to maxims that subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (not moral ones). It [...] reverses the ethical order as regards the incentives of a *free* power of choice; and although with this reversal there can still be legally good (*legate*) actions, yet the mind's attitude is thereby corrupted at its root (so far as the moral disposition is concerned), and hence the human being is designated as evil. (RGV 6:30)

This leads us to another Crusian theme on moral motivation, namely that it is not enough to merely act in conformity with the moral law but we are to do so for the right reason, for Crusius out of obedience for God. For Kant, we are to obey our reason alone but the point concerning what makes actions properly moral is structurally the same: "actions conforming to duty" but "not done purely done from duty" (RGV 6:30) are not moral because this requires that we act out of respect for the moral law.

There are thus a considerable number of structural—and, to a lesser extent, also substantial—affinities between the Crusian and Kantian systems concerning faculties and freedom. There is still one more major topic to consider, namely the role of desires in moral motivation. Here the differences start to accumulate, but in a thought-provoking fashion. Still, let us begin with a significant similarity. We have seen that, for Crusius, our free choices concern different kinds of desires. Kant never tires of stressing the importance of making our maxims adhere to the moral law; here the contrast is to our desires, which stem from self-love that aims for happiness. Given that we are sensible beings with needs, our "reason certainly has a commission from the side of [our] sensibility which it cannot refuse, to attend to its interests and to form

practical maxims with a view to happiness in this life" (KpV 5:61). Accordingly, *Willkür* does not operate in a vacuum—"without any incentive the power of choice cannot be determined" (RGV 6:35)—but is responsive not only to the incentives of practical reason but also to those of desires and inclinations (*Neigungen*): the free choice concerns moral motives and inclinations incorporated into a maxim. The challenge is to choose the former—and systematically, so that maxims of happiness are invariably subordinated to moral maxims, the "supreme maxim [...] adopted in the power of choice" (RGV 6:31) being the moral law.

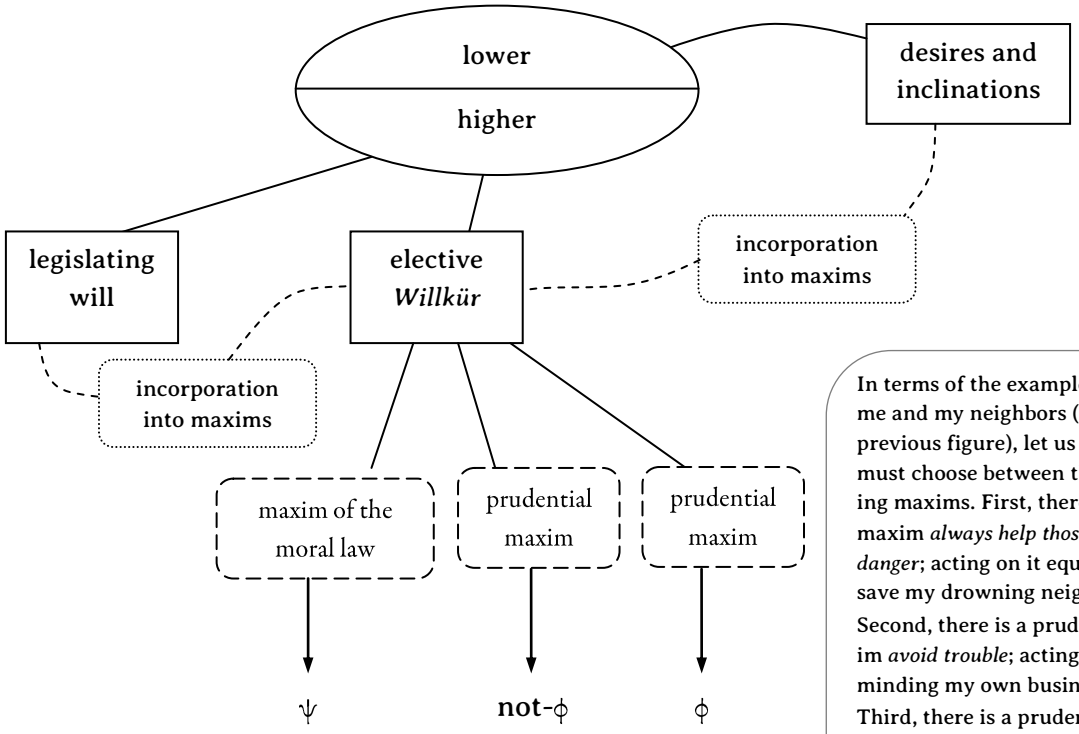
However, the two thinkers see the relationship between free choice and desires in an intriguingly different fashion. As has been made clear, for Crusius, only when our desires are in an equilibrium, we are free to choose among them; in the state of imperfect freedom, we are to try and strengthen the right desires, primarily those of the drive of conscience, so that an equilibrium is reached and freedom attained. Kantian *Willkür* has no such preconditions:

> [W]hatever [the human being's] previous behavior may have been, *whatever the natural causes influencing him* [...] his action is yet free and not determined through any of these causes; hence the action can and must always be judged as an *original* exercise of his power of choice. He should have refrained from it, *whatever his temporal circumstances and entanglements*; for through no cause in the world can he cease to be a free agent. (RGV 6:41, the first and last emphases added)

Indeed, it is hard to avoid the impression that here Kant is, at least in part, directly attacking the Crusian position, which he knew well. Nothing could take away, or even in any way reduce, the freedom of our *Willkür*: it is always absolute. A major reason for this is that, as Kant famously states, "freedom of choice [*Willkür*] has the characteristic [...] that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim"* (RGV 6:23–4). Firewalled by the rationality of the noumenal domain, our choices cannot be directly determined, for we choose among rationally formed maxims. Of course, this does not make us inevitably moral, for as we have seen, we may choose prudential maxims of happiness instead of moral ones, and even subordinate the latter to the former, which results in (radical) evil. Kant's notion of freedom is thus in a notable respect *stronger* than that of Crusius: there is no situation in which a subfaculty of ours is not

absolutely free. On the whole, Kant's picture of moral of moral agency can be, I believe, schematically presented as follows.

Kantian conative faculty (**faculty of desire**)



6. Conclusion

I have argued that the Crusian and Kantian theory of moral agency share a notable number of significant features; it is time to take stock. First, they both build on similar faculty ontologies, designating the foundational conative faculty (will or the faculty of desire) as the power to act according to one's representations, and dividing it into the lower (or animal) and higher (or human) spheres. Second, they both endorse the power–determination scheme, in which the decisive question concerns the factors involved in the determination of the conative faculty. Third, for both moral imputability requires a radical kind of freedom to spontaneously act in a self-determined fashion, undetermined by antecedent causes. Fourth, both take pains to show that there is a proper domain for this kind of freedom. Fifth, both assign a specific subfaculty (Crusius the power of freedom, Kant *Willkür*) the required kind of freedom and, sixth, claim that it does not operate in a vacuum but choose between alternatives

deriving from different types of motivating factors (whether Crusian desires or Kantian maxims that incorporate moral and sensible incentives). Seventh, both hold that there is something inscrutable for us in the way that subfaculty operates. Eighth, both emphasize that we can also choose what is evil even systematically to the effect that we become altogether corrupt and that, ninth, all other incentives should be systematically subordinated to the moral ones. Tenth, both think that it is imperative that our actions not only comply to what morality demands but are done out of commitment (for Crusius obligation, for Kant respect) to moral laws.

But of course, all these shared features do not imply that there are no crucial differences between the two thinkers. Most notable of these is formed by the fact that although their systems share many structural features, the precise nature of those features is sometimes subtly but always significantly different. To name what I see as the most important difference of this type, although both stress the bindingness of the moral law, Crusius' theological tendencies lead him to state that it is legislated by God and thus divine in origin, whereas Kant firmly places morality in the human sphere and argues that it derives from the practical reason that can latch onto what is strictly universal. As for the key structural difference, for Kant *Willkür* is never contingent on our desires but always free to choose between maxims to which it has rationally incorporated both moral and sensible incentives; there is nothing like this in the Crusian theory, which enables Crusius to think that often we fail to meet the preconditions of freedom and end up doing what the strongest desire determines. In fact, this largely explains why the figures presenting Crusian and Kantian faculty theories of action differ so substantially.

To return to the discussion on the relationship between the Crusian and Kantian theories of the will, if my interpretation throws new light to "powers and properties of the human will" as Crusius understands them, it seems clear that (in opposition to what Forman argues) Kant accepts something in key respects like the Crusian power of freedom, and that (unlike what Allison suggests) the Crusian notion of free will is not connected to Kant's doctrine of freedom as autonomous law-giving—this is precisely an element *missing* from Crusius—but to his notion of *Willkür*. But, to conclude, one may well wonder, if the present interpretation is on the right track, what are we to make of all the affinities? It would be unwise to make any bold declarations of influence: although it would seem rather miraculous that there would be *none*, given that Kant knew the ethical work of his most important Pietist predecessor well, any claim concerning influence must remain conjectural. Perhaps it can be said, in

a rather general manner, that the Crusian faculty ontology and the libertarian conception of freedom most probably invited Kant to incorporate respective elements into his system even though he was probably unaware of the extent to which his theory resembles that of Crusius. Besides, one might wonder about the philosophical weight of questions concerning influence: regardless of potential influence, is not the most intriguing thing that the two thinkers end up with in many ways structurally similar results? This might well tell us quite a bit about what building a working moral philosophy based on faculties and libertarian commitments requires, which is certainly philosophically relevant.

Finally, it is to be hoped that reading Kant against the backdrop of the Crusian system opens up new avenues of interpretation. At least two come to mind. First, there is a recent debate about whether or not *Willkür* is predisposed to normative constraints;[36] if one answers in the affirmative, Kant would be committed to an unsignaled deviation from the core view, forcibly expressed by Crusius, that any bias, even to goodness, threatens *perfect* freedom that moral imputability requires. This is of course possible, but makes one wonder if attributing such a difference is warranted simply based on a specific reading of a few brief passages.[37] Second, and more importantly, ever since Henry Allison introduced the so-called Incorporation Thesis,[38] the view that desires and inclinations can only determine our will insofar as they are incorporated into maxims has become a commonplace; but it should be noted that not only does the passage on incorporation *not* concern the foundational faculty—namely faculty of desire—whose determination is ultimately at stake, but only a subfaculty of a subfaculty of the foundational faculty—namely *Willkür*—, insulating our faculty of desires from direct contact with inclinations would mark a radical, and once again unannounced, departure from the traditional view, also defended by Crusius, on which desires can directly determine our conative faculty. Realizing this, in turn, can invite us to read many central passages of Kant's major ethical works in a new context and thus help us better discern whether there is more to the relationship between inclinations and the faculty of desire than has been realized—which just might result in a fuller picture of the way in which our actions are ultimately determined.

[36] The debate has its origins in Jens Timmermann's (2022) position that it is not.
[37] This is what Thomas Pendlebury (2025, 8–9) does; the passages in question are located in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6:226–7) and *Religion* (6:43).
[38] Allison 1990, 40.

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