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Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

Seminar Notes

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Critique of Judgment

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1. Introduction

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To begin with a few words about what concerns me in this seminar: for many years I have been preoccupied with the question of the legitimacy, but also the limits of the understanding of reality presupposed by our science and technology.¹ That understanding presides over our modern age, which Heidegger would have us understand as “The Age of the World Picture.”² I look to art, which has been important to me as long as I can remember, as a way of opening windows or doors in this world picture, i.e. in the world building objectifying reason has raised. Art so understood possesses an ontological significance. It points to a different understanding of reality. In this connection Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”³ and Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* have become important to me.

But do I not expect too much of art when I give it thus an ontological significance and expect it to lead us beyond the understanding of reality presupposed by our science? Was it not precisely Kant, who in the *Critique of Judgment* laid the foundation for the modern understanding of beauty and more fundamentally of the aesthetic object, and did so in a way that discourages all attempts to attribute to art an ontological significance? Was it not Kant, as for instance the critic Clement Greenberg claimed, who laid the foundation for that aesthetic approach to art that has dominated both the theory and practice of modern art and architecture? As we shall see, there is good reason for such a judgment. But as we shall also see: there is also good reason to question it.

¹ See Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966). Trans. Robert M. Wallace, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983). Also Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

² Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 75-113. “The Age of the World Picture,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 115-154.

³ See Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s The Origin of the Work of Art* (New York: Springer, 2009)

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What is at issue is hinted at by some remarks Heidegger makes in the *Epilogue* to the *Origin of the Work of Art*:

Almost from the time when specialized thinking about art and the artist began, this thought was called aesthetic. Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. This dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.⁴

In thinking this possibility Heidegger gestures beyond it. The “Origin of the Work of Art” most definitely does not want to be understood as a work in aesthetics. It is thus striking how quickly Heidegger moves in that essay from a discussion of art to a consideration of the question: what is a thing? Art and ontology here turn out to be inseparably intertwined. But to do justice to their relationship we have to free our understanding of art from aesthetics. To do so with some rigor we have to gain a more adequate understanding of “aesthetics.” Just because Kant (1724–1804) would appear to give such powerful support to the aesthetic approach, a critical reading of the *Critique of Judgment* can help us to do so.

In gesturing beyond aesthetics, Heidegger also gestures beyond modernity, beyond the ruling understanding of reality. What I attempt to do in this seminar is something similar. As should become clearer in subsequent sessions: the aesthetic approach and modernity belong together. One point of this seminar is to examine the nature of this relationship.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5, p. 65; “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Truth*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 79.

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But let me say a bit more about what I understand by an aesthetic approach to beauty and to art. Such an approach and the rise of philosophical aesthetics belong together. We can point to the Wolff student Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) as the founder of philosophical aesthetics, more precisely to his dissertation, *Meditationes de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, and to a specific year, 1735. He followed this up with his *Aesthetica*, which appeared in 1750. To call him the founder of aesthetics may be overdoing things just a bit, but it is to Baumgarten, at any rate, that we owe the word "aesthetics." In the next session we shall therefore take a closer look at Baumgarten's dissertation, where that word makes a first appearance. The influence of Baumgarten on Kant will, I trust, become obvious in the course of this seminar. Without some understanding of Baumgarten, some key passages in *The Critique of Judgment* remain quite obscure.

When I call Baumgarten the founder of aesthetics I am distinguishing aesthetics from the philosophy of art. I realize that the two are often taken as synonyms, but I find it useful to draw a distinction.

But I should give a bit more definition to what I mean by "aesthetics." In the *First Introduction* to the *Critique of Judgment* Kant distinguishes two rather different meanings of "aesthetic."

The expression, *aesthetic way of presenting*, is quite unambiguous, if we mean by it that the presentation is referred to an object, as appearance, to [give rise to] cognition of that object. For here the term *aesthetic* means that the form of sensibility ([i.e.,] how the subject is affected) attaches necessarily to the presentation, so that this form is inevitably transferred to the object (though to the object only as phenomenon). This is why it was possible to have a transcendental aesthetic, as a science pertaining to the cognitive powers. However, for a long time now it has become customary to call a way of presenting aesthetic, i.e. sensible, in a different meaning of the term as well, where this means that that the

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presentation is referred, not to the cognitive power, but to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure.⁵

“Aesthetic” indicates, for one, what has to do with sensibility. Kant’s transcendental aesthetic thus investigates space and time as the forms of sensibility, the necessary presuppositions of all possible experience. “Aesthetic” is understood here as belonging to the object qua phenomenon. From this meaning of aesthetic we have to distinguish a second, where by means of the aesthetic mode of representation the represented is not related to the faculty of knowledge, but to the faculty of pleasure and pain.

It is this second sense that is presupposed by the aesthetic approach. Aesthetic judgment involves a reflective movement. Reflective here suggests a looking back from the beautiful object to the kind of experience it evokes. The philosophy of art understood as aesthetics has its foundation in a more subjective approach to art that tends to view the work of art first of all as an occasion for a certain kind of pleasant experience. What is enjoyed is finally not really the work of art, but the occasioned experience or state of mind, a state of mind that Kant, as we shall see, will characterize, when the aesthetic judgment is a judgment of beauty, as the harmonious interplay of understanding and imagination. Not every aesthetic judgment need be a judgment of beauty. The judgment of the sublime is also an aesthetic judgment. So is the judgment of the interesting. I shall have more to say about these aesthetic categories and their significance.

Here I want to underscore the reflective turn back to the self. Aesthetic pleasure is a kind of self-enjoyment. This understanding of the aesthetic invites us to look back to Leon Battista Alberti, who in *On Painting* writes:

I say among friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting. Since painting is already the flower of every art, the story of Narcissus is most to the point. What else can you call

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), pp. 409-41). Subsequent references are to this edition.

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painting, but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain.⁶

That passage, which suggests that art has its foundation in narcissism, invites further exploration.

Kant's understanding of the aesthetic also invites us to look forward to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's category of the aesthetic, more especially of that species of the aesthetic that he, following Friedrich Schlegel, calls the interesting, does indeed seem to me useful in trying to understand what has been going on in much modern art (see my *The Meaning of Modern Art* and Hans Sedlmayr, "Kierkegaard über Picasso," *Der Tod des Lichtes — Übergangene Perspektiven zur modernen Kunst*; also the notes for the seminar on *Either/Or* that I taught some years ago and that turned into a book published by the Kierkegaard Center in Copenhagen.⁷)

3

It is evident that on any version of the aesthetic approach as here defined, truth and art should belong to different provinces. Works of art should be enjoyable, where in this context it does not matter whether the judgment is one of beauty, sublimity, or the interesting — all are species of aesthetic judgments. Whether the judged works are true or false matters little. Kant thus does not mention truth in his "Critique of the Aesthetic Judgment."

And yet, as we shall see, tensions develop in the course of Kant's discussion that force us to question to what extent he really subscribes to what I have here called an aesthetic approach.

To make more concrete what I have in mind I would like to spend the rest of this session on just one seemingly casual remark Kant makes when elucidating the difference between what

⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 64.

⁷ Karsten Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on Either/Or* (Berlin and New York: DeGruyter, 2010)

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he calls a truly free and a merely accessory or dependent beauty. Later we shall return to this passage and place it in its proper context. Here the passage:

Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly anyone apart from the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is [meant] to be; and even he, while recognizing it as the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural purpose when he judges the flower by taste. Hence the judgment is based on no perfection of any kind, no intrinsic purposiveness to which the combination of the manifold might refer. Many birds (the parrot, the humming-bird, the bird of paradise) and a lot of crustaceans in the sea are [free] beauties themselves [and] belong to no object determined by concepts as to the purpose, but we like them freely and on their own account. Thus designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper, etc., mean nothing on their own; they represent [*vorstellen*] nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties. What we call fantasias in music (namely, music without a topic [*Thema*]), indeed all music not set to words, may also be included in the same class. (76-77)

Especially the last sentences call themselves into question. Designs *à la grecque* followed a certain manner that blended rococo and classical elements. But that is to say, they are bound to a certain model and this model gives our judgment a certain measure that would seem to allow us to call one design more successful than another. So does the function of such designs. But if so, the judgment of taste, according to Kant, is no longer pure and we are dealing with a merely accessory beauty.

Similarly, when judging “foliage on borders or on wallpaper” we are bound by quite specific expectations. Ornamental foliage makes reference to more or less familiar leaves and borders (*Einfassungen*) and wallpaper have an ornamental and that means also a serving function. In judging them we keep in mind the nature of such service.

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But not only do these examples call themselves into question. On further reflection it is by no means clear that there can be free beauty in art. For what is art? Here is Kant's definition:

By right we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason. (Par. 43; 170)

Crucial here is the insistence that the production of art is an activity governed by the will. But the will requires reasons. The artist creates having something in mind. His creating is governed by an intention. But if so, the beauty of the work of art, it would seem, can never be a totally free beauty. All beauty in art is accessory beauty, because all artistic production presupposes a reason, an intention. This is to say that, notwithstanding what Kant had said earlier about music and ornament, a truly free beauty is encountered only in nature. Nature and art are now separated. In the concept of a pure and yet artificial beauty lies a contradiction we cannot get around.

And yet, notwithstanding this contradiction, Kant's determination of free beauty invites understanding of the epochal threshold that separates not only a distinctively modern aesthetic sensibility from the artistic culture that preceded it, but also indicates a deeper break presupposed by the development of a distinctly modern self-understanding. The modern self has, so to speak, fallen out of nature. Such a fall out of nature is implied by Heidegger's understanding of the modern age as the age of the world-picture: we stand before a picture; we cannot dwell in it, as we can in a house.

And notwithstanding this contradiction, the examples cited in the beginning anticipate future developments: ornament and music both helped art, especially painting, free itself from the rule of representation and pointed the way toward an ever more rigorous abstraction and a more pronounced autonomy. The contradiction buried in the concept of an artificial free beauty calls this development into question.

But let me return to our passage. It is surprising that Kant should name “designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper” as his first examples of artificial free beauties.

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Isn't ornament more obviously a dependent art form than a painting or a sculpture? Ornament lives only when it is more than an aesthetic addition to some thing or person. It should serve the ornament-bearer by so re-presenting it that our attention is led to what is essential. Ornament makes the ornament-bearer more legible. It dies when it loses this hermeneutic-decorative function, when the attempt is made to raise it to the status of a self-sufficient beauty, an attempt that first has to loosen and finally dissolve the fit between ornament and ornament-bearer.⁸ The death of ornament and the rise of a distinctly modern art go together. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* gestures towards this revolution. And yet Kant stands too much on this threshold to see it as such. Thus he sees neither the death of ornament nor the birth of a new art, neither what renders the examples he has chosen so profoundly questionable, nor what makes them so prophetic.

But does the concept of ornament that I have introduced here even fit in this connection? Kant after all does not speak of ornament, but of “designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper.” We sometimes speak of wallpaper patterns. We may thus want to ask whether “decorative pattern” does not better fit what Kant has in mind than “ornament.” And patterns do seem to be closer to nature than ornament — after all patterns can be the result of some accident of nature. Patterns don't necessarily guide our vision. A decorative pattern stands thus in a looser relation to the decorated object than does ornament to the ornament-bearer. Kant's examples suggest patterns more than ornament.

To be sure, many patterns do possess an ornamental function, but only because Kant here has bracketed out such a function can his joining of nature and art seem so unproblematic. Pure pattern offers itself to us indeed as a pure aesthetic object, unburdened by all service, and thus as an anticipation of an abstract work of art, which, after all, again and again, so e.g. by Klee and by Pollock, has been understood as a quasi-natural product.

⁸ See *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

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Kant does not speak of patterns, but of what has been translated as "ornaments" (*Zieraten*).

Even what we call *ornaments* [*parerga*], i.e. what does not belong to the whole presentation of the object as an intrinsic constituent, but [is] only an extrinsic addition, does indeed increase our taste's liking, and yet it too does so only by its form, as in the case of picture frames, or drapery on statues, or colonnades around magnificent buildings. On the other hand, if the ornament itself does not consist in beautiful form but is merely attached, as a gold frame is to a painting so that its charm (*Reiz*) may commend the painting for our approval, then it impairs genuine beauty and is called finery (*Schmuck*). (72)

Kant, like Christian Wolff before him,⁹ distinguishes here between two kinds of ornament. All ornament is an extrinsic addition. But Kant admits that there is ornament that does increase our appreciation of and in that sense serves the ornament bearer, as a picture frame does, or drapery, or a colonnade. Kant also recognizes that some frames detract from our experience of the framed. This invites a distinction between two kinds of ornament, one serving the ornament bearer, the other drawing attention to itself. In *The Ethical Function of Architecture* I develop this distinction at some length, distinguishing, somewhat artificially, between ornament and decoration.

But does Kant not call that distinction into question? More important to me than the distinction between mere charm and genuine beauty that pleases only because of its form is the fact that, despite the distinction I just called your attention to, Kant places all *Zierat* in a merely external relationship to whatever is decorated. Beautiful decoration is like an exchangeable frame that stands in no essential relation to the framed; it may indeed increase our aesthetic pleasure, but only because it adds to the pleasure that we take in the framed object a second,

⁹ Christian Wolff, *Anfangsgründe der Baukunst in Der Anfangs-Gründe Aller Mathematischen Wissenschaften Erster Theil* (Halle: Renger, 1710), pp. 271-467. Wolff was the first philosopher to devote a lengthy treatise to architecture.

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quite independent pleasure. But we should ask: must such an addition, even if itself quite beautiful, not diminish the attention we give to the framed and thus injure its beauty? That modern painting, after attempts to incorporate the frame into the picture — think of Seurat or Klimt — should have divorced itself ever more resolutely from the frame is only a consequence of the purity that is here being demanded, a purity that neither needs nor welcomes such assistance. The really autonomous work of art has to reject ornamental frames as it has to reject all ornament or decoration. Adolf Loos will thus condemn ornament as crime. Kant helps us mark the beginning of this development. He already no longer has an eye for the significance that ornament once held.

But should we mourn this death of ornament? Should we not welcome it, welcome ornament's replacement with mere decoration, as a first liberation of beauty from a servitude not really compatible with its essence? Only a first liberation because every decoration, even when it is experienced as a merely external addition, yet continues to stand in a relation to the decorated and by this relationship is devalued into a mere *parergon*, something incidental? Such questioning readily leads to the demand for an absolute art, an art that would serve only beauty. But even this remains a service and pure beauty has to deny itself to all who would thus serve it. As we have already seen, never will art be pure enough, unless perhaps it should succeed in effacing its own art character. Again and again modern artists have thus dreamed of creating as un-self-consciously as nature creates. Kant's self-contradictory example of an artificial and yet pure beauty thus points ahead not only to modern art, but also to its inevitable shipwreck: modern art had to suffer shipwreck on the reef of the contradiction inherent in its essence. And this shipwreck leads to a post-modern art that once again affirms what on the aesthetic approach constitutes the essential impurity of art.

This shipwreck is hardly inevitable. It becomes inevitable only when pure beauty is elevated and made the goal of artistic production, but just this Kant himself refuses to do. Thus he has a rather low opinion of what he calls *Zieraten*, as also of what he calls “fantasias in music (namely music without a topic (*Thema*), indeed all music not set to words).” *Thema* and words offer reason something it can hold on to and thus provide our experience of the artwork with a focus. A loss of aesthetic purity is the inevitable result, but, as we shall see, according to Kant what is gained outweighs such loss.

And thus Kant's sympathies do not at all lie with the examples mentioned in the beginning, but in an altogether different place, not with the rococo, but with neo-classicism, with Winckelmann's “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur,” with a beauty that clothes moral concepts in a fitting beauty. Such an art wants to offer more than occasions for that *entirely disinterested satisfaction* that Kant makes constitutive of pure beauty: it seeks to edify, awaken and strengthen interest in the vocation of man.

If we understand ornament as decoration suited to the ornament bearer, then an art serving the ideal can be understood as the ornament of the good. This service does mean a sacrifice of aesthetic purity, but just this sacrifice allows art to elevate itself beyond the merely aesthetic, just as decoration elevates itself beyond itself when it turns into genuine ornament. And thus the distinction between mere decoration and ornament does indeed mirror a distinction between two very different conceptions of art: one, perhaps we should call it “modern,” which in the name of pure beauty would take art out of the whole of life, and another, older one, which places art in the service of life and of the ideals guiding it.

If such an edifying and therefore impure art joins human beings, an art that pursues free beauty, and that means also an always personal, if in principle universally available pleasure, casts them back unto themselves. That makes it suspect and thus Kant points out that not without reason it has been claimed that

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virtuosi of taste, who not just occasionally, but apparently as a rule are vain, obstinate, and given to ruinous passions, can perhaps even less than other people claim the distinction of being attached to moral principles. And hence it seems, not only that the feeling for the beautiful is different in kind from moral interest (as indeed it actually is), but also that it is difficult to reconcile the interest which can be connected with the beautiful with the moral interest, and that it is impossible to do this by an [alleged] intrinsic affinity between the two. (165)

But how then are we to understand the harmonious joining of an appreciation of beauty and moral interest in the art of the ideal? Does the possibility of such an art not presuppose something like an inner affinity? In his determination of the beautiful as symbol of the morally good Kant will have more to say about this affinity: only as such a symbol, Kant will insist, can beauty lay claim to our approval. Such appreciation elevates taste, opens it to the intelligible, and thus edifies.

The fact that Kant, who, without intending or suspecting anything of the sort, with his analysis of beauty pointed the way for the aesthetic approach that was to shape, not only reflection about, but also the evolution of modern art, at the same time warned of this way, invites reflection. Purity is for Kant not at all a commandment the artist should heed. Quite the opposite: an art that would serve only beauty so understood has to lead to an art that turns its back to reality, to the community, to the countless problems that demand our engagement.

Kant himself was hardly what he called a *virtuoso of taste*. Committed to the primacy of the ethical he had to be suspicious of all who allowed their interest in beauty to deflect them from what needed doing. Art can be justified only where it serves the interests of reason. Kant would have had to condemn the whole development leading to an understanding of art for art's sake, even if that development could and did invoke Kant's determination of free beauty in support of the direction it had taken. He would have had to condemn it, not so much because the attempt to place art at the service of free beauty proves self-contradictory, but because such a

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pursuit had to deny what he took to be our vocation, had to deny what practical reason demands of us.

Where art commits itself to the pursuit of free beauty as Kant had understood it, it has to demand, as he recognized, that it overcome its own art character, dreaming of a return to nature that would transform artistic freedom into spontaneity. That art comes closest to such spontaneity where the task at hand can be taken for granted and requires little thought, when for example, the designer of some ornament can tacitly presuppose the function and the general appearance of what he is to create and thus bracket it, is to be expected. But we expect more from art, expect that it should somehow speak to and be worthy of our deepest interests. Such expectation will reject every devaluation of modern art in the image of Kant's devaluing example of wallpaper decorations.

But how then are we to understand the often almost religious interest in modern art? Kant's first determination of the beautiful as object of an *entirely disinterested satisfaction* will provide us with an answer. To anticipate: we are interested in such a disinterested satisfaction precisely because we have an interest in ridding ourselves of the interests inseparably bound up with the way we live first of all and most of the time, because we find ourselves burdened by our interests, and that means also by life, by reality, for interest according to Kant is always an interest in reality. The dream of an art serving only pure beauty is the dream of a redemption from reality — and just as self-contradictory. Redemption from reality here means also redemption from the desires that bind us into the world, means also a dream of what Nietzsche termed "immaculate perception," dream to be allowed just to look, "To be happy in looking, with a will that has died and without the grasping and greed of selfishness,"¹⁰ — dream of a redemption from time. More than anyone else it was Schopenhauer who transmitted the self-contradictory promise of redemption buried in Kant's determination of the beautiful as object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction to a world that was no longer able to take seriously the old

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zarathustra, Zweiter Teil*, "Von der unbefleckten Erkenntnis."

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faith's promise of redemption. Only the death of God gives room to art so understood and lets us understand the passionate interest so many have taken in it.

It is in this sense that the examples of a free, yet artificial beauty that Kant mentions in passing, without giving the matter much thought, invite us to approach thoughtfully the threshold that bounds modernity as it bounds its art.

2. Baumgarten and the Birth of Aesthetics

1

I introduced my last lecture with a remark Heidegger makes in the "Epilogue" to "The Origin of the Work of Art." Let me begin this session by taking a second look at it:

Almost from the time when specialized thinking about art and the artist began, this thought was called aesthetic. Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. This dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.¹¹

The possible dying of art is here linked to the rise of what we can call **the aesthetic approach**. As Heidegger suggests that approach is tied to a turn to experience. The way in which we experience art is supposed to give information about its nature. Instead of speaking of a turn to experience we can also speak of a turn to the experiencing subject. Such a turn to the subject is characteristic of modern philosophy. The emergence of modern aesthetics is part of that turn. The beautiful is approached first of all as the object of a particular kind of experience. This leads to the question: what is the structure of the experience of the beautiful?

We associate that subjective turn above all with Descartes. Baumgarten relies on the framework provided by Descartes and appropriated by Leibniz, when he proposes this characterization of the experience of the beautiful: *a perception of perfection that is clear, but*

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5, p. 65; "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Truth*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p 79.

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not distinct. That characterization deserves careful scrutiny: first of all, what is meant by clear, but not distinct.

What then does Descartes mean by “clear and distinct”? In the *Principles* Descartes offers us the following definition:

I term that clear and distinct which is present to an attentive mind in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient strength. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.¹²

What presents itself clearly and distinctly is thus transparent. In it there is nothing that escapes the mind's grasp. Nothing is hidden, no mystery remains. Everything is present.

From this definition it follows that whatever we are presented by our eyes may be clear, but can never be distinct; for to see something clearly and distinctly is to see it totally and with complete adequacy. The phenomenon of perspective precludes this. Perspectival understanding is inevitably partial. Clarity and distinctness demands thus a standpoint beyond perspective, beyond sensation, the stand-point of thought. As Descartes points out in the *Third Meditation*:

As regards the ideas of corporeal things, ... I find that there is but little in them which is clearly and distinctly apprehended, viz., magnitude and extension in length, breadth, and depth, shape which results from the limitation of extension, the location which bodies have in relation to one another, and motion or change of location, to which may be added substance, duration, and number. As to other things such as light and the colors, sounds, odors, tastes, heat, and cold and the other tactual qualities, they present themselves so confusedly and obscurely that I cannot tell whether they are true or false, i.e. whether the ideas I have of them are

¹² René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, XLV, *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, 2 vols., trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), vol. I, p.237.

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ideas of real things or whether they present only chimerical beings which are incapable of (independent) existence.¹³

The evidence presented to the senses has to be replaced with a more perfect inner evidence. The self-certainty of the *cogito* provides Descartes with his paradigm.

It should be noted that for Descartes the difference between concept and percept does not seem to be one of kind, but of degree. Both are modes of perception. Sense impressions are confused and obscure perceptions. But only the clear and distinct gives us access to truth and to reality. Sensory perception thus has to yield to intellectual knowledge if it is to lead us to the truth. A downgrading of the senses is the inevitable consequence. The threat that this poses to what I called in our first session the ontological conception of art should be evident. If art is not to give up its claim to serve the truth, it must become as much like thought as possible, i.e., it must destroy itself as art? Neo-classicism was well on the road towards such a self-destruction of art — where we should note a certain analogy between neo-classicism and today's concept art. The former's embarrassment about color, about the sensuous aspect of art, is of a piece with its fundamentally Cartesian approach to art. Presupposed is that clear and distinct thinking and the corresponding discourse are the proper vehicles of the pursuit of truth.

2

Descartes himself spent little time discussing perceptions that are clear, but not distinct. But their future importance for aesthetics is anticipated by a passage in Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

When I am able to recognize a thing among others, without being able to say in what its difference and characteristics consist, the knowledge is confused.

Sometimes indeed we may know clearly, that is without being in the slightest doubt, that a poem or a picture is well or badly done because there is in it an "I

¹³ Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: The Modern Library, 1958), p. 202.

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don't know what" which satisfies or shocks us. Such knowledge is not yet distinct.¹⁴

What we are dealing with is not just a mere sensation. Something like knowledge is involved. But the knowledge that something is beautiful is an odd kind of knowledge: it is clear, but not distinct, where distinct is defined as follows:

It is when I am able to explain the peculiarities which a thing has, that the knowledge is called distinct.¹⁵

To know something distinctly is to be able to explain what something is. What does it mean to explain? — Explain to me what a circle is! — The definition provides a rule for the construction of the circle. In Descartes' understanding of clear and distinct knowledge already there is tension between an understanding of such knowing in the image of perception or seeing and in the image of construction or making.

Be this as it may, there is no clear and distinct understanding when we experience the beautiful. And yet the person who sees something beautiful is convinced that what he or she sees is indeed beautiful. Even if she cannot give an account of why he should hold this conviction, she claims something like insight. Such insight Leibniz terms clear. Leibniz here recognizes a kind of quasi-knowledge. Animals, Leibniz thus suggests, have such insight. In a pre-rational way they have insight into connections.¹⁶ What opens up here is the need for a mental faculty that stands between *perceptio* and *cogitatio*. In the *Monadology* Leibniz appeals in this connection to memory — think of a Proustian memory. Indeed, by that time the need for such a faculty had already been widely recognized. This third faculty came to be identified with **taste**.

¹⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, trans. Montgomery [Open Court: La Salle, Illinois, 1953], XXIV.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Cf. Alfred Bäumler, *Das Irrationalitätsproblem in der Aesthetik und Logik des 18. Jahrhunderts bis zur Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Mit einem Nachwort zum Neudruck. Darmstadt 1967, p. 188

3

How was taste understood? Think back to the example of clear and confused knowledge that Leibniz gave. I see the picture. I am altogether convinced that what I see is beautiful. But I cannot justify my conviction. What makes me so certain, we might say, is not reason, but taste.

The concept of **taste** was given wide currency in the 17th century by the Spaniard Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658), a neglected thinker, who occupies somewhat the same place in the history of taste that Descartes occupies in that of reason. Both thinkers emphasize the individual subject: one the subject of knowledge, the other the subject of feeling. Taste is described by Gracian as an innate good sense. The man of taste knows what to do, even though he does not know how to explain his success. Taste is thus essentially private; it cannot give reasons and in this respect is like Platonic inspiration. The man of taste will, however, be found exemplary by others. Thus he can set an example.

Following Gracián, the term taste finds application in many different fields of activity. Applied to the field of politics, e.g. it gives rise to the notion of the *politicus*, the person who moves across the stage of the world, always doing the right thing. The English gentleman represents a version of the man of taste.

This concept of taste as a faculty that cannot give an account of its successes raise the question of how it is acquired. No doubt, associating with persons of taste, being confronted with the examples they set is a good setting for the development of good taste. But there are those who will never acquire good taste. And some seem to have good taste without proper training. Taste is also something of a gift. The concept of taste thus looks back to Plato's inspiration theory as it looks forward to the concept of genius, which could be understood as taste raised to a higher power. I shall have quite a more to say about taste and genius in a later session.

But first let me return to Leibniz. Leibniz himself spent little time on beauty and clearly subordinates the clear and confused to the clear and distinct. But the thought of a clear and confused quasi-knowledge is taken up by his follower Christian Wolff (1679 –1754). Wolff argues that our knowledge of particulars is never clear and distinct. I have no clear and distinct understanding of this tree in its particularity. Whatever I can say clearly and distinctly about this tree may indeed yield a description definite enough to single it out from all others, but this description will fit equally well infinitely many possible trees, very much like the one I am now describing. But this is to say that the tree in its concrete particularity has eluded me. My perception of it is clear, but not distinct. By attending to some feature of that tree, and then abstracting it from the others I can render my understanding more distinct. But as I do so I lose that confused understanding necessary to grasp individuals.¹⁷ Something like taste would thus seem to be involved in the apprehension of individuals. It suggests that Descartes *cogito* expresses not a clear and distinct perception, as he claims, but depends on something more like taste. What announces itself here is the need to place besides scientific understanding what we can call aesthetic understanding.¹⁸

To confine oneself to the clear and distinct is to confine oneself to abstractions from the concrete particulars with which our senses present us. But such abstract knowledge cannot do justice to our understanding of individuals. In his *Psychologia empirica* (1732)¹⁹ Wolff thus gives broad room to this realm between sense perception and clear and distinct understanding. Wolff is indeed sometimes mentioned as the founder of psychology, although the word was apparently first used by the Marburg Aristotelian Rudolf Gockel (Gloedenius) in 1590. In this

¹⁷ Cf. Bäuml, pp. 198 – 199.

¹⁸ Bäuml, p. 201.

¹⁹ *Psychologia empirica, methodo scientifica pertractata, qua ea, quae de anima humana indubia experientiae fide constant, continentur* (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Renger, 1732).

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connection Wolff recognizes the need to supplement philosophical with historical knowledge: it offers us insight into what is essentially singular.²⁰ And Wolf already recognizes that our experience of beauty is also an experience of what is singular, but of some particular thing as being as it should be, i.e. as **perfect**: we take pleasure in perceived perfection. **Beauty is perceived perfection.**²¹

5

It was Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714 –1762), who, by applying Wolff's insights into the quasi-rational realm to poetry, became the founder of modern aesthetics. As already suggested, he also coined that term to name the newly established philosophical discipline. He did so in his dissertation of 1735, written when he was just twenty.²²

Baumgarten defines understanding as **distinct knowledge**. A thought becomes distinct only if, in thinking of something, I abstract from what presents itself to the senses. Perception, on the other hand, is understood as **confused knowledge**. A representation becomes distinct, if I abstract from the concrete texture of reality.

Distinct and confused representations demand different kinds of discourse. The dissertation's very first proposition defines discourse:

Par. 1. By discourse we shall understand a series of words which designate connected representations.

Science demands that these representations be distinct. But that demand rules out poetry:

par. 14. Distinct representations, complete, adequate, profound through every degree, are not sensate, and, therefore, not poetic.

There is thus an essential difference between poetic and philosophical discourse:

²⁰ Ibid., par. 320.

²¹ Ibid., par. 544 and 545.

²² Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry (Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus)*, tr. Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954).

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This is the principal reason why philosophy and poetry are scarcely ever thought able to perform the same office, since philosophy pursues conceptual distinctness above everything else, while poetry does not strive to attain this, as falling outside its province.

If sensation can never be clear and distinct, this leaves either obscure or clear representations to the artist. The former are easily ruled out:

Par. 13. In obscure representations there are not contained as many representations of characteristic traits as would suffice for recognizing them from others, and as, in fact are contained in clear representations.

The distinction between **clear, but confused** and **clear and distinct** perception reappears as the distinction between **intensive** and **extensive clarity**. Intensive clarity focuses just on distinct characteristics, singles these out for special attention, abstracting them from the rest. The more is represented in a perception the greater its extensive clarity. Extensive clarity loses in distinction as it gains in extension. For that reason it is necessarily unpoetic. The poet seeks extensive clarity:

par. 16. When in representation A more is represented than in B, C, D, and so on, but all are confused, A will be said to be extensively clearer than the rest.

Every individual is infinitely complex. For this reason, as Wolff recognized, no clear and distinct discourse will ever prove adequate to it. Clear representations of individuals are therefore “in the highest degree poetic” (par. 19, p. 43). And for the same reason the poetic representation of abstract ideas will require what Baumgarten terms nonproper terms. Metaphors (par. 83) are nonproper in this sense. So are synecdoches (par. 84). And allegory is poetic as a form of nonproper discourse (par. 85), where what makes a metaphor, a synecdoche, or an allegory poetic is not so much its meaning as its ability to incarnate that meaning in sensate discourse.

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Similarly, affecting images are more poetic than images that leave us unmoved. Things which are confusedly represented as good or bad are extensively clearer and therefore more poetic (pars. 25 and 26).

Baumgarten's understanding of discourse suggests that a text is rather like a picture and so it is not surprising that he should endorse Horace's *ut pictura poesis* (p. 52). And yet, reflecting on the different media involved, he presents an argument that anticipates Lessing's *Laocoon*.

Par. 40. Since a picture represents an image only on a surface, it is not for the picture to represent every aspect, or any motion at all; yet it is poetic to do so, because when these things are also represented, then more things are represented in the object than when they are not, and hence the representing is extensively clearer, par. 16. Therefore, in poetic images more things tend toward unity than in pictures. Hence a poem is more perfect than a picture.

Important here is the reference to **time**: as already Alberti had insisted, the picture is said to be incapable of representing motion. **The analogy between thinking and seeing raises the question, whether thinking, to the extent that it is thought to be like seeing, will also have difficulty with the representation of time and therefore of reality.**

The judgment that “a poem is more perfect than a picture” is immediately called into question by the following paragraph, which calls attention to the way words are peculiarly linked to intensive clarity. But intensive clarity contributes nothing to extensive clarity, which alone is poetic. The poet has to struggle with his medium in a way in which the painter does not.

6

So far what has been said does not really allow us to distinguish a description of particulars, more especially of individuals, e.g. history, from poetry. Both are examples of *sensate discourse*. (par. 4) The difference, where Baumgarten is once again following Wolff, is

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suggested by his definition of poetry as *perfect sensate discourse* (par. 7). What then is meant by **perfection**? With this we turn from the matter to the form of poetry, and more generally of art.

In his *Metaphysics* Baumgarten defines perfection as follows:

If many things considered together contain the sufficient reason for some other thing, they **harmonize** with respect to this thing. This harmony is **perfection**.

The thing in respect to which they harmonize is its determinating reason (the focus of it perfection [*focus perfectionis*]).²³

In this sense the different steps of a proof may be said to harmonize with respect to the theorem to be proved. Similarly a machine can be called perfect if it accomplishes its end in the most efficient way possible. But the perfection of a proof or a machine must be distinguished from the perfection of a work of art, from beauty: Beauty Baumgarten understands with Wolff as **perceived perfection**. The notion of perfection refers thus to a manifold united by a common focus or theme. The simple is never beautiful, a point with which we are familiar from Aristotle's *Poetics*. The beautiful is an organized whole. It requires complexity. To appreciate beauty is to appreciate connections. Baumgarten, too, thus likens **taste**, i.e. the faculty by which beauty is appreciated, to reason. But while the latter has a clear and distinct grasp of these connections, taste grasps them more intuitively. Or, to quote Baumgarten once more:

The faculties of recognizing the connections between things confusedly are the analogon of reason (*analogon rationis*).²⁴

This *analogon rationis* is taste. Just as logic is the science that investigates the norms that govern clear and distinct reasoning, aesthetics investigates the norms governing taste.

7

Let me sum up the discussion so far by yet another quote from Baumgarten's

Metaphysics:

²³ Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle, Hemmerden, 1779), par. 93.

²⁴ *Metaphysica*, par. 640.

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The law of the faculty of judgment is as follows: if a given manifold is recognized as either fitting together or as not fitting together, then its perfection or imperfection is recognized. This happens either sensually or distinctly. The faculty of judging by means of sense is taste in its widest sense.²⁵

This returns us to one of the most frequently encountered definitions of the beautiful to be found in eighteenth century literature: **beauty is sensible perfection**. It is used by the neo-classicists, such as Winckelmann and his circle. It continues to be used by Baumgarten's successors, including Moses Mendelsohn, who points out that beauty is consequently a sign of intellectual weakness and should not be considered too highly.

Where, on this view, is beauty located, in the perceiver or in the thing perceived? Does God know beauty? In Baumgarten's sense, the answer would seem to have to be no, for God does not know things confusedly. Our ability to appreciate beauty marks us as finite, imperfect knowers. Precisely because of our finitude we can recognize the particular and concrete only indistinctly.

This understanding of beauty points to a many gathered together into a unity. Beauty thus presupposes connection. A single impression can never be beautiful.

The faculty of recognizing the connections between things distinctly is reason (*ratio*).²⁶

But from this it follows that reason cannot be at work in the appreciation of beauty. This is ruled out by the word "distinctly." And yet we need a faculty of recognizing connections, if indistinctly. Taste is thus analogous to reason.. Something like logic therefore should apply to the lower cognitive faculties and this discipline Baumgarten terms in his dissertation "aesthetic."

Par. 115. Philosophical poetics is by par. 9 the science guiding sensate discourse to perfection; and since in speaking we have those representations which we communicate, philosophical poetics presupposes in the poet a lower cognitive

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., par. 468.

faculty. It would now be the task of logic in its broader sense to guide this faculty in the sensate cognition of things, but he who knows the state of our logic will not be unaware how uncultivated this field is. What then? If logic by its very definition should be restricted to the rather narrow limits to which it is as a matter of fact confined, would it not count as the science of knowing things philosophically, that is as the science for the direction of the higher cognitive faculty in apprehending the truth? Well then. Philosophers might still find occasion, not without ample reward, to inquire also into those devices by which they might improve the lower faculties of knowing and sharpen them and apply them more happily for the benefit of the whole world. Since psychology affords sound principles, we have no doubt that there could be available a science which might direct the lower cognitive faculty in knowing things sensately.

Having delineated the nature of this new science, Bamgarten proceeds to name it:

Par. 116. As our definition is at hand, a precise designation can easily be devised. The Greek philosophers and the Church fathers have already carefully distinguished between *things perceived (aistheta)* and *things known (noeta)*. It is entirely evident that they did not equate *things known* with things of sense, since they honored with this name things also removed from sense (therefore images). Therefore *things known* are to be known by the superior faculty as the object of logic; things perceived [are to be known by the inferior faculty as the object] of the science of perception, or *aesthetic*.

Just as *logic* is the science of knowledge, *aesthetic* is the science of perception.

The implications of this view of perfection are developed in pars. 65 - 76. The definition of perfection, given above, which spoke of a thing in which other things cohere, recurs in Baumgarten's conception of the understanding of the poem's **theme**, the focus of its perfection.

Par. 66. By *theme* we mean that whose representation contains the sufficient reason of other representations supplied in the discourse, but which does not have its own sufficient reason in them. (p. 62)

In creating a unity out of a manifold the poet is like another god, the work he creates like another world, having its own closure. The simile leads Baumgarten to make the following provocative claim:

Par. 68. We observed a little while ago that the poet is like a maker or creator. So the poem ought to be like a world. Hence by analogy whatever is evident to the philosophers concerning the real world, the same ought to be thought of a poem. (p. 63)

This is to say that whatever the metaphysicians have said about the world is by analogy true of the poem. Take Leibniz's *Monadology*, which represents the world as a perfectly ordered whole. The philosopher's discourse, to be sure, aims to be, not sensate, but clear and distinct. But note what the simile suggests: the work of art has a structure that is very much like that of Leibniz's best of all possible worlds. The poem's theme is its God. Or, we can say, the world presents itself to us humans as a poem that has God for its theme. Today we are, to be sure, unlikely to be convinced by Leibniz's metaphysics. But note that Baumgarten's simile does not depend for its effectiveness on whether Leibniz is right or wrong. Baumgarten invites us, although this is hardly what he intended, to read the *Monadology* as a philosophical poem that presents a world, whose order is not secured by clear and distinct reasoning, but by an act of imagination, where the imagination appears as the creative side of taste. Just this makes it a poem, despite its medium.

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According to Baumgarten, and the point is one with which we are already familiar from Aristotle's *Poetics*, the work of art should contain nothing that does not make a direct contribution to the revelation of the theme. In a good poem nothing can be left out or added without a loss of perfection. Baumgarten speaks in this sense of the absolute brevity of a successful poem.

9

When considering poetry, according to Baumgarten, it is necessary to distinguish between two aspects of language, meaning and sound. (p. 67, par. 78) So far, in speaking of the poetic experience, we have neglected the latter. But language can be manipulated in such a way that apart from its meaning it produces pleasure or displeasure in the ear. (par. 94) And here, too, one can speak of perfection. In this connection Baumgarten introduces the idea of poetic as *bounded discourse* (par. 111, p. 76). Thus verse is said to be perfected by its meter (par. 109, p. 75). This raises the question of how these two aspects, the task of representation and the task of bounding discourse are to be joined, as they presumably must be, if the poem is to be experienced as a whole. How does the music of a discourse link with it as representation of a world?

10

By now Baumgarten's definition of the beautiful as sensibly apprehended perfection should pose no problem. But why does the beautiful please? Like all the rationalists, Baumgarten sees human knowledge as having its measure in divine knowledge. God knows the infinite complexity of the world clearly and distinctly. But as finite knowers we are incapable of thus reconciling infinite complexity with clear and distinct knowledge. We must give up either extensive or intensive clarity. Baumgarten thus emphasizes the one-sidedness of clear and distinct knowledge. It cannot do justice to reality. Nor does it fulfill us as knowers. The senses

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and the body are shortchanged by the turn to the clear and distinct. Wanting to penetrate reality, to seize it in its essence, the abstracting intellect loses the concrete texture of reality, exchanges reality for a pale representation. The lower faculties, on the other hand, put us in touch with the texture of reality, but they do so in a way that fails to satisfy the demands of the spirit. There is a sense in which the artwork appears to heal that strife. By its matter it is linked to the lower faculties, by its form to the higher faculties. We return here to a theme, familiar already from the *Symposium*, to the healing power of the beautiful, which for a time at least restores to us a unity we have lost and yet deeply desire. But note that on Baumgarten's aesthetic approach the work of art purchases this recovery of the whole at the price of truth. What matters about art, on such an approach, is its coherence, not its truth.

3. Kant's *Critique of Judgment* — Preface and Introduction

Last time I tried to sketch at least a bit of the background of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* by taking a look at Baumgarten's dissertation. Let me underscore here what I had to say about the concept of taste: as the expression Baumgarten uses to describe it, *analogon rationis*, suggests, **taste** appears to be in some ways like reason, and yet in other ways resembles sense. It thus occupies something like a middle ground between the two. Taste involves something like a recognizing of salient relationships. **To see a family resemblance is to see such a salient relationship, inviting us to consider how such a seeing relates to conception and to aesthetic experience.**

When Baumgarten defines **aesthetics** as the science that investigates the norms governing **taste**, and taste as “the faculty of recognizing the connections between things indistinctly,” he appeals to a by then well-established notion, well established especially in England. Kant, as we shall see, was well acquainted with the literature on taste. Thus he had read Addison, Pope, Hutcheson, Hume, Burke, and Home, although only Burke and Hume are mentioned by name in the *Critique of Judgment*. But then even Baumgarten, to whom Kant so often refers, remains unnamed.

Kant is open to both to the British tradition and to the rationalism in which he had been trained. The two most important thinkers for the aesthetics developed in the *Critique of Judgment* are thus Burke, to whom Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the sublime owes a great deal, and Baumgarten. As we shall see and as I already suggested, Kant's personal and quite undeveloped taste in art was very much in tune with the then reigning neo-classicism, as represented by Winckelmann.

For a long time Kant had felt that the beautiful was not really capable of a genuinely philosophical treatment, as would indeed have to be the case if the beautiful were indeed appreciated by something like a sixth sense. Thus his early *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, written in 1763, and published in 1764, were written very much in the

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spirit of English discussions of taste, especially that offered by Burke. It was well received. Already in 1766 a second edition appeared, a third in 1771.

In these observations Kant, quite expectedly, remarks that the beautiful induces love, the sublime respect. Friendship is linked to the sublime, love between the sexes to the beautiful. We find a suggestion that a melancholic temperament will have a special susceptibility for the sublime, an interesting suggestion that deserves development (A 30). So does the once again not unexpected gendering of the distinction: beautiful:sublime = female:male (A 48). Kant wonders whether women are capable of acting out of a sense of duty (cf. Lawrence Kohlberg's six stages of moral development; according to Kohlberg women rarely rise above the third stage, where Schopenhauer would wonder whether those who rise to the top of Kohlberg's scale are not pedants): Reason:taste = man:woman. Kant emphasizes how silly it is to call the sublime better than the beautiful or the reverse. He then applies the categories to various nationalities. The results are not surprising. Altogether this slender book was meant to entertain, a polite essay more than a piece of serious philosophy.

Kant had indeed long despaired of the possibility of placing the critical judgment of the beautiful under principles of reason. In the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781, the effort of Baumgarten is thus dismissed as impossible and the term "aesthetic" as used by him rejected as unfortunate:

The Germans are the only ones who now use the word "aesthetics" to refer to what others call a critique of taste. This has its foundation in the false hope of the excellent analyst Baumgarten to place the critical judgment of the beautiful under principles of reason and to elevate the rules governing such judgment to a science. But this effort is vain. For these rules and criteria have their origin in experience; thus they can never serve as *a priori* laws to which our judgment of taste should conform; rather the latter is the real touchstone of the former. It is therefore

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advisable to either drop the term altogether, and to reserve it for that doctrine that alone can be a true science... (A 21)

The second edition of 1787 adds

or share this term with speculative philosophy and to understand "aesthetics" partly in a transcendental sense, partly as having a psychological significance. (B 36)

Kant is referring here to his own transcendental aesthetic, which inquires into space and time, as the pure intuitions that have to be presupposed by all sensible experience. Transcendental aesthetic is the science of the a priori principles of sensibility. It was only in 1787, when the second edition of the Critique appeared that Kant began to change his mind, apparently not so much because of new reflections about art, but because the evolution of his own thinking demanded it. At any rate, in 1787 he writes in a letter to Reinhold (Dec, 28, 1787) that in thinking about the critique of taste, about something that in the cited footnote he had called a vain hope, he had found "a new kind of principles a priori." And he also suggests that what led him to this discovery had been systematic considerations: Between theoretical and practical philosophy teleology was to be given a place. He hopes to offer a new work that was to bear the title *Critique of Taste* in 1788. Not only his rectorate prevented him from meeting that schedule. More importantly, the planned critique of taste had become part of a more encompassing work, the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, of which the critique of taste now became the first part, the "Critique of the Aesthetical Judgment."²⁷

Kant himself thus gives us the hint that to approach this work we should keep in mind its place in his system. Just such a placement is provided by the "Introduction":

²⁷ Ernst Cassirer already pointed out that in his "Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie" Salomon Maimon had reached the very same position that Kant occupied when he began the *Critique of Judgment*. Markus Herz had sent Maimon's "Versuch" to Kant on April 7, 1789. That Kant would have been appreciative was to be expected, given the letter to Reinhold. Cassirer, *Erkenntnisproblem*, III, 94. See now also Manfred Frank, "Unendliche Annäherung." *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (1998) and *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (1989).

I. The first section spells out the basic distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy:

Insofar as philosophy contains principles for the rational cognition of things through concepts (and not merely, as logic does, principles of the form of thought in general without distinction of objects), it is usually divided into *theoretical* and *practical*. That division is entirely correct, provided there is also a difference in kind between the concepts that assign to the principles of this rational cognition their respective objects ... (9)²⁸

On the whole this first section should not pose any problems. Thought provoking, however, is the way Kant considers the will here as a natural cause in the world.

For the will, as the power of desire, is one of the many natural causes in the world, namely the one that acts in accordance with concepts; and whatever we think of as possible (or necessary) through a will we call practically possible (or necessary), as distinguished from the physical possibility or necessity of an effect whose cause is not determined to [exercise] its causality through concepts (but through mechanism, as in the case of lifeless matter, or through instinct, as in the case of animals). It is here, concerning the practical, that people leave it undetermined whether the concept that gives the rule to the will's causality is a concept of nature or a concept of freedom. (10)

And yet the will is not just another cause in the world:

... the will is subject not merely to the concept of nature, but also to the concept of freedom; and it is in relation to the latter that the will's principles are called laws. Only these latter principles, along with what follows from them, form the second, i.e., the practical part of philosophy. (11)

²⁸ References are to Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987)

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The will therefore has a bridge function, somewhat like Descartes' pineal gland. The distinction between concept of nature and concept of freedom is crucial. It establishes the sharp distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy. And yet the notion of will has not become here as clear as we might wish: As the power of desire it is said to be one of many natural causes, but it is not adequately understood as such. None of these causes act in accordance with concepts. Does this not presuppose a certain elevation of the self above nature, even as it remains part of and embedded in nature?

II. Philosophy is understood in the second section as the inquiry into a priori concepts and their application:

The range within which we can use our power of cognition according to principles, and hence do philosophy, is the range within which a priori concepts have application. (12)

This is followed by a distinction between the realm, territory, and domain of concepts.

Insofar as we refer concepts to objects without considering whether or not cognition of these objects is possible, they have a realm [*Feld*: "field" would be a better translation]: and this realm is determined merely by the relation that the object of these concepts has to our cognitive power in general. The part of this realm in which cognition is possible for us is a territory [*Boden*] (*territorium*) for these concepts and the cognitive power we need for such cognition. That part of the territory over which these concepts legislate is the domain [*Gebiet*] (*ditio*) pertaining to them. Hence empirical concepts do have their territory in nature, as the sum total of all objects of sense, but they have no domain in it but only residence (*domicilium*); for though they are produced according to law, they do not legislate; rather, the rules that are based on them are empirical and hence contingent. (13)

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Empirical concepts pose thus a problem. They are said to be produced according to law. But what law is sufficient to produce them? If there were such a law, would they not have to be legislative and have its domain? But Kant, insists, there are indeed only two domains:

Our cognitive power as a whole has two domains, that of the concepts of nature and that of the concept of freedom, because it legislates a priori by means of both kinds of concepts. Now philosophy too divides, according to these legislations, into theoretical and practical. And yet the territory on which its domain is set up and on which it *exercises* its legislation is still always confined to the sum total of the objects of all possible experience, insofar as these are considered nothing more than mere appearances, since otherwise it would be inconceivable that the understanding would legislate with regard to them. (13)

The split between theoretical and practical legislation is a consequence:

Hence understanding and reason have two different legislations on one and the same territory of experience. Yet neither of these legislations is to interfere with the other. For just as the concept of nature has no influence on the legislation through the concept of freedom, so the latter does not interfere with the legislation of nature. That it is possible at least to think, without contradiction, of these two legislations and the powers pertaining to them as coexisting in the same subject was proved by the *Critique of Pure Reason* [See the Third Antinomy], for it exposed the dialectical illusion in the objections against this possibility and thus destroyed them. (13-14)

Understanding and reason share the same territory, but rule different domains. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had insisted that what we experience and can know are always only phenomena, appearances, constituted by the understanding, which has always already subjected the manifold of sense to its concepts. The world is first of all world for me. I cannot know things as they are in themselves. The concept of appearance does indeed require me to form the

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idea of a thing-in-itself, but I cannot understand what it points to. That we have no access to things in themselves is bound up with our finitude, and bound up with it, too, is the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Important here is the point that the world explored by science should not be identified with the whole of reality.

In this connection we should also keep in mind what was said above about the problem posed by empirical concepts, which are said to be produced by law and yet to have no domain. How are we to think their genesis? **Does this not imply that the legislation of the understanding is essentially incomplete?** Such incompleteness would seem to be implied by the claim that “understanding and reason have two different legislations on one and the same territory of experience.”

The distinction gains in importance when we turn to the Second Critique. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* human beings are discussed as persons, i.e. as moral agents. As such agents they have to act by certain principles. These principles can have their origin either within reason or without. When acting by the former we call the person autonomous, in the latter case heteronomous. Human freedom is linked by Kant to **autonomy**. This double view of the human being as a natural being science can investigate and as a moral agent, a person, allows Kant to say the following:

Now, although these two domains do not restrict each other in their legislation, they do restrict each other incessantly in the effects that their legislation has in the world of sense. Why do these two legislations not form one domain? This is because the concept of nature does indeed allow us to present its objects in intuition, but as mere appearances rather than as things in themselves, whereas the concept of freedom does indeed allow us to present its object as a thing in itself, but not in intuition; and so neither concept can provide us with theoretical cognition of its object (or even of the thinking subject) as things in themselves, which would be the supersensible. We do need the idea of the supersensible in

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order to base on it the possibility of all those objects of experience, but the idea itself can never be raised up and expanded into a cognition. (14)

Practical knowledge is of the thing in itself, but it offers no theoretical cognition of its object.

Theoretical knowledge is of objects, but it offers no theoretical cognition of the thing in itself. A rift has been opened up between the sensible and the supersensible. But this **rift is finally**

unacceptable:

Hence an immense gulf is fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible, so that no transition from the sensible to the supersensible and by means of the theoretical use of reason is possible, just as if they were two different worlds, the first of which cannot have any influence on the second: and yet the second is to have an influence on the first, i.e. the concept of freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws. Hence it must be possible to think of nature as being such that the lawfulness of its form will harmonize with at least the possibility of [achieving] the purposes that we are to achieve in nature according to laws of freedom. (14/15)

As already suggested, that such an influence is indeed possible Kant thought he had shown in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially in the Third Antinomy. That the separation between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom becomes unsatisfactory as soon as we consider that morality is supposed to be effective in the world is evident.

So there must after all be a basis uniting the supersensible that underlies nature and the supersensible that the concept of freedom contains practically, even though the concept of this basis does not reach cognition of it either theoretically or practically and hence does not have a domain of its own, though it does make possible the transition from our way of thinking in terms of principles of nature to our way of thinking in terms of principles of freedom. (15)

Freedom, as Kant points out, **must have an effect in the world**, and — although this Kant does not mention here — **I must be able to recognize something I experience as a person if the categorical imperative is to have applicability**. Nature must be in some sort of harmony with freedom. But where are we to look for the ground of such harmony.

III. The third section introduces us to the judgment as a faculty mediating between understanding and reason. There is nothing surprising in this. We find it thus described already in the First Critique, where Kant correlates the understanding with concepts, judgment with judging by means of these concepts, and reason with inferences. (A 131) Judgment then is the faculty of subsuming under rules (A 132). There can thus be judgments of the understanding and judgments of reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had denied that the judgment needs special principles. Both understanding and judgment were said to have their canon in the transcendental logic. In the *Critique of Judgment* this claim is challenged:

And yet the family of our higher cognitive powers also includes a mediating link between understanding and reason. This is judgment, about which we have cause to suppose, by analogy, that it too may contain a priori, if not a legislation of its own, then at least a principle of its own, perhaps a merely subjective one, by which to search for laws. Even though such a principle would lack a realm of objects as its own domain, it might still have some territory; and this territory might be of such a character that none but this very principle might hold in it. (16)

But this appeal to analogy is subordinated to another consideration, again supported by the power of analogy:

But there is also (judging by analogy) another basis, namely for linking judgment with a different ordering of our presentational powers, an ordering that seems even more important than the one involving judgment's kinship with the family of cognitive powers. For all of the soul's powers or capacities can be

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reduced to three that cannot be derived further from a common basis: the *cognitive power*, the *feeling of pleasure and displeasure*, and the *power of desire*.

(16)

That the feeling of pleasure should be said to mediate between the faculties of knowledge and desire is hardly surprising.

Hence, even if philosophy can be divided into only two main parts, theoretical and practical, and even if everything we might need to say about judgment's own principles must be included in the theoretical part of philosophy, i.e., in rational cognition governed by concepts of nature, yet the critique of pure reason, which must decide all of this before we attempt to construct the mentioned system so as to inform us whether this system is possible, still consists of three parts: the critiques, respectively of pure understanding, of pure judgment, and of pure reason, which are called pure because they legislate a priori. (18)

Note the distinction being drawn here between philosophy proper and critique.

IV. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the faculty of judgment had appeared as the faculty of subsuming a manifold under a concept, or of constituting a manifold as a unity: e.g. 'this is a rose'; 'this rose is red'. The *a priori* principles governing such judgments were exhibited in the categories, these pure concepts of the understanding, and finally rooted in the transcendental unity of apperception, that is to say of self-perception: experience requires the unity of the subject and thus constitutes necessarily a manifold united into a whole.

In the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment* (IV) judgments like 'this rose is red' are called **determinative judgments**. In such a judgment the concept, here 'red' is given and applied. The movement is from the general or universal to the particular.

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From such judgments Kant distinguishes **reflective judgments**. The reflective judgment attempts to find a general term when only the particulars are given: here the general is not given as a rule, but needs to be established.

Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, the judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is *determinative* (even though [in its role] as transcendental judgment it states a priori the conditions that must be met for subsumption under that universal to be possible). But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely *reflective*. (18/19)

Consider the legend of Newton sitting under the apple tree: The apple falls and suddenly Newton has an intuition that all the many, seemingly so different things of nature, planets, stars, the coffee swirling in a cup, falling trees, that all these are expressions of the same force and he responds to that intuition by formulating his laws of motion. Newton, we might want to say, using Baumgarten's language, has an intuition of the perfection of nature, an aesthetic intuition. That intuition is presupposed by the attempt to state the laws of motion. To generalize, the scientist seeks to find for countless phenomena which exhibit a certain resemblance a few simple principles or laws. The movement to such a law is what Kant calls a **reflective judgment**.

Kant is struck by the way science seems confident in its ability to find such laws. Such confidence does not seem obviously well founded. It has, at any rate, no basis in the understanding.

On the other hand, since the laws that pure understanding gives a priori concern only the possibility of a nature as such (as object of sense), there are such diverse forms of nature, so many modifications as it were of the universal transcendental concepts of nature, which are left undetermined by these laws, that surely there must be laws for these forms too. Since these laws are empirical, they may

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indeed be contingent as far as *our* understanding can see; still, if they are to be called laws (as the concept of nature does require), then they must be regarded as necessary by virtue of some principle of the unity of what is diverse, even though we do not know this principle. (19)

We may not know it, and yet it seems a presupposition of doing science, and more generally of our attempt to understand nature.

Now this principle can only be the following: since universal natural laws have their basis in our understanding, which prescribes them to nature (though only according to the universal concept of it as a nature), the particular empirical laws must, as regards what the universal laws have left undetermined in them, be viewed in terms of such a unity as [they would have] if they too had been given by an understanding (even though not ours) so as to assist our cognitive powers by making possible a system of experience in terms of particular natural laws. That does not mean that we must actually assume such an understanding (for it is only reflective judgment that uses this idea as a principle, for reflection rather than determination); rather in using this principle judgment gives a law only to itself, not to nature. (19-20)

But judgment's use of this principle would be fruitless unless nature presented itself to us in such a way that it in some way proved responsive to this law judgment gives to itself. Once again we need an account of how the universal natural laws that reason prescribes to nature are to be schematized. This presupposes that we experience nature in ways that in some sense direct the reflective judgment toward specific empirical laws.

V. Kant speaks in this connection of the **transcendental concept of the purposiveness of nature (V)**:

Now this transcendental concept of the purposiveness of nature is neither a concept of nature nor a concept of freedom, since it attributes nothing whatsoever to the object (nature), but through this transcendental concept [we] only think of the one and only way in which we must process when reflecting on the objects of nature with the aim of having thoroughly coherent experience. Hence it is a subjective principle (maxim) of judgment. This is why we rejoice (actually we are relieved of a need) when, just as if it were a lucky chance favoring our aim, we do find such a systematic unity among merely empirical laws, even though we necessarily had to assume that there is such a unity even though we have no insight into this unity and cannot prove it. (23/24)

In looking for such principles we presuppose that nature is such that it harmonizes with our intellectual faculty and its demand for order or perfection. That is to say, **we demand and expect more order** than is assured by the categories, the principles presupposed by the very possibility of experience. We demand purposiveness of nature. We can restate this demand as a demand that the manifold of nature form a harmoniously ordered whole. Thus what seems like a lucky accident as far as our understanding reaches is yet demanded as necessary by the reflective judgment which posits it as a regulative principle. This principle governs scientific research. And because we demand such unity and yet do not seem to be entitled to what we demand, such unity when first sensed and then discovered gives rise to delight. But this presupposes that this unity is in some sense sensed. This pre-rational sensing of unity in nature invites reconsideration of Baumgarten's understanding of taste as the *analogon rationis*. When we sense such a unity we feel in tune with nature. It is as if nature had been created to be understood by us, to be our home.

VI. We are by our very nature wed seek the same in the different. Relieving us, as Kant puts it, of a need that is part of our nature, such a sensing of unities in nature fills us with pleasure.

In thinking of nature as harmonizing, in the diversity of its particular laws, with our need to find universal principles [*Allgemeinheit der Prinzipien*] for them, we must, as far as our insight goes, judge this harmony as contingent, yet as also indispensable for the needs of the understanding — hence as a purposiveness by which nature harmonizes with our aim, though only insofar as it is directed to cognition. (26)

And what is said here of the diversity of empirical laws must also be said of the diversity of empirical concepts.

The cognitive faculty aims at knowledge. That is its intention (*Absicht*). We human beings desire to know. The harmony between what is demanded by the faculty of knowledge and by the way we find the world to be results in pleasure. The purposive world pleases when seen.

The attainment of an aim [*Absicht*] is always connected with the feeling of pleasure; and if the condition of reaching the aim is an a priori presentation — as, in this case, it is a principle for reflective judgment as such — then [there is] a basis that determines the feeling of pleasure a priori and validly for everyone. And the feeling of pleasure is determined a priori and validly for everyone merely because we refer the object to the cognitive power; [for] in this case the concept and the purposiveness does not in the least concern the power of desire and hence is quite distinct from any practical purposiveness of nature. (27)

The expression “power of desire” [*Begehrungsvermögen*] invites question. Does not aim suggest a desire to achieve the goal of that aim? There is thus a sense in which a certain desire can be said to be constitutive of the cognitive power. But this cognitive desire would have to be

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distinguished from any practical desire and it is the latter Kant has in mind when he here speaks of the *Begehrungsvermögen*.

VII. Let me return to the fiction of Newton sitting under his apple tree. As he senses a unity in a vast manifold of seemingly disparate things, he experiences a quite distinct delight: delight in the way nature seems made to be understood. This is an **aesthetic** delight.

What is merely subjective in the presentation of an object, i.e. what constitutes its reference to the subject and not to the object, is its aesthetic character; but whatever in it serves, or can be used, to determine the object (for cognition) is its logical validity. (28)

The feeling of delight is always subjective:

On the other hand, that subjective [feature] of a presentation *which cannot at all become an element of cognition* is the *pleasure* or *displeasure* connected with that presentation. For through this pleasure or displeasure I do not cognize anything in the object of the presentation, though it may certainly be the effect of some cognition. (29)

Our experience of nature as answering the need of our cognitive faculty for unity is necessarily a source of aesthetic delight. There is thus delight whenever we apprehend something like unity or form in nature.

For this apprehension of forms by the imagination could never occur if reflective judgment did not compare them, even if unintentionally, at least with this ability [in general] to refer intuitions to concepts. Now if in this comparison a given presentation unintentionally brings the imagination (the power of a priori intuitions) into harmony with the understanding (the power of concepts), and this harmony arouses a feeling of pleasure, then this object must thereupon be regarded as purposive for the reflective power of judgment. A judgment of this

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sort is an aesthetic judgment about an object's purposiveness; it is not based on any concept we have of the object. (30)

Recall that Baumgarten had identified what was commonly called taste with the faculty of judging perfection clearly but confusedly. Such a confused judgment of perfection was also discussed as a confused judgment of the purpose or theme of the work of art. Kant cannot make sense of such a confused judgment. Taste is now understood as **a perception of purposiveness without an understanding of the purpose**. We shall have to return to this point.

VIII. When our fictional Newton proceeds from such aesthetic appreciation and arrives at a statement of his laws he proceeds from an **aesthetic** to a **teleological judgment**. The latter is grounded in the former. This is why the first part of the *Critique of Judgment* deals with the aesthetic judgment and thus with art, while its second part deals with the teleological judgment and thus with science.

When an object is given in experience, there are two ways in which we can present purposiveness in it. We can present it on a merely subjective basis: as the harmony of the form of the object (the form that is [manifested] in the *apprehension (apprehensio)* of the object prior to any concept) with the cognitive powers — i.e., the harmony required in general to unite an intuition with concepts so as to produce a cognition. But we can also present it on an objective basis as the harmony of the form of an object with the possibility of the thing itself according to a prior concept of the thing that contains the basis of that form. (32)

Kant thus distinguishes judgments of the beauty from judgments of the purpose of some object, calling the first **aesthetic**, the latter **teleological**.

Hence, we may regard *natural beauty* as the *exhibition* of the concept of formal (merely subjective) purposiveness, and may regard *natural purposes* as the exhibition of the concept of a real (objective) purposiveness, the first of which we

judge by taste (aesthetically, by means of the feeling of pleasure), and the second by understanding and reason (logically, according to concepts).

IX. Reason, according to Kant, legislates for freedom, the understanding for nature. This split into two quite distinct domains is a consequence of human finitude. Reason demands that it rule. This demand finds expression in the moral law; it also finds expression in the cognitive desire to understand nature as a coherent whole. Our understanding of ourselves as free rational agents forces us to recognize that we are not only members of the realm of phenomena, which is the realm explored by science, a realm where necessity reigns, but also members of the realm of freedom. But our world is one. The recognition of this unity brings with it the need to mediate between what has been split apart, between the order of nature and the order of morality. The reflective judgment offers such mediation by inviting us to think nature as ordered with an eye to the purposes of reason. The gulf separating nature and morality has been bridged.

In the experience of the beautiful the human being senses himself to be at one with nature without having to betray practical reason and its demand for autonomy, but also without having to assert his freedom in the face of his natural desires. **Thus the beautiful carries the promise of a higher mode of existence that has overcome the rift between reason and nature.**

The understanding, inasmuch as it can give laws to nature a priori proves that we can cognize nature only as appearance, and hence at the same time points to the supersensible substrate of nature; but it leaves this substrate wholly *undetermined*. Judgment, through its a priori principle of judging nature in terms of possible particular laws of nature, provides nature's supersensible substrate (within as well as without us) with *determinability by the intellectual power*. But reason, through its a priori practical law, gives this same substrate *determination*. Thus judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom.

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Appendix:

Kinds of judgment:

1. Determinative judgment: A — a, b, c, d. Subsumption under a law, rule, or concept
2. Reflective judgment: a, b, c, d — A. Comparison, abstraction

2 a. Aesthetic judgment: a, b, c, d — X

Purposiveness without a purpose

2ai. Judgment of beauty: purposiveness of objects to subject

2aii. Judgment of sublime: purposiveness of subject to objects

2b. Teleological judgment: a, b, c, d — A

Purposiveness with a purpose

2bi. Formal teleology: reference to subject. This figures in all the sciences as a criterion of elegance.

2bii. Objective teleology: no reference to subject.

Example: Biology

4. Kant's Critique of Empiricism

1

All philosophy that is constructive must also be destructive; every original thinker must also be polemical. The polemical side of Kant is very much in evidence in the discussion of the four moments. Among other things, Kant is here concerned to show what distinguishes his position from the **rationalists** on one side, from the **empiricists** on the other. I shall follow these two arguments, rather than Kant's own architectonic, which relies on the table of categories as stated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to arrive at the four moments of the beautiful, one each of quality, quantity, relation, and modality.

Today I would like to discuss Kant's critique of **empiricist aesthetics**. The first moment raises the key issue. The central idea here is that of **interest**. Consider the explanation at the end of the First Moment:

Taste is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking devoid of all interest. The object of such a liking is called *beautiful*. (53)

- a. **Taste** is the faculty of judging an object beautiful or ugly.
- b. It does so by **referring it to a satisfaction or dissatisfaction** we feel as we look at or listen to it.
- c. That satisfaction is said to be **entirely disinterested**.

At a first glance it might seem that Kant is here not so much disagreeing as agreeing with the British empiricists. Could they not have agreed with what is said in the first moment? Think of the word "taste." It is of course a metaphor. When I find what I taste pleasant, say the sweet taste of a peach, is my pleasure not immediate? Does interest play any part in it? And must the same not be said of the pleasure I take in some beautiful object?

2

Kant's use of the word "taste" is in keeping with what then was common usage. Addison, in the *Universal Spectator* (1747) has this to say about taste:

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Of all our favorite Words lately, none has been more in Vogue, nor so long held in esteem, as that of Taste. (xxvii)²⁹

Six years later Horace Walpole will complain that the word had come to be used so loosely as to have lost all meaning. As I suggested earlier, the opposition of **reason and taste** helps to define the intellectual climate of the 17th and 18th centuries.

How was taste understood? Think back to the example of clear and confused knowledge that Leibniz gave: I see the picture. I am altogether convinced that what I see is beautiful. But I cannot justify my conviction. What makes me so certain, we might say, is not reason, but taste. But what is taste. Baumgarten, as we saw, attempts to answer this question.

As I pointed out, this concept of taste as a faculty that cannot give an account of its successes raises the question: how is taste acquired? No doubt, associating with persons of taste, being confronted with the examples they set, is a good setting for the development of good taste. If some people have good taste and are recognized as such by their success, can one not acquire good taste by patterning oneself after people of acknowledged good taste? Thus together with the concept of taste, the idea of a model to be imitated also becomes important. The age of **taste** is thus also the age of the **academy**, of rules: rules how to think, how to paint, and how to move at court.

But besides this academic tendency, there is always the other, in tension with it: let the **heart** speak. Good sense, Boileau writes, stands even above Virgil. The tension to which I have pointed could not find clearer expression than in this saying. Heart, feeling (Bouhours), delicacy become important terms in aesthetics. Dubos speaks of a **sixth sense** that judges beauty. This would make further analysis of what constitutes beauty as fruitless as speculation about what constitutes yellow. Both, on this view, are givens, there to be experienced by those who have the proper sense, where the sixth sense that appreciates beauty is presumably qualitatively different from and more rare than sight: an inner sense of sorts. Aesthetic experience is then interpreted as another pleasant sensation, not so very different from the

²⁹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Ed. and Intro by James T. Boulton. (Notre Dame: U.of Notre Dame Press, 1968). Page references are to this edition, Roman numerals refer to the excellent introduction.

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pleasures we take in good food. Consider this passage from Dubos, *Reflections* (tr. Nugent, 1748):

Do we ever reason, in order to know whether a ragoo be good or bad; and has it ever entered into anybody's head, after having settled the geometrical principle of taste, and defined the qualities of each ingredient that enters into the composition of these messes, to examine into the proportion observed in their mixture, to decide whether the ragoo is good or bad? No, this is never practiced. We have a sense given us by nature to distinguish whether the cook acted according to the rules of his art. People taste the ragoo, and tho' unacquainted with those rules, they are able to tell, whether it be good or no. The same may be said of productions of the mind and of pictures made to please and move us. (xxxvi)

So understood, aesthetic experience cannot involve an appeal to rules. Such an appeal is incompatible with the required immediacy. Nor does interest seem to come into play. Bad taste, on this view, is a bit like bad eyesight.

3

The country in which the theory of taste finds its final home and most influential exponents is England. I suggested earlier that we can understand the English gentleman as a version of the person of good taste.

A characteristic example of the literature on taste is Hume's essay *Of the Standard of Taste*. Hume fundamentally agrees with those who say that sentiment or taste is always right. *De gustibus non est disputandum*. But isn't there such a thing as bad taste? To distinguish between good and bad taste we have to find a standard of taste. This is provided by an empirical investigation into what has generally pleased everywhere and at all times. It is of course quite possible that at a particular time a majority will find something beautiful that a few years later will be disliked. Such short lived beauty, Hume suggests, hardly deserves the name. **Durable admiration**, on the other hand, is a sure sign of the beauty of objects, according to Hume. There does thus seem to be a general principle of approbation and blame. If you don't find beautiful what has generally been judged beautiful you lack **delicacy of imagination**.

The profound tension that pervades the entire discussion of taste is thus also found in Hume: we meet on one hand with a stress on sentiment that finally has no justification, on the

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other with a stress on rules to be discovered by empirical investigation. The ancients are the great examples. Hume, too, calls that artist wisest who entrusts himself to these models. Objective rules and subjective freedom thus collide. The artist and the connoisseur of the eighteenth century thus find themselves caught between these two extremes, between the rules of the academy and the freedom of taste. And rules are discovered by observation or established by genius.

Just in passing I should mention Shaftesbury here, who in his *Characteristicks* (1714) had linked the doctrine of subjective sentiment to Platonic inspiration. Like so many exponents of the theory of sentiment he expresses a certain distrust of his own principles, e.g. when he argues that one should derive one's rules from the study of the best statues. Here he reflects the classicizing academicism of the day: statues are better than nature. On the other hand he writes: *the most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system.* (290) And yet he also insists: *art itself is severe, its rules are rigid* (340) or *Harmony is harmony by nature, let men judge ever so ridiculously of musick. So is symmetry and propotion founded still in nature, let men's fancy rove ever so barbarous, or their fashions ever so gothick in their architecture, sculpture, or whatever designing art.* (35) It is essentially the same tension that we still find in Hume. In the political realm it is the tension between **individualism and absolutism** (cf. Hobbes), where absolutism allied itself quite readily with **academicism**.

It is thus no mere accident that French art in the time of Louis XIV should have become academic: the discipline of the ancients, of the renaissance, of Poussin, is opposed to the lack of discipline of a Borromini. Art is disciplined from above. French academicians thus gave grades to the great artists of the past. Roger de Piles suggested composition, drawing, color, expression as the proper rating categories. Raphael and Rubens tied with a 65, while Titian got a 51 and Rembrandt a 50. Raphael received 18 points both in drawing and expression, Rembrandt got only 6 in drawing and 12 in expression.

4

Hume's "Dissertation on Taste" appeared only two months before Burke's *Enquiry*, which Kant appears to have read with great care. He read it presumably in the German translation by Christian Garve, which was published anonymously by Kant's publisher Hartknoch in Riga in 1773.

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Burke's decision to write an introduction on taste as a preface for the second edition of his *Enquiry* may well be, as Boulton suggests in his Editor's Introduction, a response to Hume. Burke is much more confident that it is possible to establish a standard of taste than Hume:

On a superficial view we may seem to differ very widely from each other in our reasonings, and no less in our pleasures: but, notwithstanding this difference, which I think to be rather apparent than real, it is probable that the standard both of reason and taste is the same in all human creatures. For if there were not some principles of judgment as well as of sentiment common to all mankind, no hold could possibly be taken either on their reason or their passions, sufficient to maintain the ordinary correspondence of life.

One could call this a quasi-transcendental argument. The *ordinary correspondence of life* is a necessary condition of our social being. It presupposes not only a common standard of reason, but also a common standard of taste, although Burke suggests that the need for the latter is not as great:

The initial definition of taste that Burke then offers leaves open whether it is a sense or a judgment:

, no more than that faculty or those faculties of the mind, which are affected with, or which form a judgment of, the works of imagination and the elegant arts. This is, I think, the most general idea of that word, and what is the least connected with any particular theory.

Burke insists that the natural powers of man, sense, imagination, are pretty much the same in all human beings.

Burke concludes his discussion of taste with the claim that the pleasure of the senses, including even that of taste, that most ambiguous of the senses, are pretty much the same for all human beings. We should note here that the sense of taste would seem to stand in somewhat the same relationship to the sense of sight, as aesthetic taste does to the understanding.

Burke next turns to the imagination, the *representative of the senses*, which, by extending to the realm of the possible, also vastly extends the province of pleasure and pain. Only as beings of imagination are we capable of hope or fear. In imagination we experience something like the pain or pleasure we experience when actually experiencing the object in question. But apart from their content, the representations furnished by the imagination please just as

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resemblances, a pleasure, familiar from Aristotle's *Poetics*, that Burke here simply observes and does not attempt to explain. But our experience of resemblances depends to a considerable degree on past experience and observation, on a certain kind of knowledge.

Differences in taste are then to be explained first of all in terms of differences in knowledge. The connoisseur sees resemblances where the layman does not notice anything. He also brings to the experience a much more developed set of expectations, concerning e.g. probabilities and the like.

By now it has become possible to substitute for the initial definition of taste a fuller description:

On the whole, it appears to me, that what is called taste, in its most general acceptation, is not a simple idea, but is partly made up of a perception of the primary pleasures of sense, of the secondary pleasures of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the various relations of these, and concerning the human passions, manners, and actions. All this is requisite to form taste, and the groundwork of all these is the same in the human mind; for as the senses are the great originals of all our ideas, and consequently of all our pleasures, if they are not uncertain and arbitrary, the whole groundwork of taste is common to all, and therefore there is a sufficient foundation for a conclusive reasoning on these matters. (23)

Bad taste is, Burke suggests, primarily due to a defect of judgment, although, like Hume, Burke observes that there is in fact more agreement about matters of taste than on matters that depend on naked reason, less agreement about propositions in philosophy than about the merit of a particular poem.

5

Burke thus rejects the then commonly held view that taste requires something like a special sense, as e.g. Hutcheson had insisted in his *Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. He there speaks of the appreciation of the beautiful as being **immediate, by means of a special sense**. Such appreciation of the beautiful is said to precede and to be **independent of all interest** (Sect I, Art X, XIV, XV). Burke denies that we need to invoke a special sense, but he also suggests that the beautiful is immediately apprehended. And if the aesthetic

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experience is characterized by its **immediacy**, it cannot involve an appeal to **rules**. Such an appeal is incompatible with the required immediacy.

Similarly it cannot involve an interest, it would seem. For what is **interest**? Consider Kant's definition:

Interest is what we call the liking we connect with the presentation of an object's existence. Hence such a liking always refers at once to our power of desire, either as the basis that determines it, or at any rate as necessarily connected with that determining basis. (45)

I am interested in something that will satisfy me. I call the apple beautiful because it is good to eat. That would be an interested judgment and thus not a proper use of the word beautiful as Kant would have us use it. Thus I may be interested in art, e.g. in looking at or owning works of art. I want such works to exist. But my interest in art should not be confused with the pleasure I have when actually looking at the work of art. At that point I am satisfied. While I am actually enjoying the beautiful there would seem to be no interest. The immediacy of enjoyment would seem to leave no more room for interest than for attention to rules. Thus it would seem that Kant, when he insists on the disinterested nature of aesthetic enjoyment finds himself in fundamental agreement with the British.

Yet he himself makes this interpretation impossible by arguing that **the agreeable or pleasant is bound up with interest**, where the pleasant is defined as **that which pleases in sensation**.

Now, that a judgment by which I declare an object to be agreeable expresses an interest in that object is already obvious from the fact that, by means of sensation, the judgment arouses a desire for objects of that kind, so that the liking presupposes something other than mere judgment about some object: it presupposes that I have referred the existence of the object to my state insofar as that state is affected by such an object. This is why we say of the agreeable not merely that we *like* it but that it *gratifies* us. When I speak of the agreeable, I am not granting mere approval: the agreeable produces an inclination. Indeed, what is agreeable in the liveliest way requires no judgment at all about the character of the object, as we can see in people who aim at nothing but enjoyment (this is the word

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we use to mark the intensity of the gratification): they like to dispense with all judging. (48)

In what sense is such pleasure interested? And what does Kant mean when he calls aesthetic pleasure disinterested?

Crucial here is the way Kant insists that both the **agreeable** and the **good** have a reference to the faculty of desire, and they bring with them, the agreeable a satisfaction pathologically conditioned by stimuli (*stimuli*), the good a pure practical liking that is determined not just by the representation of the object, but also by the presentation of the subject's connection with the existence of the object; i.e. what we like is not just the object but its existence as well.

A judgment of taste, on the other hand, is merely *contemplative*, i.e., it is a judgment that is indifferent to the existence of the object: it [considers] the character of the object only by holding it up to our feeling of pleasure and displeasure. Nor is this contemplation, as such, directed to concepts, for a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment (whether theoretical or practical) and hence is neither *based* on concepts, nor directed to them as *purposes*. (51)

Interest, Kant thus tells us, is **interest in existence**. Interest is concern: I care for something or someone. The human being is interested because he is a being in need. Indeed his need is twofold, in keeping with his twofold being. As a being of nature the human being is in need of what satisfies his appetites and desires. As a moral being he strives for autonomy. As a sensible being he is interested in the **agreeable** or **pleasant**, as a reasonable being in the **good**. The former point is developed in par. 3, the latter in par. 4.

6

Let me consider the former (I shall return to the latter next time): The interest in the pleasant is an interest to submerge myself in my natural being, an interest that seeks to appropriate and in such appropriation to enjoy. The pleasure of food provides the obvious example. Such pleasure is tied to an **interest in the existence of something** which, thus appropriated, will give me pleasure. Kant insists that in such pleasure we are **pathologically conditioned**: I allow something to happen to me. Thus when I say something is pleasant in this

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sense I say that some desire is satisfied by this object. The human being here depends on something else, is thus not autonomous.

Although correct, it may thus be misleading to say that what distinguishes aesthetic pleasure from mere pleasure on Kant's view is that one is interested while the other is not. The key difference is rather that one has its **center within the human being**, while the other depends on the existence of some object. When I reflect and call something pleasant I can say that in this case an interest is connected with my appreciation, while when I reflect on my appreciation of the beautiful I recognize that this is not the case.

But why is the judgment that something is beautiful not interested in whether something exists? In one sense this claim would seem to be obviously false. Do we not want there to be beautiful objects, objects that give us aesthetic pleasure? What then is the difference between the beautiful and the pleasant? Kant might ask: but do we desire what is beautiful? Or rather: what is our relationship to the beautiful object? When we appreciate the beauty of something, Kant insists, we do not want to devour it; we want to **let it be**, keep our **distance** from it. The existence of the beautiful object has been bracketed. Thus the beauty of a Chinese bridge does not become less beautiful when mirrored in a quiet pond; quite the opposite. The same holds of a rainbow. The irrealty of what we see may well strike us here as enhancing its beauty. If I had a strong enough imagination to mentally reproduce a certain piece of music I would not need to hear it to find it beautiful, if Kant is right. Something analogous could be said about some painting.

To say that the aesthetic judgment is disinterested is to say that it does not demand the other as existing, as the beautiful object is not **appropriated**, but merely **contemplated**. Before I can enjoy an object aesthetically I have to free myself from it and for it. That is to say, I may not look at it as an object of desire. If a painting does not allow me to assume this detached position I have failed from an aesthetic point of view. If, for example, when looking at a Dutch still-life showing a beautiful ham and a glass filled with red wine my hunger and thirst are aroused, I have failed as an aesthetic observer, where this may have its source more in my inability to free myself from my desires or in the painting. Similarly, if, when looking at a nude by Titian, my sexual appetite is aroused, then from the aesthetic point of view, at least how Kant understands it, this must be considered a failure, whatever other pleasures I may derive from it. From this it would follow that there cannot be beautiful pornography. If we follow Kant, to

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show that something succeeds as an aesthetic object is sufficient to show that it is not pornography.

On this view, what distinguishes aesthetic enjoyment from, say, our enjoyment of food or similar pleasures, is that the former is characterized by a peculiar distance between subject and object. Aesthetic enjoyment asks nothing of what it enjoys. It lets it be.

Kant here anticipates what later was to be called **psychical** or aesthetic **distance**. Edward Bullough wrote a famous essay on psychical distance, which has become a point of departure for countless subsequent discussions. The main point is simple enough: aesthetic experience is said to have "a *negative*, inhibitory aspect — the cutting out of the practical side of things and of our practical attitude to them — and a positive side — the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of distance."³⁰ In aesthetic experience the human being leaves behind or brackets out the everyday claims that objects have on us. We step so to speak back from things, leave behind our usual engagement in the world. Such disengagement is a presupposition of aesthetic enjoyment. We could speak in this connection, with Arthur Danto, of a **transfiguration of the commonplace**. Duchamp demonstrated the power of dislocation that establishes distance with his ready-mades. His snow-shovel, exhibited in a museum with the label "In Advance of the Broken Arm," is an obvious illustration of the transfiguration of the commonplace.

Kant, no doubt, would have pointed out that mere distancing is not sufficient to establish beauty. The judgment that something is ugly is also an aesthetic judgment. But in this case we are not satisfied, but dissatisfied. Of what nature then is the satisfaction we take in the beautiful? Kant links such satisfaction to the **free and harmonious play of imagination and understanding**. Already in the introduction Kant writes this of the apprehension of beautiful forms:

Now if in this comparison a given presentation unintentionally brings the imagination (the power of a priori intuitions) into harmony with the understanding (the power of concepts), and this harmony arouses a feeling of pleasure, then this object must thereupon be regarded as purposive for the reflective power of

³⁰ Edward Bullough, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Esthetic Principle," in *A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology*, ed. Melvin Rader (New York: Holt, 1952), p. 404.

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judgment. A judgment of this sort is an aesthetic judgment about an object's purposiveness; it is not based on any concept we have of the object. (30)

The beautiful object looks purposive; but to say that something looks purposive is to say also that imagination and understanding are in harmony, and we can speak of a harmonious play as long as the aesthetic judgment has not given way to a teleological judgment, that is to say, as long as such play is not put to rest by the discovery of a determinate purpose. I shall return to this point next time. Here I want to emphasize only that for Kant it is precisely the **form** of the beautiful that matters — its material existence is unimportant. When Kant speaks of an entirely disinterested satisfaction he means one that is not dependent on the material aspect of what satisfies it. It is as if the material art object were only an occasion allowing us to appreciate a particular form. It follows from this that from a purely aesthetic point of view it matters little whether a particular work of art is enjoyed is the original or a very good copy: what lets us prefer the original to a very good reproduction of, say, a Rembrandt drawing has little to do with aesthetic judgments. **This suggests that that aura Walter Benjamin suggests the art-work must lose in this age of its technical reproducibility is lost already when a work of art is considered an aesthetic object in Kant's sense.**

A question that must be raised in this connection is whether Kant is in fact right to distinguish so sharply between aesthetic pleasure and sense pleasure. Kant places so much emphasis on the **pure** imagination and the understanding that whatever appeals not by its form, but by its material qualities, say by its tone colors or colors, would seem to be incidental to art. Like the neo-classicists Kant, too, has to be suspicious of painting that relies on the texture of the paint or music that relies, say, on the lush tone of a cello. Such suspicion of paint or tone color would seem to be of a piece with his insistence that aesthetic interest be divorced from erotic interest. **If Plato linked love and beauty, Kant divorces them.** I shall have to return to this problematic divorce.

7

The second moment, which characterizes the beautiful as "that which pleases universally without a concept," yields a second way in which Kant's view differs from that of the empiricists. If the beautiful and the pleasant were one, then it would be impossible to escape the conclusion that ultimately there is **no disputing about taste**. There would be no reason to demand

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agreement in such matters. All one could hope for is that it might be possible to generate empirically certain general observations, in the manner of Burke, Hume, and the young Kant. And yet, Kant insists, when we make an aesthetic judgment we **demand universal agreement**. The aesthetic judgment speaks as if with a universal voice.

We can see at this point, that nothing is postulated in a judgment of taste except such a universal voice about a liking unmediated by concepts. Hence all that is postulated is the possibility of a judgment that is aesthetic and yet can be considered valid for everyone. (60)

At first this seems difficult to reconcile with the fact that aesthetic judgment is inevitably **particular**, a judgment that what I am now looking at or listening to is beautiful, not a judgment that things of this type are beautiful. The latter judgment would have to be based on experience. And is it really this particular something that I can call beautiful? Do I not call it beautiful only with reference to the particular delight I feel as I look at it? In a sense then the appreciation of beauty would seem to be inevitably private or subjective, just as the good taste of some dish is not an objective fact. But how then are we to reconcile this privacy with the fact that the aesthetic judgment speaks with a universal voice?

Usually when we make a judgment that demands the assent of others we are willing to exhibit some publicly available ground or reason in which this judgment is rooted. Beauty is not in this sense a publicly available fact. To be sure, any beautiful thing, say a work of art, is also a thing in the world and a great many true statements can be made about it. But while such statements may be true of the object, they will inevitably fail to do justice to what makes this a beautiful object. The aesthetic appeal of a work of art may have its basis in certain objective facts, but should not be confused with them. It has its root in the harmonious interplay of the faculties of the person judging:

When this happens, the cognitive powers brought into play by this presentation are in free play, because no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition. Hence the mental state in this presentation must be a feeling, accompanying the given presentation, of a free play of the presentational powers directed to cognition in general. Now if a presentation by which an object is given is, in general, to become cognition, we need *imagination* to combine the manifold of intuition and *understanding* to provide the unity of the concept uniting the

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[component] presentations. This state of *free play* of the cognitive powers, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given, must be universally communicable; for cognition, the determination of the object with which given presentations are to harmonize (in any subject whatsoever) is the only way of presenting that holds for everyone. (62}

My judgment that some object is indeed beautiful refers that object to the special delight that I feel as I look at it. But if Kant is right, I am right to think that every human being is able to share such delight. The reason is that the faculties involved, imagination and understanding, as conditions of the very possibility of experience, are common to all human beings. To recognize someone as a fellow human being is to know them to be in possession of these faculties and thus to be capable of making an aesthetic judgment. Not that there is some objective feature or characteristic to which we can point when we judge something to be beautiful. The aesthetic judgment is subjective, and yet it is entitled to assume that all human beings, as beings of imagination and understanding, are capable of responding in the same manner.

Essentially the same point returns in the fourth moment where Kant suggests that when making an aesthetic judgment we ask for the agreement of all because we are in possession of a ground common to all, a **common sense**, by which he means no more than the interplay of imagination and understanding.

But if cognitions are to be communicated, then the mental state, i.e. the attunement of the cognitive powers that is required for cognition in general — namely the proportion [between them which is] suitable for turning a presentation (by which an object is given to us) into cognition — must also be universally communicable. For this attunement is the subjective condition of [the process of] cognition, and without it cognition [in the sense of] the effect [of this process] could not arise. And this [attunement] does actually take place whenever a given object, by means of the senses, induces the imagination to its activity of combining the manifold, the imagination in turn inducing the understanding to its activity of providing unity for this manifold in concepts. But this attunement of the cognitive powers varies in its proportion, depending on what difference there is among the objects that are given. And yet there must be one attunement in which this inner relation is most conducive to the (mutual) quickening of the two mental powers with a view to

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cognition (of given objects) in general; and the only way this attunement can be determined is by feeling (rather than by concepts). Moreover this attunement itself, and hence also the feeling of it (when a presentation is given), must be universally communicable, while the universal communicability of a feeling presupposes a common sense. (88)

The feeling of pleasure, which results from the harmonious interplay of these faculties, can therefore be postulated to be a feeling everyone is capable of experiencing when in the presence of some beautiful object.

Next time I want to turn to Kant's critique of the rationalists, especially of Baumgarten.

5. Kant's Critique of Rationalism

1

Last time I focused on Kant's analysis of the beautiful as subject of an entirely **disinterested** satisfaction. I spent quite a bit of time trying to explain what Kant means by **interest**. Interest, I pointed out, is linked to need. **The person who is interested is oriented towards the future.** To define the beautiful as object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction is to suggest that aesthetic experience allows us to lose ourselves in the present. Thus it frees us from our usual worries and anxieties. **In aesthetic experience we take our leave from the usual business of life.**

If Kant understands the human being as a being in need, this need, I pointed out, is twofold, in keeping with Kant's understanding of the human being as belonging partly to nature, to the world of sense, partly to reason. As a being of nature the human being is interested in physical pleasure. As a being of reason, or as a moral being, the human being is interested in the good. If we can term the confusion of the beautiful with the pleasant the **hedonistic fallacy**, we can call the confusion of the beautiful with good the **moral fallacy**: An object is called beautiful because it agrees with certain ideas we have concerning what ought to be. We might thus find a painting beautiful because we find it morally uplifting. The work is measured by some conception of what ought to be.

As I suggested already in our very first session, the confusion of aesthetic and moral categories was part of the aesthetics of neo-classicism. Winckelmann, the most influential theorist of this movement is quite representative of this when he speaks of the quiet grandeur and noble simplicity of the Greek soul, which, he thinks, had found its unsurpassed expression in the masterpieces of Greek art, which he holds up as standards that are to be imitated and aspired to, even if they can never be surpassed. Related is the way French classicists identified their fight for linearism, simplicity, and the stress on rules, so opposed to the painterly qualities and the capriciousness of a Fragonard, or, more generally of the rococo, with a struggle for the noble and good and against irrationalism. Ingres was the self-appointed defender not just of linearism and the classical tradition, but of morality as well.³¹ According to this view, art ought to be rooted in

³¹ See W. Friedländer, *David to Delacroix*, tr. R. Goldwater (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1952).

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a state of affairs that ought to be. Thus it teaches us. Tolstoy has given us what is perhaps the most famous defense of this moralistic view of art in his essay *What is Art?* Moralistic criteria already play an important role in Plato's condemnation of the poets.

One consequence of the “moral fallacy,” if indeed it is a fallacy — the term ‘fallacy’ may unduly prejudge the matter — is that the aesthetic experience is not viewed as self-justifying and its own reward, but as essentially an incentive to action. It is to fill us with the desire to realize what morality demands. It thus becomes a tool in the moral education of the citizens. The work of art should carry a message. It should edify. Furthermore, it should be possible to detach this message from the work of art. Kant's first moment thus distinguishes the aesthetic judgment from all moral judgments by insisting that the pleasure we take in the beautiful is free from all interest, while moral concern is essentially concern with actions to be done.

Good is what, by means of reason, we like through its mere concept. We call something (viz., if it is good for something useful) good for [this or that] if we like it only as a means. But we call something intrinsically good if we like it for its own sake. In both senses of the term, the good always contains the concept of a purpose, consequently a relation of reason to a volition (that is at least possible), and hence a linking for the existence of an object or action. In other words, it contains some interest or other.

In order to consider something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is [meant] to be, i.e., I must have a [determinate] concept of it. But I do not need this in order to find beauty in something. Flowers, free designs, lines aimlessly intertwined and called foliage: these have no significance, depend on no determinate concept; and yet we like [*gefallen*] them.

(48/49)

2

The second moment further develops the difference between the aesthetic and the moral judgment by insisting that the **beautiful pleases without any concept**. The aesthetic judgment is not bound to any rule. It is impossible to tell someone that he ought to like a particular work of art because it exhibits certain qualities, e.g. expresses certain uplifting moral ideals. Suppose you insist that one ought to like some manifold a, b, c, d, because it exhibits a certain concept A.

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Why should I like A? Suppose you defend A on moral grounds. Then what you will have is a moral, not an aesthetic judgment. Suppose you argue that A is in the interest of the state. Again you will not have an aesthetic, but a political judgment. But let me cite Kant:

Objective purposiveness can be cognized only by referring the manifold to a determinate purpose, and hence through a concept. Even from this it is already evident that the beautiful, which we judge on the basis of a merely formal purposiveness, i.e. a purposiveness without a purpose, is quite independent of the concept of the good. For the good presupposes an objective purposiveness, i.e. it presupposes that we refer the object to a determinate purpose. (73)

Objective purposiveness is precisely what is expressed by the diagram: a, b, c, d — A. Moral judgments of art are of this sort. But this, Kant insists, is incompatible with the character of the beautiful as a purposiveness without a purpose. You cannot state an A, a *focus perfectionis*, when you appreciate something beautiful. The beautiful is not good for anything. It has no purpose. Instead of A we should put X.

But could we not follow Baumgarten and locate the purpose that justifies some beautiful object within rather than without it, make it part of the work of art, as Baumgarten did when he spoke of the theme of the work of art. Once again let me quote Kant:

Objective purposiveness may be extrinsic, in which case it is an object's *utility*, or intrinsic, in which case it is an object's *perfection*. If our liking for an object is one on account of which we call the object beautiful, then it cannot rest on a concept of the object's utility, as is sufficiently clear from the two preceding chapters; for then it would not be a direct liking for the object, while that is the essential condition of a judgment about beauty. But perfection, which is an objective intrinsic purposiveness, is somewhat closer to the predicate beauty, and that is why some philosophers of repute have identified perfection with beauty, adding, however, that it is *perfection thought confusedly*. It is of the utmost importance, in a critique of taste, to decide if indeed beauty can actually be analyzed into the concept of perfection. (73)

Kant is of course referring here first of all to Baumgarten and his followers, such as Georg Friedrich Meier (1718-1777), when he speaks of celebrated philosophers. But why do we have to go beyond Baumgarten? Does Baumgarten's insistence that the judgment of beauty is not

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clear and distinct not give him a ready answer to Kant's charge that the beautiful pleases immediately, that there is no reason or concept we could state to explain **adequately** why something is beautiful. Baumgarten would of course have agreed to this. To repeat: why then is it necessary to go beyond Baumgarten? But let me continue with par. 15:

In order to judge objective purposiveness, we always need the concept of a purpose, and (if the purposiveness is not to be extrinsic — utility, but intrinsic) it must be the concept of the intrinsic [*inner*] purpose that contains the basis for the object's inner [*inner*] possibility. Now insofar as a purpose as such is something whose *concept* can be regarded as the basis of the possibility of the object itself, presenting objective purposiveness in a thing presupposes the concept of the thing, i.e. what sort of thing it is [meant] to be; and the harmony of the thing's manifold with this concept (which provides the rule for connecting this manifold) is the thing's qualitative perfection. (74)

Baumgarten, as we have seen, does not understand the theme, which organizes a work of art into a whole, as a concept. That theme, he insists, is not grasped by a clear and distinct understanding. It is only grasped by **taste**, the *analogon rationis*.

But just such insistence on a confused quasi-judgment, Kant insists, does not make sense.

Now a judgment of taste is an aesthetic judgment, i.e., a judgment that rests on subjective bases, and whose determining basis cannot be a concept and hence cannot be the concept of a determinate purpose. Hence in thinking of beauty, a formal subjective purposiveness, we are not at all thinking of a perfection in the object, an allegedly formal and yet also objective purposiveness; and hence the distinction between the concepts of the beautiful and of the good which alleges that the two differ only in their logical form, with the first merely being a confused and the second a distinct concept of perfection, while the two are otherwise the same in content and origin, is in error. For in that case there would be no difference in kind between them, but a judgment of taste would be just as much a cognitive judgment as is a judgment by which we declare something to be good. So, for example, the common man bases his judgment that deceit is wrong on confused rational principles, and the philosopher bases his on distinct ones, but both at bottom base their judgment on one and the same rational principles. In fact, however, as I have

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already pointed out, an aesthetic judgment is unique in kind and provides absolutely no cognition (not even a confused one) of the object; only a logical judgment does that. (74/75)

Kant has to reject Baumgarten's understanding of beauty as sensible perfection because of the sharp division he has drawn between sensibility and understanding, distinguishing himself in this respect from both the German rationalists Leibniz, Wolff, and Baumgarten and from the British empiricists, e.g. Hume, who had all insisted that there is a continuum that links the two, although they had placed different emphases on the poles of the continuum, the former understanding percepts as confused concepts, the latter understanding concepts as washed out percepts. Neither a sense judging nor a sensible understanding makes any sense to Kant. Thus he has to reject Baumgarten's interpretation of taste as an *analogon rationis*. According to Kant, there is no such analogy. **At stake here is also the relationship of taste to the understanding: how can the reflective judgment ascend from the particular to the universal without invoking something like an aesthetic intuition of family resemblance?**

Kant rejects the teleological judgment as an interpretation of the aesthetic judgment, because it involves an act of abstraction, while, if Kant is right, every beautiful object must resist such abstraction if I am to continue to appreciate it as beautiful. If I were to succeed in finding an A that totally accounted for the beautiful manifold a, b, c, d, the mind would no longer feel free. The work would no longer feel inexhaustible. When I experience a work of art as totally accounted for by certain rules, I no longer find beauty in it. Works of art are not predictable or reproducible. Academic training cannot give rules for the production of great art. Kant echoes here a point with which by now we should be familiar: the presence of the conceptual destroys the aesthetic, for then the work of art is no longer something that pleases just in being seen. Rather our mind turns to the idea the artist is expressing, to its content. A genuinely beautiful work of art will not allow for the abstraction of such a content from the work of art. Or rather, when it permits the abstraction of such a content — say a painting represents the Crucifixion — that fact will have nothing to do with its success as a work of art. The very term "content" invites confusion: as if we could oppose what the work means from its form. In keeping with the aesthetic conception Archibald MacLeish's claimed: the poem should not mean, but be! Kant's analysis of the beauty implies a similar demand. Implied is, e.g. a rejection of allegory. It is of course often meaningful to speak of the content of a work of art. And it may well be the case

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that we take a special interest in certain works of art because of their content. Kant knows this. But he would insist that our appreciation of such works is no longer a purely aesthetic appreciation. **This is not to say, however, that art, according to Kant, should be pure in that sense.**

3

The crucial distinction between **free** and **merely accessory or dependent beauty**, which Kant introduces in par. 16 and which dominates the discussion of the Third Moment at first seems to add little to what has already been said. Dependent beauty presupposes a concept of what a thing ought to be like. Free beauty, on the other hand is independent of such a concept. The examples of free beauty Kant gives are thought provoking. I considered the relevant passage already in our very first session:

Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly anyone apart from the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is [meant] to be;

Were such knowledge to come into play, we would have, not a free, but a dependent beauty. Something like what Kant calls our normal idea of, say a rose, would enter our judgment, which as a result would no longer be a pure aesthetic judgment.

Kant recognizes here a **natural purpose**, but in a pure aesthetic judgment that purpose is **disregarded**, bracketed. It is thus possible to look at things that clearly have a purpose in a way that brackets that purpose. Utensils can thus be looked at as aesthetic objects. As Panofsky points out,

It is possible to experience every object, natural or manmade, aesthetically. We do this, when we just look at it (or listen to it) without relating it, intellectually or emotionally, to anything outside of itself. When a man looks at a tree from the point of view of a carpenter, he will associate it with the various uses to which he might put the wood; and when he looks at it from the point of view of an ornithologist, he will associate it with the birds that might nest in it. When a man at a horse race watches the animal on which he has put his money, he will associate its performance with his desire that it may win. Only he who

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simply and wholly abandons himself to the object of his perception will experience it aesthetically.³²

Aesthetic beholding may be defined in terms of such **absorption** in what it beholds.³³ No longer do our usual cares and concerns dominate our sight; we are free to attend to what lies before our eyes.

This kind of bracketing would seem to be a defining characteristic of such judgments, where in our quote it would seem to be significant that what is bracketed is the **reproductive purpose** of the flower's organs.

4

Let me continue with the quote:

and even he, while recognizing it as the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural purpose when he judges the flower by taste.

Kant, as I pointed out, recognizes here a **natural purpose**, but that purpose is **disregarded**, bracketed. What, indeed, could **beauty** have to do with **reproduction**, with sex, with love?

And yet Kant himself had in his earlier *Betrachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* insisted on a special link between woman, who is said to be physically and spiritually more beautiful than the man, and beauty. With justice, he there observed, we speak of *das schöne Geschlecht*. There he linked beauty, if only in passing as it were (*ohne auch dasjenige zu vergessen*), to that **geheime Zauberkraft** ... *wodurch sie unsere Leidenschaft zum vorteilhaften Urteile vor sie geneigt macht*, to that “secret magic power by which it inclines our passion to make a favorable judgment.” (A 48) In the *Anthropologie* Kant will call passions a disease (226), **Krebsschäden**, a cancerous growth for practical reason, and for the most part incurable.

Throughout the *Critique of Judgment* Kant seems determined to break that link between beauty and love on which Burke and the young Kant, and we could point back to Plato and ahead to Freud, had insisted. Such determination brings to mind a remark Nietzsche makes in the *Genealogy of Morals*:

³² Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), p. 11.

³³ Cf. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), p. 147: “Presentness is grace.” Also *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: Chicago U. Press, 1988).

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If our aestheticians never weary of asserting in Kant's favor that, under the spell of beauty, one can *even* view undraped female statues "without interest," one may laugh a little at their expense: the experience of artists on this ticklish point are more "interesting" and Pygmalion was in any event *not* necessarily an unaesthetic man. Let us think all the more of the innocence of our aestheticians, which is reflected in such arguments; let us, for example, credit it to the honor of Kant that he should expatiate on the peculiar properties of the sense of touch with the naïveté of a country parson.³⁴

Nietzsche here has his fun with Kant. Beauty, he suggests, is too intimately tied to love to allow us to be convinced by Kant's understanding of the beautiful as object of an entirely disinterested perception.

In support of this claim that beauty is indeed closely tied to love let me cite here Xenophon's *Symposium*, written a few years after Plato's, which also had insisted in that link.³⁵ The situation is quite similar to that in Plato's dialogue: Socrates and some friends are invited to a symposium given by the wealthy Callias in honor of the beautiful young Autolycus, who had just won an important athletic competition. After some objections they finally accept the invitation. After a while Autolycus arrives with his father. The following passage describes the effect he has on those present.

A person who took note of the course of events would have come at once to the conclusion that beauty is in its essence something **regal**, especially when, as in the present case of Autolycus, its possessor joins with it modesty and sobriety. For in the first place, just **as the sudden glow of a light at night** draws all eyes to itself, so now the beauty of Autolycus compelled everyone to look at him. And again, there was not one of the onlookers who did not feel his **soul strangely stirred** by the boy; some of them grew quieter than before, others even assumed some kind of pose. Now it is true that all who are under the influence of any of the gods seem well worth gazing at; but whereas those who are possessed of the other gods have a

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* III, 6, trans. Walter Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 104.

³⁵ See Ernesto Grassi, *Die Theorie des Schönen in der Antike* (DuMont Dokumente. Reihe I: Kunstgeschichte. Deutung, Dokumente, 1962). Grassi invites us to understand the passage cited below as perhaps the first phenomenological description of beauty.

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tendency to be sterner of countenance, more terrifying of voice, and more vehement, those who are inspired by chaste love have a more tender look, subdue their voices to more gentle tones, and assume a supremely noble bearing.

Such was the demeanor of Callias at this time under the influence of Love; and therefore he was an object well worth the gaze of those initiated into the worship of this god.³⁶

Xenophon's account gives us an account of the beautiful. Note these key features:

1. The beautiful is something regal. It stands out as a figure on the ground of the ordinary. The beautiful bids us look again. It **re-presents itself**. There is a sense in which every beautiful object can be said to **frame** itself.

2. Xenophon likens the beautiful to the sudden glow of a **light** at night, which draws all eyes to itself. In what sense then is beauty like a light? When the beautiful is likened to light, is Xenophon just repeating the first point? Light illuminates. It renders visible. **The beautiful renders visible**. It invites us to look again. Think of a person of striking beauty. And you should note that Xenophon's paradigm of a beautiful object is not a work of art, but a person.

3. The beautiful strangely stirs us. To insist on the strangeness of what stirs us is to suggest that it originates somewhere beyond the familiar and expected. The beautiful displaces us. **Something extraordinary seizes us**.

4. Xenophon goes on to suggest that what touches us is a god. Beauty is understood as **an epiphany of the divine in the mundane**.

5. But what touches us is not just any god, but **Love**, and Love, unlike other deities, which tend to put us in a state of frenzy, makes us more gentle and moves us to silence.

Like Plato, Xenophon links beauty and love. On this point at least the modern post-Kantian aesthetic understanding of beauty and the Greek understanding appear to be quite different. But the case is complicated by the following passage; Socrates is here complimenting Callias:

Now, I have always felt an admiration for your character, but at the present time I feel a much keener one, for I see that you are in love with a person who is not marked by dainty elegance or wanton effeminacy, but shows to the

³⁶ Xenophon, *Symposium*, I, 8 - 10, tr. O. J. Todd, in Xenophon, vol. IV, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1923), pp. 537 - 538.

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world physical strength and stamina, virile courage and sobriety. Setting one's heart on such traits gives an insight into the lover's character. Now, whether there is one Aphrodite or two, 'Heavenly' and 'Vulgar,' I do now know; for even Zeus, though considered one and the same, yet has many by-names. I do know, however, that in the case of Aphrodite there are separate altars and temples for the two, and also rituals, those of the 'Vulgar' Aphrodite excelling in looseness, those of the 'Heavenly' in chastity. One might conjecture, also that different types of love come from the different sources, carnal love from the 'Vulgar' Aphrodite, and from the 'Heavenly' spiritual love, love of friendship and of noble conduct.³⁷ (VIII, 9 - 11)

Either there are two Aphrodites, Socrates suggests here, or Aphrodite appears in two forms. And the same would appear to hold for love. There is a celestial, spiritual love and an earthly carnal love. And if we understand beauty, with Xenophon and Plato, as the object of love, then we should expect a similar doubling of beauty: on one hand a celestial, spiritual beauty, on the other a beauty very much of this world and linked to sexual desire.

In Xenophon's *Symposium*, as in Plato's, it would seem to be the Vulgar Aphrodite, who triumphs in the end. Towards the end of this symposium, Autolycus leaves with his father to take a walk; a Syracusan entertainer enters with this announcement:

"Gentlemen, Ariadne will now enter the chamber set apart for her and Dionysus; after that, Dionysus, a little flushed with wine drunk at the banquet of the gods, will come to join her; and then they will disport themselves together."³⁸

The onlookers viewed a Dionysus truly handsome, an Ariadne truly fair, not presenting a burlesque but offering genuine kisses with their lips; and they were all raised to a high pitch of enthusiasm as they looked on. For they overheard Dionysus asking her if she loved him, and heard her vowing that she did, so that not only Dionysus, but all the bystanders as well would have taken their oaths in confirmation that the youth and the maid surely felt a mutual affection. For theirs was the appearance not of actors who had been taught their poses, but of persons now permitted to satisfy their long-cherished desires. At last, the banqueters,

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 615 - 617.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 633.

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seeing them in each other's embrace and obviously leaving for the bridal couch, those who were unwedded swore that they would take to themselves wives, and those who were already married mounted horse and rode off to their wives that they might enjoy them. As for Socrates and the others who had lingered behind, they went out with Callias to join Lycon and his son in their walk.

So broke up the banquet held that evening.³⁹

Note how the participants in the symposium respond to the beautiful spectacle they have witnessed. The pantomime of Ariadne and Dionysus lets them be seized by a divinity, by love, but this time it is very much an earthly love. The heavenly love and the beauty that corresponds to it, on the other hand, lets us be silent, calms us, while Dionysian beauty awakens an earthly love that is very much interested, that spurs us to action; in this case the onlookers are filled with the desire to marry and to make love, where love is now understood very much as the love of a man and a woman.

We should note that Socrates and Callias alone are not swept up into this Dionysian frenzy. Socrates, who, according to Xenophon, in his defense to the Athenians called himself **the freest of all Athenians from bodily appetites**, does not fall under the spell of Dionysus, does not go home to his wife Xanthippe; instead, accompanied by Callias, he joins Autolycus and his father. He is under the spell of a very different kind of beauty.

Given that Greek association of beauty and love, how are we to understand the dissociation of love and beauty that characterizes the modern aesthetic understanding, articulated by Kant and Schopenhauer?

5

But let me continue with the Kant passage:

Hence the judgment is based on no perfection of any kind, no intrinsic purposiveness to which the combination of the manifold might refer. Many birds (the parrot, the humming-bird, the bird of paradise) and a lot of crustaceans in the sea are [free] beauties themselves [and] belong to no object determined by concepts as to the purpose, but we like them freely and on their own account.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 635

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Thus designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper, etc., mean nothing on their own; they represent [*vorstellen*] nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties. What we call fantasias in music (namely, music without a topic [*Thema*]), indeed all music not set to words, may also be included in the same class (76-77)

In our first session I remarked on the interesting choice of examples. Ornament and music are singled out. It was in the name of both that painting in the early twentieth century was to free itself from the rule of representation. We sense in the phrase “music without a topic [*Thema*]” a criticism of Baumgarten. At the same time Kant also gestures forwards to romanticism with his conception of a free beauty. Consider the following passage from Ferruccio Busoni's *A New Esthetic of Music*:

Such lust of liberation filled Beethoven, the romantic revolutionary, that he ascended one short step in the way leading music back to its loftier self: — a short step in the great task, a wide step in his own path. He did not quite reach absolute music, but in certain moments he divined it, as in the introduction to the fugue of the Sonata for Hammerclavier. Indeed, all composers have drawn nearest the true nature of music in preparatory and intermediary passages (preludes and transitions), where they felt at liberty to disregard symmetrical proportions, and unconsciously drew free breath. Even a Schumann (of so much lower stature) is seized, in such passages, by some feeling of the boundlessness of this pan-art (recall the transition to the last movement of the D-Minor symphony); and the same may be asserted of Brahms in the introduction to the Finale of the First Symphony.⁴⁰

In Kant we begin to feel this romantic sense of aesthetic freedom of which there is little trace in Baumgarten or Winckelmann, although the English had prepared the way for Kant. We should of course keep in mind that **freedom** in the Third Critique would seem to mean something quite different from the freedom of the moral person, who is free precisely when he acts in accord with the moral law that he bears within him. In aesthetic experience, we do not feel bound by any

⁴⁰ *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music* (New York: Dover, 1962)

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law. Freedom here suggests a return to the **spontaneity** of nature. Kant's conception of free beauty places itself in opposition to any restraints concepts might impose.

But if it is only in the judgment of free beauty that the judgment of taste can be said to be pure, most of our judgment of beauty are not thus free, but dependent on some concept or other:

But the beauty of a human being (and, as kinds subordinate to a human being, the beauty of a man or woman or child), or the beauty of a building (such as a church, palace, armory, or summer-house) does presuppose the concept of the purpose that determines what the thing is [meant] to be, and hence a concept of its perfection, and so it is merely adherent beauty. Now just as a connection of beauty, which properly concerns only form, with the agreeable (the sensation) prevented the judgment of taste from being pure, so does a connection of beauty with the good (i.e., as to how, in terms of the thing's purpose, the manifold is good for the thing itself) impair the purity of the judgment of taste, (77)

Our understanding of what a particular thing should look like limits what we are willing to accept as beautiful. This also applies to ornament.

Much that would be liked directly in intuition could be added to a building, if only the building were not [meant] to be a church. A figure could be embellished with all sorts of curlicues and light but regular lines, as the New Zealanders do with their tattoos, if only it were not the figure of a human being. And this human being might have had more delicate features and a facial structure with a softer and more likable outline, if only he were not [meant] to represent a man, let alone a warlike one. (77)

The passage invites us to think of the contemporary critique of rococo ornament.

But where only a free play of our presentational powers is to be sustained [*unterhalten*] (though under the condition that the understanding suffers no offense), as in the case of pleasure gardens, room decoration, all sorts of tasteful utensils, and so on, any regularity that has an air of constraint is [to be] avoided as much as possible. That is why the English taste in gardens, or the Baroque taste in furniture, carries the imagination's freedom very far, even to the verge of the grotesque, because it is precisely in this divorce from any constraint of a rule that

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the case is posited where taste can show its greatest perfection in designs made by the imagination. (93)

But this raises the question of what it is about a particular form that does not fit a particular content and gives offense to the understanding. **This has to mean that there is an affinity between certain beautiful configurations and certain conceptual contents**, i.e., it calls for a mediation between form and content. How are we to think such mediation?

Crucial is Kant's suggestion that the beautiful is capable of becoming an instrument of the good:

It is true that taste gains by such a connection of aesthetic with intellectual liking, for it becomes fixed and, though it is not universal, rules can be prescribed for it with regard to certain objects that are purposively determined. By the same token, however, these rules will not be rules of taste but will merely be rules for uniting taste with reason, i.e. the beautiful with the good, a union that enables us to use the beautiful as an instrument for our aim regarding the good, so that the mental attunement that sustains itself and has subjective universal validity may serve as a basis for that other way of thinking that can be sustained only by laborious resolve but that is universally valid. Actually, however, neither does perfection gain by beauty, nor beauty by perfection. Rather, because in using a concept in order to compare the presentation by which an object is given us with that object itself (with regard to what it is [meant] to be), we inevitably hold the presentation up to the sensation in the subject, it is the complete power of presentation that gains when the two states of mind harmonize (78)

The beautiful, Kant suggests, can put us in the right mood (*Gemütsstimmung*) to act in ways that require painful resolve. He admits freely that from a purely aesthetic point of view nothing is gained by this turn to the intellectual. But he also points out that taste gains by this admixture of an intellectual satisfaction in as much as it becomes fixed.

This suggests an additional consideration in favor of a subordination of the aesthetic to the intellectual faculty. Perhaps freedom, if it is not given a framework by the intellect in which it can unfold, will find it difficult to become fixed. Perhaps it needs the resistance of rules as support or perhaps as an opposition to be conquered. Perhaps the great work of art is one that

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begins with the rules of art only to transfigure these rules in such a way that they appear the product of free play.

6

This prepares us for the discussion that follows. If with his discussion of free beauty Kant points to the future, with his discussion of the **ideal** in par. 17 he points to the past. Someone impressed by the discussion of free beauty may find surprising those pages in the third moment, where Kant seems to desert the banner of free beauty and finds some very kind words for adherent beauty, which move him right into the neighborhood of Winckelmann, which were indeed written in the spirit of Winckelmann.

Kant begins by reaffirming that there can be no rule of taste:

There can be no objective rule of taste, no rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful. (79)

And yet, and here he agrees with Burke, experience teaches us that there is widespread agreement “among all ages and peoples” concerning the beautiful. Such agreement provides us with an “empirical criterion”:

This criterion, although weak and barely sufficient for a conjecture, [does suggest] that a taste so much confirmed by examples stems from [a] deeply hidden basis, common to all human beings, underlying their agreement in judging the forms under which objects are given to them.

That is why we consider some products of taste *exemplary*. (79)

Of interest is the footnote which invites application also to the visual arts.

Models of taste in the arts of speech must be composed in a language both dead and scholarly, dead, so that it will not have to undergo the changes that inevitably affect living ones, whereby noble expressions become flat, familiar ones archaic, and newly created ones enter into circulation for only a short while; scholarly, so that it will have a grammar that is not subject to the whims of fashion, but has its own unalterable rule.

Kant introduces his discussion of the ideal by pointing out that to find it we should not look to a **vague**, but to a **fixed beauty**. (80) Rather quickly he moves to the assertion that the human being alone is a worthy candidate:

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An ideal of beautiful flowers, of beautiful furnishings, or of a beautiful view is unthinkable. But an ideal of beauty that is accessory to determinate purposes is also inconceivable, e.g. an ideal of a beautiful mansion, a beautiful tree, a beautiful garden, etc., presumably because the purposes are not sufficiently determined and fixed by their concept, so that the purposiveness is nearly as free as in the case of *vague* beauty. [This leaves] only that which has the purpose of its existence with itself — *man*. Man can himself determine his purposes by reason; or, where he has to take them from outer perception, he can still compare them with essential and universal purposes and then judge the former purposes' harmony with the latter ones aesthetically as well. It is man, alone among all objects in the world, who admits of an ideal of beauty, just as the humanity in his person, [i.e. in man considered as an intelligence, is the only [thing] in the world that admits of the ideal of perfection]. (80-81)

Note that this presupposes that moral self-determination can appear in a person and be represented by an artist. The gulf that separates noumenon and phenomenon would appear to be bridged here.

Crucial is the distinction between the **standard** or **normal idea** and the **rational idea** of a human being that follows. Human beauty, or the beauty of a horse, or that of a building presupposes, Kant insists, some idea of the kind of thing we are judging. In judging a horse beautiful we inevitably refer it to the standard idea of a horse. The ability to arrive at such normal ideas is a remarkable if incomprehensible power of the judgment.

But this [ideal of beauty] has two components. The first is the aesthetic *standard idea*, which is an individual intuition (of the imagination) [by] which [we] present the standard for judging man as a thing belonging to a particular animal species. The second is the *rational idea*, which makes the purposes of humanity, insofar as they cannot be presented in sensibility, the principle, for judging his figure, which reveals these purposes, as their effect in appearance. (81)

The passage deserves careful consideration. First of all, Kant invites us to understand the **imagination** here very much as an **analogon rationis**. We intuit the **standard idea** that is a presupposition of recognizing something, say, as a cow or a human being as such, by means of

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the imagination. Possession of the standard idea of a human being is a presupposition of the judgment of human beauty.

It is the image for the entire kind, hovering between all the singular and multiply varied intuitions of individuals, the image that nature uses as the archetype on which it based its productions within any one species, but which it does not seem to have attained completely in any individual. The standard idea is by no means the entire *archetype of beauty* within this kind, but is only the form that constitutes the indispensable condition of all beauty, and hence merely the correctness in the exhibition of the kind. It is the rule, just as the famous Doryphorus of Polyclitus was called the rule (Myron's Cow, within its kind, also allowed this use, as such a rule). (83)

Presupposed is a kind of double awareness. Between our intuitions of individuals hovers the "image for the entire kind"—Plato's ideas come to mind as do Wittgenstein's family resemblances. A gifted artist is apparently able to give expression to that image so convincingly that his creation comes to provide something like a rule. But such works will not attempt to capture what makes a person this individual. A portrait is not a good candidate for such a rule-establishing work of art,

It is precisely because of this, too, that the standard idea cannot contain any specific characteristics, since then it would not be the standard idea for that kind. (83)

Interesting here is the explicit exclusion of the **characteristic**, which Aloys Hirt (1759-1837) soon was to make a cornerstone of his aesthetics.

But if the standard idea of a human being is, according to Kant, a necessary condition of the ideal of beauty, it is not sufficient: In judging the beauty of a human being we presuppose not only the **standard idea** of a human being, but also the **idea** of the human being as a **rational being**, provided by the conception we have of ourselves as moral agents. This idea is said to find expression in the **ideal of beauty**, a particular representation adequate to that idea.

But from the standard idea of the beautiful we must still distinguish the ideal of the beautiful, which for reasons already stated must be expected solely in the human figure. Now the ideal in this figure consists in the expression of the moral; apart from the moral the object would not be liked universally and moreover positively

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(rather than merely negatively, when it is exhibited in a way that is [merely] academically correct). Now it is true that this visible expression of moral ideas that govern man inwardly can be taken only from experience. Yet these moral ideas must be connected, in the highest purposiveness, with everything that our reason links with the morally good: goodness of soul, or purity, or fortitude, or serenity, etc.; and in order for this connection to be made visible, as it were, in bodily expression (as an effect of what is inward), pure ideas of reason must be united with a very strong imagination in someone who seeks so much as to judge, let alone exhibit, it. (83/84)

Kant here presupposes that we can experience certain phenomena as the visible expression of moral ideas. This is to say once more that there are experiences that bridge the divide between phenomena and moral ideas. Art that succeeds in exhibiting the ideal establishes such a bridge.

With Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty we are suddenly back with Winckelmann and his quiet grandeur and noble simplicity of the Greek soul. Now we learn that rules may be prescribed in art after all, provided that we remember that these are rules not for taste, but **for the unification of taste with the demands of reason**. And although Kant is quick to point out that by this admixture neither the moral nor the aesthetic sphere gains, he yet immediately weakens this claim by saying that due to this wedding of the two realms the two spheres are brought into harmony and thus our whole faculty gains. While Kant's analysis of beauty thus invites a critique of neo-classicism for compromising the purity of the aesthetic, he himself goes on to defend it.

7

The fourth moment has little to add to this discussion. Kant is concerned to explain further how the judgment of beauty, while not based in a concept, is yet taken to be necessary.

The last pages of Book I once more reassert the importance of freedom, and reject regularity. Interesting is the concluding remark:

Again we must distinguish beautiful objects from beautiful views of objects (where their distance prevents us from recognizing them distinctly). In beautiful views of objects, taste seems to fasten not so much on what the imagination apprehends in

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that area, as on the occasion they provide for it to engage in fiction [*dichten*], i.e., on the actual fantasies with which the mind entertains itself as it is continually aroused by the diversity that strikes the eye. This is similar to what happens when we watch, say, the changing shapes of the flames in a fireplace or of a rippling brook: neither of these are beauties, but they still, charm the imagination because they sustain its free play.

This concluding remark invites comparison with what Kant will have to say about the imagination in his discussion of the sublime.

But let us return once more to the two points of view which confront each other in the Third Moment. This confrontation reveals the peculiar place Kant occupies in the history of aesthetics. On one hand he remains faithful to the old idea of art as an imitation of edifying sights. On the other hand, with his understanding of free beauty, he points forward to an art that would be free of the requirements of representation, indeed of all meaning.

6. The Sublime

1

In Kant's discussion of the beautiful we were able to note a tension: on one hand, in his discussion of free beauty he looks forward to romanticism and indeed to modern conceptions of art; on the other, in his discussion of the ideal, a form of dependent beauty, he shows himself in fundamental agreement with the classicism of a Winckelmann.

This standing between the ages finds an even clearer expression in Kant's discussion of the **sublime**, as opposed to the **beautiful**. The curious fact that in the eighteenth century a need comes to be felt to distinguish between two kinds of aesthetic experience, that of the sublime and that of the beautiful, invites reflection. Consider the way Burke organizes his *Enquiry*. In his *Observations* Kant follows suit, and the distinction determined the organization of the "Critique of the Aesthetical Judgment," where there appears to be, however, a problem, apparent when you look at the table of Contents: where does the "Second Book" of the "First Division" of the "First Part," the "Analytic of the Sublime" end? Given Kant's interest in architectonics the very fact that there is such a question invites reflection.

What we find beautiful presents itself to us, on Kant's interpretation, as if it were made to be appreciated and comprehended by us. The experience of the beautiful suggests an attunement between the beautiful object and the human knower. **In beautiful nature we thus tend to feel at home.** Beautiful nature presents itself to us as if it were a house in which we can dwell. But nature, re-presented in the image of the house, is what we mean by cosmos. We can say that the beautiful awakens feelings that invite us to think of nature as a cosmos, which owes its order to some higher intelligence.

This is one implication of Kant's talk of **purposiveness**. The beautiful invites thoughts of a higher purpose behind appearance, thoughts of a creator who cares for us.

With the sublime emphasis shifts to something quite different: sublime nature no longer suggests that we human beings are at home in the universe, quite the opposite. In his *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant thus remarks that consideration of the countless worlds that make up the universe "annihilates as it were my importance as *an animal creature* that has to return the matter, that formed it, to the planet, after it was equipped for a short time (one does not know

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how) with vital force.”⁴¹ The world is experienced here as something threatening and ominous. And yet it is precisely this threatening aspect that, if Kant is right, we nevertheless enjoy aesthetically. Why?

2

But let me move more slowly through Kant's discussion, which owes a great deal to and invites comparison with Edmund Burke's *Inquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful*. Like judgments of beauty, judgments of sublimity are aesthetic judgments.

The beautiful and the sublime are similar in some respects. We like both for their own sake, and both presuppose that we make a judgment of reflection rather than either a judgment of sense or a logically determinative one. Hence in neither of them does our liking depend on a sensation, such as that of the agreeable, nor on a determinate concept, as does our liking of the good; yet we do refer the liking to concepts, though it is indeterminate which concepts these are. Hence the liking is connected with the mere exhibition or power of exhibition, i.e., the imagination, with the result that we regard this power, when an intuition is given to us, as harmonizing with the power of concepts, i.e., the understanding or reason, this harmony furthering [the aims] of these. (97)

The structure of the two judgments is thus quite similar, although, while in the case of the beautiful there is a harmonious play between what presents itself to our imagination and the understanding, in the case of the sublime, the reference is not to the understanding, but to reason. The relationship of what presents itself to us to the lower faculties is indeed a disharmonious one.

But some significant differences between the beautiful and the sublime are also readily apparent. The beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in [the object's] being bounded. But the sublime can also be found in the formless object, insofar as we present *unboundedness* either [as] in the object or because the object prompts us to present it, while yet we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality. (98)

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. (Riga: Hartknoch. 1788), p. 289.

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The beautiful presents itself as a **bounded** whole, although this claim invites challenge: in just what sense do the examples of free beauties presented in par. 16 present themselves to us as bounded wholes?

The sublime, on the other hand presents itself as **boundless**, although this presentation is haunted by the thought of totality.

So it seems that we regard the beautiful as the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of the understanding, and the sublime as the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of reason. Hence in the case of the beautiful our liking is connected with the presentation of quality, but in the case of the sublime with the presentation of quantity. (98)

The determination of the difference that follows would seem to owe quite a bit to Burke:

The two likings are also very different in kind. For the one liking ([that for] the beautiful) carries with it directly a feeling of life's being furthered, and hence is compatible with charms and with the imagination at play. But the other liking (the feeling of the sublime) is a pleasure that arises only indirectly: it is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger. Hence it is an emotion, and so it seems to be seriousness, rather than play, in the imagination's activity. Hence, too, this liking is incompatible with charms, and, since the mind is not just attracted by the object but is alternately always repelled as well, the liking for the sublime contains not so much a positive pleasure as rather admiration and respect, and so should be called a negative pleasure. (98)

Kant follows this with a statement of what he calls the "intrinsic and most important distinction":

But the intrinsic and most important distinction between the sublime and the beautiful is presumably the following. If, as is permissible, we start here by considering only the sublime in natural objects (since the sublime in art is always confined to the conditions that [art] must meet to be in harmony with nature), then the distinction in question comes to this: (Independent) natural beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form, by which the object seems as it were predetermined for our power of judgment, so that this beauty constitutes in itself an object of our liking. On the other hand, if something arouses in us, merely in apprehension and

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without any reasoning on our part, a feeling of the sublime, then it may indeed appear, in its form, contrapurposive for our power of judgment, incommensurate with our power of exhibition, and as it were violent to our imagination and yet we judge it all the more sublime for that. (98-99)

This raises immediately a question concerning the possibility of sublime art. Is such art not always limited by the requirement of representation and more generally by the inevitably bounded character of the work of art?

The statement that the sublime does, as it were, violence to our imagination, invites further consideration. There would seem to lie within the imagination a tension between the infinite and the finite. Consider:

The above explication can also be put as follows: That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small. We can easily see here that nothing in nature can be given, however large we may judge it, that could not, when considered in a different relation, be degraded all the way to the infinitely small, nor conversely anything so small that it could not, when compared with still smaller standards, be expanded for our imagination all the way to the magnitude of a world; telescopes have provided us with a wealth of material in support of the first point, microscopes in support of the second. Hence, considered on this basis, nothing that can be an object of the senses is to be called sublime. [What happens is that] our imagination strives to progress towards infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination,] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea. Yet this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgment makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling), and in contrast with that use any other use is small. Hence what is to be called sublime is not the object, but the attunement that the intellect [gets] through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment.

Hence we may supplement the formulas already given by another one:
Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense. (105/106)

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Sublime nature seems to transcend our ability to cope with it. The imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) cannot hold on to it and take its measure, as if it were a beautiful picture. The sublime floods every frame. But precisely this inadequacy awakens us to a faculty in us, namely reason which is not bound to the finite and comprehensible.

In this connection Kant emphasizes that, while in the case of the beautiful the reason for the harmonious play of our faculties must be sought in what is judged beautiful — in the case of beautiful nature, it must be sought in the makeup of nature — this is not the case with the sublime:

We see from this at one that we express ourselves entirely incorrectly when we call this or that *object of nature* sublime, even though we may quite correctly call a great many natural objects beautiful; for how can we call something by a term of approval if we apprehend it as in itself contrapurposive? Instead, all we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind. For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility. Thus the vast ocean heaved up by storms cannot be called sublime. (99)

In recognizing the sublimity of nature, the human being really is recognizing his or her own sublimity. There is something about the human mind, about human reason, that allows it to transcend all that is finite and puts it in touch with the infinite. The **subjectivity** of the idea of the sublime, as opposed to the **objectivity** of the beautiful should be apparent.

In this connection it is helpful to take a brief look at Burke, who bases our appreciation of the beautiful on love and fellow feeling; it depends on the pleasure we take in the other or others, while in the case of the sublime our appreciation is based on the pleasure we take in ourselves. While the beautiful is thus linked to the community, the sublime is linked to the solitary individual.

3

Despite this difference, the structure of the judgment of the beautiful and that of the sublime is similar enough to make all four moments of the beautiful applicable to the sublime as

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well. The sublime, too, pleases without an interest; that is to say, the experience again is characterized by aesthetic distance; the objects of our contemplation are, as it were, bracketed. The sublime pleases without a concept. There is no purpose to be discovered. And the sublime pleases universally and necessarily, although, as we shall see, with an important qualification. That qualification has to do with the fact that the key faculty in the case of the beautiful is the understanding, in the case of the sublime reason. But the understanding is the more fundamental faculty. Reason, on the other hand, presupposes a **reflective turn** on the understanding. Where reflection is only weakly developed or not at all, we will not find a receptivity to the sublime. Thus Kant gives the example of a peasant in the Alps who considers all those foreigners who come to visit in order to admire their sublimity mere fools.

It is a fact that what is called sublime by us, having been prepared through culture, comes across as merely repellent to a person who is uncultured and lacking in the development of moral ideas. In all the evidence of nature's destructive force [*Gewalt*], and in the large scale of its might, in contrast to which his own is nonexistent, he will see only the hardship, danger, and misery that would confront anyone forced to live in such a place. Thus (as Mr. de Saussure relates) the good and otherwise sensible Savoyard peasant did not hesitate to call anyone a fool who fancies glaciated mountains. He might even have had a point, if Saussure had acted merely from fancy, as most travelers tend to, in exposing himself to the dangers involved in his observations, or in order that he might some day be able to describe them with pathos. In fact, however, his intention was to instruct mankind, and that excellent man got, in addition, the soulstirring sensation and gave it into the bargain of the readers of his travels. (124)

Still, we can demand universality, as the potentiality for reason is to be found in all, albeit in an undeveloped state. By turning reflectively upon himself the human being is able to transcend himself as being in the world. The experience of the sublime is precisely such an experience of self-transcendence. World is no longer world for that transcending ego. Rather this ego looks at the ego for whom the world is. The important point here is that reality reveals itself to us human beings only in a very limited way, limited by our point of view, limited by our fears and desires. But human beings can rise above this limitation of nature. The experience of the sublime is inseparable from such **self-transcendence**.

4

There is, however, one further distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, which Kant explains as follows:

For while taste for the beautiful presupposes and sustains the mind in *restful* contemplation, the feeling of the sublime carries with it, as its character, a mental *agitation* connected with our judging of the object. But (since we like the sublime) this agitation is to be judged subjectively purposive, and so the imagination will refer this agitation either to the *cognitive power* or to the *power of desire*, but in both cases the purposiveness of the given presentation will be judged only with regard to these powers (without any purpose or interest). The first kind of agitation is a mathematical, the second a dynamical attunement of the mind. And so we attribute both these kinds of agitation to the object, and hence present the object as sublime in these two ways. (101)

First then let us consider the **mathematically sublime**. We call that sublime, Kant tells us, which is absolutely large or great? (103)

What does Kant mean by "absolutely large"? Usually when I call something large I compare it to other things of the same or a similar type. This returns us to the already discussed passage on 105: "That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small." The absolutely large is thus not something that is objectively large. Rather the term is understood in terms of the capability of the imagination to comprehend. If what confronts the human being, i.e. what he apprehends, is so complex that when our attention passes from one aspect of the phenomenon to another, it loses as much as it gains, then this proves the imagination's ability to apprehend has been stretched to its limits. The phenomenon confronting me no longer can be grasped as a whole. Once again let me turn to Kant's formulation:

In order to take in a quantum intuitively, so that we can then use it as a measure or unity in estimating magnitude, the imagination must perform two acts: apprehension (*apprehensio*) and comprehension (*comprehensio aethetica*). Apprehension involves no problem, for it may progress to infinity. But comprehension becomes more and more difficult, the further apprehension progresses, and it soon reaches its maximum, namely the aesthetically largest

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basic measure for an estimation of magnitude. For when apprehension has reached the point where the partial presentations of sensible intuition that were first apprehended are already beginning to be extinguished in the imagination, as it proceeds to apprehend further ones, the imagination then loses as much on the one side as it gains on the other; and so there is a maximum in comprehension that it cannot exceed. (108)

If the phenomenon confronting me cannot be given to me as a whole, it still can be thought as a whole, and just in this respect reason exhibits itself as of wider scope than the imagination.

As in the case of beauty Kant introduced the concept of a dependent or adherent beauty, so Kant introduces the concept of the dependent sublime. But it receives only very passing mention:

Here I shall only point out that if the aesthetic judgment in question is to be pure (unmixed with any teleological and hence rational judgment), and if we are to give an example of it that is fully appropriate for the critique of aesthetic judgment, then we must point to the sublime not in products of art (e.g. buildings, columns, etc.) where both the form and the magnitude are determined by a human purpose, not in natural things whose very concept carries with it a determinate purpose (e. g. animals with a known determination in nature), but rather in crude nature (and even in it only insofar as it carries with it no charm, nor any emotion aroused by actual danger), that is merely insofar as crude nature contains magnitude. For in such a presentation nature contains nothing monstrous (nor anything magnificent or horrid). (109)

With the monstrous Kant offers us an example of the dependent sublime. An object is called **monstrous** or immense if the concept by which we normally would judge it does not present itself to us, not because there is no such concept, but because the size of the object prevents us from applying it. In this sense we can speak of a monstrous deed, poem, etc. An object is called **colossal** if we arrive at such a concept only with difficulty. But the very fact that Kant gives only a few lines to the impure aesthetic judgment shows his lack of interest in it. This is due to the fact that the sublime cannot finally be reconciled with the application of definite concepts.

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Since comprehension is necessary for the beautiful as well as for understanding there is no such clash in that case.

The very notion of the mathematically sublime invites us to think it against the background of the mathematical estimation of magnitude, i.e. of measuring. The logical estimation of magnitude, Kant suggests, “progresses without hindrance to infinity” (111). But reason demands that the infinite be presented as a totality:

But the mind listens to the voice of reason within itself, which demands totality for all given magnitudes, even for those that we can never apprehend in their entirety but do (in presentation of sense) judge as given in their entirety. Hence reason demands comprehension in one intuition, and exhibition of all the members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and it exempts from this demand not even the infinite (space and past time). Rather reason makes us unavoidably think of the infinite (in common reason’s judgment) as given in its entirety (in its totality). (111)

In this ability to think the infinite as a whole, the human being's power to transcend itself as a finite being of sense manifests itself.

To be able even to think the infinite as a whole indicates a mental power that surpasses any standard of sense. For thinking the infinite as a whole [while using a standard of sense] would require a comprehension yielding a standard that would have a determinate relation to the infinite, one that could be stated in numbers, and this is impossible. If the human mind is nonetheless to be able even to think the given infinite without contradiction, it must have within itself a power that is supersensible, whose ideas of a noumenon cannot be intuited, but can yet be regarded as the substrate underlying what is mere appearance, namely, our intuition of the world. (111)

The passage suggests the possibility of distinguishing between **a negative and a positive sublime**, between **the sublime as an epiphany of freedom, and the sublime as an epiphany of the thing in itself**.

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What is judged sublime is first of all nature, which Kant calls sublime “in those of its appearances whose intuition carries with it the idea of their infinity.” (112)

But must something of the sort not be said even of a blade of grass? Indeed, is this not part of our experience of the reality of things, of their thingliness?

Now the proper unchangeable basic measure of nature is the absolute whole of nature, which, in the case of nature as appearance, is infinity comprehended. This basic measure, however, is a self-contradictory concept (because an absolute totality of an endless progression is impossible). Hence that magnitude of a natural object to which the imagination fruitlessly applies its entire ability to comprehend must lead the concept of nature to a supersensible substrate (which underlies both nature and our ability to think), a substrate that is large beyond any standard of sense and hence makes us judge as sublime not so much the object as the mental attunement in which we find ourselves when we estimate the object. (112)

The sublime, Kant tells us, fills us with **respect** (114).

But respect here has its object not in nature, but in the human being himself and in his high destination. In respect to the lower faculties the sublime is simply unpleasant. Only reason delights in it. The result is that the experience of the sublime does not allow for quiet contemplation. What is sublime moves us, and the poles of this movement are defined by its reference to imagination and understanding on the one hand, to reason on the other.

The passage that links the sublime to a feeling of respect, however, also demands to be applied to our experience of other persons as moral agents: it would seem that such an experience, too, must fill us with respect. And once again the ability to comprehend the other must suffer shipwreck and yet, it would seem, there must be some sort of apprehension of the other, an apprehension of something one might perhaps call intensive infinity, that leads reason to the concept of a person. **The experience of persons calls for an experience of the positive sublime.** And must something similar not in the end be said of our experience of any object of nature which presents itself as an infinite whole?

Kant's second division is that of the **dynamically sublime**. Nature in this case is confronted as a power capable of annihilating us, as a power inspiring fear. Again we find, however, that nature, to be experienced as sublime, may not simply fill us with fear, but that there must be sufficient distance to allow us to calmly contemplate what lies before us.

Might is an ability that is superior to great obstacles. It is called dominance [*Gewalt*] if it is superior even to the resistance of something that itself possesses might. When in an aesthetic judgment we consider nature as might that has dominance over us, then it is dynamically sublime. (119)

It is this second aspect that is particularly close to Burke's account. However, Kant explicitly rejects Burke's claim that the feeling is linked to the way that, confronted with what threatens annihilation, we feel elated when we recognize that we are in fact not annihilated. This, Kant suggests, takes the embodied self, which lives with the threat of annihilation, too seriously. Rather, he suggests, the experience of the sublime is tied to the recognition of something in us that transcends nature in such a way that it cannot be annihilated. What presents itself as a threatening abyss to the physical human being, becomes a source of delight once the human being recognizes that he is more than just a being of nature. In discovering to the human being his true being as a being of reason, the sublime moves him to an acknowledgement of himself as moral agent. And indeed, we can demand universality of the judgment of the sublime, for the same reason that we demand universality of a moral judgment. Both are based on imputing to others the same reason, the same moral nature, that we discover within ourselves.

This leads Kant to his celebration of the soldier, which Schiller took up in his famous *Reiterlied* from *Wallenstein, Wohlauf Kameraden, aufs Pferd, aufs Pferd! / Ins Feld, in die Freiheit gezogen*. which sounds like an anticipation of Heidegger's understanding of the resolute anticipation of death. In this connection, Kant, too, has some kind words for war:

Even war has something sublime about it if it is carried on in an orderly way and with respect for the sanctity of the citizens' rights. At the same time it makes the way of thinking of a people that carries it on in this way all the more sublime in proportion to the number of dangers in the face of which it courageously stood its ground. A prolonged peace, on the other hand, tends to make prevalent a

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mere[ly] commercial spirit, and along with it base selfishness, cowardice, and softness, and to debase the way of thinking of that people. (122)

Similarly an appreciation of the sublimity of God must be distinguished from fear of an omnipotent deity. Here indeed lies a key for the distinction between **genuine religion** and **superstition**.

6

I anticipated already the discussion of par. 29. But let me briefly return to the question of sublime art. Kant, as I noted, wrote his discussion of the sublime with nature, rather than art, in mind. Indeed, how can the artist, say a painter, create works that deserve to be called sublime? A painting, it would seem, is of necessity something finite, bounded. How is it possible to reconcile this boundedness of the painting with the infinity demanded by the sublime? The most often taken approach, to represent sublime nature, is generally a failure. Pictorial representations of the sublime do not necessarily result in sublime paintings. The artist, it would seem, cannot hope to catch the sublimity of nature by translating it unto a finite canvas. What he would have to do is to create works that somehow extend an invitation to the observer to transcend the inevitable finitude of pictorial representation. How can the artist do so? Should he turn to the colossal, to very large formats, as Barnett Newman tried to do with paintings such as *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950/51).

For hints of another and in my opinion more convincing answer let me refer just briefly to what are perhaps the two leading landscape painters of the romantic period, at least if we confine ourselves to considerations of the sublime, to Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and to J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851). In his paintings Friedrich likes to set up a dialectic between foreground and background. A sharply defined screen, made up perhaps of some oak trees and a ruined abbey is placed before an atmospheric, difficult to grasp background. Often these paintings find a focus in a figure or figures seen from behind, absorbed in the contemplation of the misty void before them. "Motionless these figures sit, lost as they seem, in their thoughts and waiting for nothing or for all." (*Moonrise Over the Sea, Two Men Looking at the Moon, Cemetery, Cloister Graveyard in the Snow*).⁴² Here it is the dialectic of clearly defined

⁴² Rehder, 194

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foreground and the immensity of the atmospheric background that figures the dialectic of finite and in finite that helps to define the sublime and communicates a sense of the sublime.

In the *Monk by the Sea* it is the horizon line that invites us to extend it beyond the seemingly arbitrary cut introduced by the frame *ad infinitum*. Here too the expanse of the sky, so reminiscent of the color fields that were to become popular in the art of the sixties, is another figure of the infinite.

Turner, almost an exact contemporary, takes a different approach. For him the human element is not nearly as important as for Friedrich. In Turner's paintings we see the atmospheric become abstract and defeat the representational that offers the understanding something that it can hold on to. In his *Burning of the Houses of Parliament* bridge, building, and spectators thus lose their substantiality. In Turner's late paintings his fascination with abstraction dominates his art to a point where all definition is in danger of being lost. In his *Steamer in a Snowstorm* the ship is thus barely noticeable. A last element of structure and orientation, almost submerged by the swirling storm, or rather the swirling paint around it. The human being is, as it were, whirled around by this painting. Paint itself here becomes a figure of the infinite. Only the ship remains as something we can hold on to, a last point of orientation. Would the painter have done better without it? Would it have been "better" had Turner taken the last step that here separates him from a dynamic abstract expressionism? From the point of view of the sublime it is precisely this tension between the finite and the infinite that allows the painting to succeed.

The sublime work of art must be dialectic. Inevitably the painter creates a bounded, finite object. Within that work he sets up a dialectic that figures the dialectic between the finite and the infinite, where the sublime means a privileging of the infinite. But the painter's evocations of the infinite require the assertion of the finite as a foil. Negation must be preceded by affirmation. Confusion must be preceded by structure. Thus the ship in the Turner is necessary.

Would Kant have welcomed such art? Kant was too much of a moralist not to be suspicious of art. How can we justify spending time and money on art when there are so many more important things — hunger, injustice, suffering — that demand our attention. Would Kant have judged someone with an interest in sublime art differently? Would such a person not have

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to be grouped with those who seek out sublime nature out of mere curiosity, as do those tourists whom Kant contrasts unfavorably with de Saussure?

7

The natural sublime holds significance for Kant because of its relationship to the moral law. In this sense nature's sublimity prepares for resolute acceptance of the moral law. This brings to mind Lyotard's invocation of the Kantian sublime in his essay "Answer to the Question: What is Postmodern?" Lyotard there celebrates *novatio*, innovation, the "increase of being and jubilation which results from the invention of new rules of the game, be it pictorial, artistic, or any other" and places the postmodern sublime in unending opposition to the comforts provided by the established and accepted.⁴³ Lyotard celebrates a freedom that would outstrip whatever would bind it, including Kant's moral law. But once the pleasure we take in the sublime has thus been severed from the moral, a dissociation that corresponds to the dissociation of freedom from the moral law, such pleasure becomes the narcissistic pleasure the solitary self takes in the free play of its own thoughts and inventiveness, which ceaselessly trespasses the boundaries of the currently accepted and acceptable in search of ever new experiences. In other words, once severed from the moral, the postmodern sublime begins to look a lot like what has long been discussed in terms of the category of the **interesting**. Instead of invoking the Kantian sublime would we not so better to understand the aesthetics of postmodern art as an aesthetics of the interesting?

As Kierkegaard observed, the boring is annulled by the interesting. Lyotard's answer to the question "what is postmodern?" suggests that postmodern aesthetics is at bottom an aesthetics of the interesting. With its emphasis on negation and innovation, Lyotard's postmodern sublime turns out to be just another version of the interesting.

Let me explain a bit more what I mean by the interesting. Cultivation of the interesting presupposes an understanding of what has come to be established and accepted. The normal is boring, the abnormal interesting. Boredom provides the soil in which the interesting thrives, offers the thrills of the not quite expected. The appeal of the interesting is thus essentially short-

⁴³ Jean-François Lyotard, "Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern," in *The Postmodern Explained*, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 10

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lived. It depends on its effect on changing expectations. When Duchamp, one of the heroes of Lyotard's postmodern sublime, exhibited a quite ordinary urinal as a work of art, such deliberate confusion of the established categories "work of art" and "piece of plumbing" was no doubt interesting. But we fail to respect the success of this paradigmatic act today when we drag all sorts of plumbing pieces, say bathtubs and sinks into galleries in an inevitably futile attempt to generate a comparable interest. Today such repetitions seem just boring. No longer do they test the boundary of art. And must a work today not challenge that boundary, challenge the very meaning of art, if we are to find it interesting as a work of art. Duchamp's enormously inventive questioning of the nature of art has invited countless successor acts even as its success has cast an inhibiting shadow on all those who would follow his example: the shadow of being just boring. The interesting demands novelty. If one has an interest in the interesting to say that something has already been done is devastating criticism.⁴⁴

Key texts for anyone who wants to formulate an aesthetics of the interesting would have to include Friedrich Schlegel's "Modern Poesy"⁴⁵ and Kierkegaard's "Rotation Method." Schlegel was perhaps the first to use the concept of the "interesting" to interpret the meaning of "modern" in "modern art" and "modern poetry" — an interpretation that invites comparison with Lyotard's determination of the postmodern sublime. Kierkegaard had indeed already recognized a connection between the sublime and the interesting, a connection hinted at already by Kant's mention of the tourist who is led to his appreciation of the sublime scenery of the Alps by what Kant calls "amateur curiosity." Kierkegaard recognizes the middle term that links the sublime and the interesting as boredom. There is indeed something sublime about boredom. Consider our everyday life: day after day the same place, the same routines, the same sights, the same job, the same wife, the same art. Why be committed to such a dull state of affairs. Such reflections, Kierkegaard suggests, cause a dizziness like that produced by looking down into a yawning chasm, and this dizziness is infinite.⁴⁶ That Kierkegaard here turns to the rhetoric of the sublime is significant.

⁴⁴ Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 59.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, "Die moderne Poesie (1795-96), in *Schriften und Fragmente*, ed. Ernst Behler (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1956), pp. 114-121.

⁴⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. J. O'Brien (New York, 1955), vol. I, p. 287.

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Schlegel already saw that to the extent that art is governed by the pursuit of the interesting we should expect an accelerating race for the ever more interesting. The desire for the interesting has to lead to dissatisfaction with whatever is now expected. Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* provides a devastating critique of the interesting, a critique that Lyotard's postmodern sublime needs to confront.

In conclusion let me return once more to Lyotard's questionable invocation of the Kantian sublime. As Kant understands it, the experience of the sublime raises human beings beyond their merely natural being. What presents itself first as a threatening abyss becomes a source of delight, once the human being discovers that he is more than just an insignificantly small, ephemeral part of nature, that he is also a free spirit. But for Kant, as I pointed out, such discovery is inseparably linked to an acknowledgement of the moral law. The universality of that law offers us heirs of the Enlightenment, i.e. us, who we have truly come of age, our spiritual home. The progressive incarnation of the universal in the natural and particular presents us human beings with an infinite task. Not artistic play, but responsible moral action answers to that task, action that will make the world ever more our home. But such action would have to seem pointless if the world were so indifferent to this task as to rob us of all hope to make things somewhat better. Kant would have been unable to agree with Lyotard that "it is not up to us to provide reality," that all that is up to us is "to invent allusions to what is conceivable but not presentable."⁴⁷ Whether the world is experienced in a way that lets us despair of the possibility of responsible action is indeed our business. But confidence in the possible efficacy of responsible action presupposes a sense of what Kant calls the purposiveness of nature, that is to say, presupposes an appreciation of its beauty; presupposes an understanding of the world as our home. Beauty is necessary if the self-transcending subject is to find its way back onto the world, into nature. To Lyotard's plea for a postmodern-sublime I would therefore like to oppose a quite old-fashioned plea for beauty.

⁴⁷ Lyotard, p. 15.

7. Taste as a *Sensus Communis*

1

Let me begin by summing up some of the points we considered in Kant's discussion of the sublime. As opposed to the beautiful, the sublime is said to have its foundation in a disharmony between the way what is before us presents itself and the lower cognitive faculties. Given the needs of the understanding, the sublime does not present itself as purposive. It thus leads to a sense that we are facing a world that is indifferent to our needs and demands. We can speak of a sense of not being at home in the world — Heidegger will make this a mark of authentic Dasein. But there is something in us that transcends our natural being and nature: as free rational beings capable of reflection and responsible action we transcend ourselves as parts of nature. Recognizing the sublimity of nature, the human being really recognizes his or her own sublimity. Appreciation of the sublime presupposes thus that our power of reflection has reached a certain level of development. The experience of the sublime confronts us with the depth of our own subjectivity. But if the experience of sublime is thus more introverted than the comparatively more extroverted experience of the beautiful, Kant insists that the freedom the former discloses is inseparably linked to reason. Thus, while less closely tied to a sense of community than the beautiful, the sublime is more intimately linked to the **universal**, which according to Kant holds the key to full humanity.

2

Last time we did not have time for the *General Remark Upon the Exposition of the Aesthetic Reflective Judgment*. As so often when Kant leaves the main thread of his argument, it contains some of his most interesting reflections.

Kant begins with a by now quite expected distinction between the **agreeable**, the **beautiful**, the **sublime**, and the **good**. Kant's understanding of the agreeable invites thoughts of a pleasure calculus:

The *agreeable*, as an incentive for desires, is always of the same kind, wherever it may come from and however different in kind may be the presentation (of sense, and of sensation regarded objectively). That is why what matters in judging its influence on the mind is only the number of stimuli (simultaneous and

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successive), and as it were, only the mass of the agreeable sensation, so that this sensation can be made intelligible only through its quantity. Nor does the agreeable contribute to culture, but it belongs to mere enjoyment. (126)

What counts, when basing one's decisions on a reasonable assessment of what is more or less agreeable, can only be the quantity of pleasure. Such a utilitarian approach leaves no room for culture. The beautiful, on the other hand, distances us from the natural and thereby allows for a **freer** attitude:

The beautiful, on the other hand requires that we present a certain quality of the object, and a quality that can be made intelligible and brought to concepts (even though in an aesthetic judgment the beautiful is not brought to concepts). It also contributes to culture, for it teaches us at the same time to be mindful of purposiveness in the feeling of pleasure. (126)

Later Kant will speak of a certain **liberality**. As demanded by Kant's understanding of the beautiful as the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction, to appreciate the beauty of something is to let it be the thing it is without concern for sensory pleasure or pain: "the pleasure we take directly in the beautiful in nature ... presupposes, as well as cultivates, a certain *liberality* in our way of thinking, i.e. an independence of the liking from mere enjoyment of sense." The beautiful thus prepares us for morality, "but here the freedom is still presented more as in *play* than as subject to a law-governed *task*. But the latter is what genuinely characterizes man's morality, were reason must exert its dominance over sensibility, except that in an aesthetic judgment about the sublime we present this dominance as being exerted by the imagination itself, as an instrument of reason." (128)

With the sublime the focus shifts from nature to the supersensible: "The sublime consists merely in a relation, for here we judge the sensible [element] in the presentation of nature to be suitable for a possible supersensible use." (126) Kant's real interest here is in the good and how we are to understand the relationship of the beautiful and the sublime to morality. We shall have to return to this point, but let us look more closely at the statement Kant here offers:

The *absolutely good* (the object of moral feeling), as judged subjectively by the feeling it inspires, is the ability of the subject's powers to be determined by the conception of a law that *obligates absolutely*. It is distinguished above all by its *modality*: a necessity that rests on a priori concepts and contains not just a claim

but also a *command* that everyone approve. Actually the absolutely good belongs not to the aesthetic, but to pure intellectual judgment; by the same token, we attribute it to freedom rather than to nature, and in a determinative rather than in a merely reflective judgment. But the *determinability of the subject* by this idea — the determinability, indeed, of a subject who can sense within himself, as a *modification of his state, obstacles* in sensibility, but at the same time his superiority to sensibility in overcoming these obstacles, which determinability is moral feeling — is nevertheless akin to aesthetic power of judgment and its formal conditions inasmuch as it allows us to present the lawfulness of an act done from duty as aesthetic also, i.e. as sublime or for that matter beautiful, without any loss in the feeling's purity, while such a loss would be unavoidable if we sought to bring the feeling into a natural connection with the feeling of the agreeable. (126-127)

The idea of the absolutely good, Kant insists, requires no more than a pure intellectual judgment that looks, not to nature, but to freedom, a freedom that demands autonomy and asserts itself in the face of the obstacles presented by that concern for the agreeable that is part of our natural being. We experience the actions of such an autonomous self as sublime in that they awaken us to our own supersensible being; we experience the actions of such a person as beautiful in that they let us feel that, while as free, responsible actors we transcend nature, yet nature is experienced here as compatible with full humanity. The abyss that separates the realm of nature from that of freedom has here been bridged. The question remains just how we are to understand our experience of such action: nature here would seem to transcend itself towards the supersensible.

Kant insists on the different ways in which the beautiful and the sublime relate to interest.

Beautiful is what we like when we merely judge it (and hence not through any sensation by means of sense in accordance with some concept of the understanding). From this it follows at once that we must like the beautiful without any interest.

Sublime is what, by its resistance, to the interest of the senses, we like directly. (127)

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We should note how this suggests a way of relating the beautiful to the sublime that Schopenhauer was going to exploit: if the beautiful pleases without any interest, the sublime in opposition to the interest of the senses, then the effort it takes to appreciate the beauty of something we find seductive because of its charms, say a Titian nude, partakes of the sublime.

The sublime can be described thus: it is an object (of nature) *the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature's inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas.*

If we speak literally and consider the matter logically, ideas cannot be exhibited. But when in intuiting nature we expand our empirical power of presentation (mathematically or dynamically), then reason, the ability to [think] an independent and absolute totality, never fails to step in and arouse the mind to an effort, although a futile one, to make the presentation of the senses adequate to this [idea of] totality. This effort, as well as the feeling that the imagination [as it synthesizes empirical nature] is unable to attain to that idea, is itself an exhibition of the subjective purposiveness of our mind, in the use of our imagination, for the mind's supersensible vocation. And we are compelled to subjectively think nature itself in its totality as the exhibition of something supersensible, without our being able to bring this exhibition about objectively. (127/128)

While able to think, we will never be able to comprehend an independent and absolute totality. We thus will never be able to take the measure of the absolute. The "Ultimatum" of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* comes to mind, which offers a meditation on why it is edifying to know that over against God we are always in the wrong.

But let me continue with Kant:

For we soon come to realize that nature in space and time [i.e. phenomenal nature] entirely lacks the unconditioned, and hence lacks also that absolute magnitude [i.e. totality] which, after all, even the commonest reason demands. And this is precisely what reminds us that we are dealing only with nature as appearance, which must yet be considered in turn the mere exhibition of nature in itself (of which reason has the idea). We cannot determine this idea of the supersensible any further, and hence we cannot *cognize* but can only *think* nature as an exhibition of it. But it is this idea that is aroused in us when, as we judge the

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object aesthetically, this judging strains the imagination to its limit, whether of expansion (mathematically) or of its might over the mind (dynamically). (128)

Note the claim that in the judgment of the sublime reason's demand to encompass and comprehend what is presented to us suffers shipwreck on the reef of the infinite raised by the imagination, which, as Kant had pointed out "may progress to the infinite." (108) But reason comes to the rescue by raising beyond what we can cognize, the idea of the supersensible, where someone may want to read this **turn to reason as an evasion of the abyss** opened up by the imagination.

Once again Kant emphasizes that we must focus on pure aesthetic judgment.

Therefore, when we call the sight of the starry sky *sublime*, we must not base our judgment upon any concepts of worlds that are inhabited by rational beings, and then [conceive] of the bright dots that we see occupying the space above as being these world's suns, moved in orbits prescribed for them with great purposiveness; but we must base our judgment regarding it merely on how we see it, as a vast vault encompassing everything, and merely under this presentation may we posit the sublimity that a pure aesthetic judgment attributes to this object. (130)

Something analogous must be said about the sight of the ocean. If we think of it, teleologically, as contributing in various ways to our welfare its sublimity vanishes (130).

Instead we must be able to view the ocean as poets do, merely in terms of what manifests itself to the eye — e.g. if we observe it while it is calm, as a clear mirror of water bounded only by the sky; or, if it is turbulent, as being like an abyss threatening to engulf everything — and yet find it sublime. (130)

And Kant extends this thought to human beings:

The same applies to the sublime and beautiful in the human figure. Here, too, we must not have in mind [*zurücksehen auf*], as bases determining our judgment, concepts of the purposes *for which* man has all his limbs, letting the limb's harmony with the purposes *influence* our aesthetic judgment (which would then cease to be pure), even though it is certainly a necessary condition of aesthetic liking as well that the limbs not conflict with these purposes. (130-131)

But how are we to reconcile this with what went before? Is the judgment of human beauty not always a judgment of a dependent beauty? And if so, is it not inevitably impure? And how are

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we to understand the judgment that calls some human figures sublime. What here invites the imagination to progress towards infinity?

Significant in this connection is Kant's understanding of the **sacrifice** as **the one way in which the moral law becomes visible**.

The object of a pure and unconditioned intellectual liking is the moral law in its might, the might that it exerts in us over any and all of those incentives of the mind that precede it. This might actually reveals itself aesthetically only through sacrifice (which is a deprivation — though one that serves our inner freedom — in return for which it reveals in us an unfathomable depth of this supersensible power, whose consequences extend beyond that we can foresee). (131)

I suggested that something like an aesthetic judgment is necessary to disclose a person to us. Kant here seems to suggest that such an aesthetic judgment could only be a judgment of the sublime. But must we not question such a claim? The moral person is here split off from the person who is an object of love, at least of a love that seeks expression in making love. The person, Kant insists, must not be the sex object. But is it not important that the sex object be also a person, as Sartre, e.g. would insist? How does the person show him- or herself? Sartre would emphasize the look in this connection.

The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime brings to mind the Greek distinction between two kinds of love and two Aphrodites, or perhaps two aspects of Aphrodite. But whether we say one or the other is not innocent. I would suggest the need for mediating between the beautiful and the sublime and would side with Plato and Schopenhauer and insist that a readiness for self-sacrifice is built into eros, speak of a natural unselfishness that may be sublimated into a moral unselfishness. Consider in this connection the tales told in Plato's *Symposium* about Achilles and Alcestis.

How does such unselfishness become visible? Kant suggests in sacrifice, that is an action that is a gift of self for the sake of another or others. This is why literature may have an easier time with the human sublime than painting. But let us continue with the text:

If the idea of the good is accompanied by affect [as its effect], this [affect] is called enthusiasm. This mental state seems to be sublime, so much so that it is commonly alleged that nothing great can be accomplished without it. But in fact any affect is blind, either in the selection of its purpose, or, if that were to be given

by reason, in [the manner of] achieving it. For an affect is an agitation of the mind that makes it unable to engage in free deliberations about principles with the aim of determining itself according to them. Hence there is no way it can deserve to be liked by reason. Yet enthusiasm is sublime aesthetically, because it is a straining of our forces by ideas that impart to the mind a momentum whose effects are mightier and more permanent than those of an impulse produced by presentations of sense. But (strange though it seems) even [the state of] being without affects [*apatheia*, *phlegma in significatu bono*] in a mind that vigorously pursues its immutable principles is sublime, and sublime in a far superior way, because it also has pure reason's liking on its side. Only a cast of mind of that sort is called noble — [though] the term has since come to be applied to things as well, such as a building, a garment, a literary style, a person's bearing, and so on — namely, if it arouses not so much *amazement* [*Verwunderung*] (an affect [that occurs] when we present novelty that exceeds our expectation) as *admiration* [*Bewunderung*] (an amazement that does not cease once the novelty is gone), which happens when ideas in their exhibition harmonize, unintentionally and without art, with [not 'without' as in the Pluhar translation] our aesthetic liking. (132-133)

I want to underscore the "seems" (**scheint**) in the second sentence of the cited passage. It only seems, because what becomes visible here is an affection that is not in tension with the moral law, something like an angelic being. Kant therefore qualifies: "But in fact..." **nun aber...** Such angelic beings do not need to rise above temptation.

In passing we should take note of the distinction between affect and passion drawn in the footnote:

Affects differ in kind from passions. Affects relate merely to feeling, whereas passions belong to our power of desire and are inclinations that make it difficult or impossible for us to determine our power of choice through principles. Affects are impetuous and unpremeditated, passions persistent and deliberate. This resentment in the form of anger is an affect, in the form of hatred (vindictiveness) is a passion. Passion can never be called sublime, no matter what the circumstances; for while in an affect the mind's freedom is impeded, in passion it is abolished. (132)

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The visibility of an “affect of the vigorous kind” is said to be aesthetically sublime, for it involves a battle with, and overcoming of, natural inclinations. An “affect of the **languid** kind” may be beautiful, (133) but such beauty presupposes a kind of self-surrender, or self-sacrifice, a descent of the spirit into nature, in which the person betrays himself. Kant thus condemns sentimentality (*Empfindelei*). (133)

Again and again Kant insists on the distance that true nobility must keep from the sensuous, from affects and emotions. And thus he is suspicious of certain religious practices.

But even impetuous agitations of the mind — whether they are connected with religious ideas and are called edification, or with ideas involving a social interest and pertain merely to culture — can by no means claim the distinction of being a *sublime* exhibition [of ideas], no matter how much they may strain the imagination, unless indirectly, our consciousness of our fortitude and resolution concerning what carries with it pure intellectual purposiveness (namely, the supersensible). For otherwise all these emotions belong only to inner *motion*, which we welcome for the sake of our health. (134)

Kant is thus critical of edifying sermons, of tragedies that fail to make us better persons, but serve primarily to entertain and rout boredom (134). The sublime, Kant insists, “must always have reference to our way of thinking, i.e. to maxims directed to providing the intellectual side [in us] and our rational ideas with supremacy over sensibility.” (134-135)

Kant is clearly suspicious of religion that ties itself too closely to art, where he could look to the rococo churches of the 18th century for examples of what he would have to condemn. More than a trace of iconoclasm becomes explicit in the following passage:

We need not worry that the feeling of the sublime will lose [something] if it is exhibited in such an abstract way as this, which is wholly negative as regards the sensible. For though the imagination finds nothing beyond the sensible that could support it, this very removal of its barriers also makes it feel unbounded, so that its separation [from the sensible] is an exhibition of the infinite; and though an exhibition of the infinite can as such never be more than merely negative, it still expands the soul. Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc. (135)

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Kant sees the sublime as building a bridge to a truly moral society. Governments and religions, however, too readily embrace art in an attempt to “relieve every subject of the trouble, yet also the ability, to expand his soul’s forces beyond the barriers that one can choose to set for him so as to reduce him to mere passivity and so to make him more pliable.” (135) True enlightenment is incompatible with such a use of art. The sublime, by contrast, helps to protect against *Schwärmerei* (only inadequately translated as “fanaticism”), which Kant defines as “the delusion of wanting to SEE something beyond all bounds of sensibility, i. e. of dreaming according to principles (raving with reason).” (135)

Is Satan sublime? Kant, it would seem, could not consider him that. But the question is difficult to simply dismiss. Kant’s discussion of the sublime is shadowed by **the possibility of a freedom that seeks to ground itself, not in the moral law, but refuses to subject itself to any rule.**

In much of this remark we find Kant struggling with another problem, with the difficulty of keeping his understanding of morality pure. There is tension between the need for the supersensible to descend into the visible, a descent that is necessary if Kant’s moral law is to have any applicability, and the fear that such a descent might contaminate the person in a way that would rob him of what makes him noble and worthy of respect.

The Remark concludes with a comparison of the offered analysis with that of Burke that supports what has already been said and does not seem to require further discussion.

3

After this long aside, Kant returns to the main argument with his “Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgment.” “Deduction” here is used, not in a logical, but a legal sense: it answers the *quaestio juris*, the question, by what right can the aesthetic judgment lay claim to universal agreement?

Since an aesthetic judgment lays claim to universal validity for every subject and hence must be based on some a priori principle, or other, it requires a deduction (i. e. a legitimation of its pretension). Such a deduction is needed, in addition to an exposition of the judgment, if the judgment concerns a liking or disliking for the

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form of the object. Judgments of taste about the beautiful in nature are of this sort.
(142)

Note once more how Kant here links purity to form; note also the **elision of art**, which suggests a change from the earlier discussion, where Kant's understanding of free beauty was illustrated with examples of both natural and artificial beauties.

Such a deduction is said to be unnecessary in the case of the sublime where the exposition is already the deduction (142). We may well wonder whether a deduction is really necessary in the case of the beautiful — consider the discussion of par. 22. What more is needed? Beauty, Kant suggests once again, has its ground in the object, in nature, where questions concerning the ground of such purposiveness suggest themselves.

Par. 31 similarly has little to add to the discussion. By what right do we make claim to everyone's assent when we judge, say, a flower beautiful? In the case of moral and theoretical judgments the idea of freedom, as given a priori by reason, and the concept of nature provide the sought for answer. But by what right can I claim universality for a judgment of taste. What had been said earlier anticipates the essential points.

The judgment of beauty looks like an objective judgment, and like such a judgment "makes a claim to everyone's assent." But how is that claim to be justified? Presupposed is something like a **common**, indeed **universal sense**, a sense that human beings possess just in so far as they are human beings.

Kant is quite aware that aesthetic judgments, while they lay claim to universality, are often mistaken.

That is why a young poet cannot be brought to abandon his persuasion that his poem is beautiful, neither by the judgment of his audience nor by that of his friends; and if he listens to them, it is not because he now judges his poem differently, but because, even if (at least with regard to him) the whole audience were to have wrong taste, his desire for approval still causes him to accommodate himself (even against his judgment) to the common delusion. Only later on, when his power of judgment has been sharpened by practice, will he voluntarily depart from his earlier judgment just as he does with those of his judgments which rest wholly on reason. Taste lays claim merely to autonomy; but to make other

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people's judgments the basis determining one's own would be heteronomy. (145-146)

We begin to recognize the importance of history and education, not just in the case of the sublime, but also in the case of the beautiful, and by extension in the realm of the moral; the supposedly pure judgments appear now as inevitably **mediated historically**.

The same holds for all uses, no matter how free, of our powers, including even reason (which must draw all its judgments from the common a priori source): if each subject always had to start from nothing but the crude predisposition given him by nature, [many] of his attempts would fail, if other people before him had not failed in theirs; they did not make these attempts in order to turn their successors into mere imitators, but so that, by their procedure, they might put others on a track whereby they could search for the principles within themselves and so adopt their own and often better course. (146)

And here, Kant suggests, examples are better than rules, following (*Nachfolge*) better than imitation.

Following by reference to a precedent, rather than imitating, is the right term for any influence that products of an exemplary author may have on others; and this means no more than drawing on the same sources from which the predecessor himself drew, and learning from him only how to go about doing so. Among all our abilities and talents, taste is precisely what stands most in need of examples of what has enjoyed the longest-lasting approval in the course of cultural progress, in order that it will not become uncouth again and relapse into the crudeness of its first attempts; and taste needs this because its judgment cannot be determined by concepts and precepts. (145-146)

We meet here with a version of that tension between autonomy and the authority of tradition on which I remarked earlier, a tension that we meet with also in, e.g. Hume's essay on the *Standard of Taste*. Kant does not think that we can come up with rules, but we can come up with examples, where the authority of these examples must finally be sought in our own autonomous selves. And such autonomy makes it possible to improve on the example, so that the example set by some precursor is not something to be passively received, but to be creatively confronted and

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appropriated, where such appropriation means a descent into that incomprehensible ground in which his and our works are rooted. Such successive appropriations build a culture.

In par. 33 Kant reaffirms the autonomy of our judging. There is no objective principle of taste, no proof that something is beautiful. The judgment of taste is always singular: “Only a judgment by which I find a singular given tulip beautiful, i.e., in which I find that my liking for the tulip is universally valid, is a judgment of taste.” (148)

But how does such insistence on the singularity of what I call beautiful agree with the claim that what is judged beautiful is not really the thing but the form it exhibits. Can different tulips of the same variety not exhibit the same form; and is it not this form rather than this particular tulip that is judged beautiful? Where is the singularity of the beautiful to be located, in the thing present to my senses or in the form it exhibits? And what about a work of art, say a drawing, available in numerous good reproductions? **How important is the thingliness of the material object judged beautiful?** The question becomes especially acute when we consider, say, different performances of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Every such performance might be considered an exemplary enactment of the real work, but that work proves elusive, to be reconstructed over and over again in creative readings, creative seeings, creative performances.

Kant's statement of what he means by a "critique of taste" no longer would seem to require much discussion:

Hence the critique of taste is itself only subjective as regards the presentation by which an object is given us: it is the art, or science, of finding rules for the reciprocal relation that understanding and imagination have in the given presentation (without reference to prior sensation or concept), and hence for their accordance or discordance, and of determining them as regards their conditions. The critique of taste is an art if it shows this only through examples; it is a science if it derives the possibility of such judging from the nature of these powers as cognitive powers as such. (150)

There can be no objective principles of taste.

Par. 35 provides us with what is perhaps the crucial step in this discussion:

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Now since the concepts in a judgment constitute its content (what belongs to the cognition of the object), while a judgment of taste cannot be determined by concepts, its basis is only the subjective formal condition of a judgment as such. The subjective condition of all judgments is our very ability to judge, i.e. the power of judgment. When we use this power of judgment in regard to a presentation by which an object is given, then it requires that there be a harmony between two representational powers, imagination (for the intuition and the combination of the manifold) and understanding (for the concept that is the presentation of the unity of this combination. Now since the judgment of taste is not based on a concept of the object (in the case of a presentation by which an object is given), it can consist only in the subsumption of the very imagination under the condition [which must be met] for the understanding to proceed in general from intuition to concepts. (151)

Much of this recapitulates what Kant had argued in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the transcendental deduction (A 99, 100, 103). The interplay of imagination and understanding is a necessary condition of the very possibility of experience.

In other words, since the imagination's freedom consists precisely in its schematizing without as concept, a judgment of taste must rest upon a mere sensation, namely our sensation of both the imagination in its freedom and the understanding with its lawfulness, as they reciprocally quicken each other. (151)

The pure schema is "a rule of synthesis of the imagination, in respect to pure figures in space," the empirical schema, correspondingly, is a rule of synthesis of the empirical imagination with respect to what is sensibly given. In *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had called this schematism "an art concealed in the depth of the human soul." (A 141). The faculty of taste has its roots in this depth.

Par. 36, 37, and 38 would seem to pose few problems; they repeat material we are already familiar with. Once more Kant's formalism should be noted. One wonders a bit why the deduction is really necessary. Kant almost seems to struggle to find enough words for this deduction. The remark notes the ease of this deduction. We have a right to presuppose in every human being the faculties of imagination and understanding that we possess. The experience of

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the beautiful is inseparable from experience as such. To be sure we may disagree with someone else's judgment that x is beautiful. But this does not challenge the claim to universality. If there is such disagreement, at least one of us must not be making a pure judgment of beauty.

Par. 39 begins with a consideration of the communicability of sensation. Take the judgment: this tulip is beautiful. Does agreement with this judgment not presuppose that a person can see and is not color-blind? But can we assume that everyone has the same senses that we have? And even less can agreement be presupposed in the case of the agreeable and the disagreeable. Some like to be scratched, others don't. That is why Plato in the *Philebus* opposed to such pleasures the pleasures we take in geometric forms and pure colors. We may want to accept Kant's claim that the satisfaction we take in an action because of its moral character is, indeed, in principle universal. And the sublime participates sufficiently in the moral law to allow us to impute a satisfaction in the sublime to everyone, with the proviso that the faculty of reason has evolved sufficiently. But what of judgments of beauty? How does the universality claimed here square with the differences in our senses? Must we not assume that there are personal differences that make the proclaimed agreement no more than a hoped for ideal? Something like that is suggested by Kant's formalism.

But in that case, does his ideal beauty furnish the kind of integration of all the faculties, including sensibility, that lets us interpret it as granting something like a foretaste of paradise?

Par. 40 picks up the discussion of taste as a **sensus communis** that had been prepared for earlier (see pars. 19 - 22). Interesting, and not only from the point of view of aesthetics, are the general principles Kant announces at the bottom of p.160:

[Let us compare with this *sensus communis*] the common human understanding, even though the latter is not being included here as part of the critique of taste. The following maxims may serve to elucidate its principles: (1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) to think always consistently. The first is the maxim of an unprejudiced, the second of a broadened, the third of a consistent way of thinking. The first is the maxim of a reason that is never passive. A propensity to a passive reason, and hence to a heteronomy of reason, is called prejudice; and the greatest prejudice of all is superstition, which consists in thinking of nature as not subject to rules which the understanding

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through its own essential law lays down as the basis of nature. Liberation from superstition is called *enlightenment*. (160-161)

Kant insists on autonomy, universality, consistency. But may these not do violence to the whole human being? Schopenhauer was to charge Kant with **pedantry**. Is Kant so insistent on purity that he cannot fully respond to what presents itself in experience? Moving to the context of the *Critique of Judgment*: is the imagination that matters when judging beauty not inevitably concrete and particular? **How important is sensibility?** Kant has a great deal to say about the imagination and little about sensibility. He wants to keep the imagination unsullied by sense. This insistence on purity is of a piece with his **formalism**. And yet once we bring in sense, as we must, how do we save universality?

Kant links his three maxims with understanding, judgment, and reason. (162) Interesting is the conclusion:

Hence taste is our ability to judge a priori the communicability of the feelings that (without mediation by a concept) are connected with a given presentation.

If we could assume that the mere universal communicability as such of our feeling must already carry with it an interest for us (something we are, however, not justified in inferring from the character of a merely reflective power of judgment), then we could explain how it is that we require from everyone as a duty, as it were, the feeling [contained] in a judgment of taste. (162)

4

Like Burke Kant links our interest in beauty to society: if the impulse to society is part of human nature than the impulse in communicating one's feelings is similarly natural. "Only in society," Kant claims, "is the beautiful of empirical interest." (163) If Kant is right, Robinson Crusoe would not have planted a beautiful flower garden just for himself. To create something beautiful is to create it for others to appreciate. Such creation builds community and Kant suggests that the progress of culture can be measured by the extent to which a society had progressed from concerns with the merely charming to a concern with beauty.

But in the end, when civilization has reached its peak, it makes this communication almost the principal activity of refined inclination, and sensations are valued only

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to the extent that they are universally communicable. At that point, even if the pleasure that each person has in such an object is inconsiderable and of no significant interest of its own, still its value is increased almost infinitely by the idea of its universal communicability. (164)

But Kant is reluctant to place too much weight on such a merely empirical interest, as the conclusion to this paragraph shows:

This much we can surely say about the empirical interest in objects of taste and in taste itself: in such an interest taste caters to inclination, and no matter how refined this inclination may be, still the interest will also easily fuse with all the [other] inclinations and passions that reach their greatest variety and highest degree in society; and if our interest in the beautiful is based on these, then it can provide only a very ambiguous transition from the agreeable to the good. But whether taste in its purity, may not still be able to further this transition — this we may have cause to investigate. (164-165)

We need thus to pass on to a consideration of the intellectual interest in the beautiful. Clear is that what really interests Kant is the power of beauty to build a bridge from the agreeable to the morally good.

Kant opens his discussion in the following paragraph by calling attention to a difference of opinion concerning the question whether interest in the beautiful is the mark of a good character: Much speaks against this, Kant observes. I called attention to the relevant passage in our very first session. Not without reason, Kant tells us, it has been claimed that

virtuosi of taste, who not just occasionally, but apparently as a rule are vain, obstinate, and given to ruinous passions, can perhaps even less than other people claim the distinction of being attached to moral principles. And hence it seems, not only that the feeling for the beautiful is different in kind from moral interest (as indeed it actually is), but also that it is difficult to reconcile the interest which can be connected with the beautiful with the moral interest, and that it is impossible to do this by an [alleged] intrinsic affinity between the two. (165)

His own position is given in the following paragraph, which I touched on already in our very first session:

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Now I am quite willing to concede that an interest in the *beautiful in art* (in which I include the artistic use of natural beauties for our adornment, and hence for vanity's sake) provides no proof whatever that [someone's] way of thinking is attached to the morally good, or even inclined toward it. On the other hand, I do maintain that to take a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* (not merely to have the taste needed to judge it) is always the mark of a good soul; and that, if this interest is habitual, if it readily associates itself with the *contemplation of nature*, this fact indicates at least a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling. But we must carefully bear in mind that what I mean here is actually the beautiful *forms* of nature, while I continue to set aside the *charms* that nature tends to connect so plentifully with them; for an interest in these, though also direct, is yet empirical. (165-166)

Noteworthy here is Kant's preference for the individual who admires the beauties of nature by himself, without the empirical interest in sociability. Such a person loves nature, delights, not just in its beautiful forms, but in the existence of a wild flower, a bird, and insect. He lovingly lets them be what they are. What lets us judge such a person highly is not an aesthetic, but an intellectual judgment: we cannot think of the beauty of nature without taking an interest in it, an interest that is akin to moral feeling: here we have a sense that, though we cannot discover the purpose behind what we experience, it yet strikes us as purposive. The supersensible here exhibits itself as in harmony with our faculties. Aesthetic experience here opens the door to a natural religion.

Here we have a crucial difference between Hegel and Kant. Hegel is almost exclusively interested in the beauty of art.

Although we take an immediate pleasure in the beautiful in art, our interest that there be art is mediated by the purpose behind it. The following paragraphs will unpack Kant's understanding of art.

Unexpected is the way in which in natural beauty the charming is allowed here by Kant to mingle with the beautiful:

The charms in beautiful nature, which we so often find fused, as it were, with beautiful form, belong either to the modifications of light (in coloring) or of sound (in tones). For these are the only sensations that allow not merely for a

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feeling of sense, but also for reflection on the form of these modifications of the senses, so that they contain, as it were, a language in which nature speaks to us and which seems to have a higher meaning. Thus a lily's white color seems to attune the mind to ideas of innocence.... A bird's song proclaims its joyfulness and contentment with its existence. At least this is how we interpret nature, whether or not it has this intention. (169)

Kant here returns to the old view of **nature as a book**. Nature speaks to us, "as it were." It provides us with what we can call natural metaphors of moral qualities. I would want to expand on this suggestion, which it seems to me, may well force us to call quite a bit of what has been said into question. Recall, e.g. the point that the sublime mood of not being at home is a mark of moral sensibility; Heidegger, as I pointed out, might say this of authenticity. The intellectual interest in the beautiful, however, is an interest in being able to experience the world as our home. And interestingly, this leads here to that **descent of pure beauty into the charming** of which Kant so often is suspicious.

8. Taste, Art, and Genius

1

With par. 43 we enter territory that seems to have only a somewhat uncertain place in a critique of judgment or in a work in aesthetics. **Aesthetics** is sometimes defined as that branch of philosophy that is concerned with the beautiful. The beautiful is understood first of all as the object of a certain kind of experience. So understood it is quite different from the **philosophy of art**, where the focus is more on making than on observing. The tension between these two approaches pervades the history of 18th century aesthetics, which has one root in epistemology, another in rhetoric.

The two, aesthetics and the philosophy of art, stand indeed in a somewhat problematic relation. Important here is the consideration that beauty is found not only in works of art, but in nature. Kant's privileging of beauty in nature over beauty in art is indeed quite characteristic of his aesthetics, which approaches aesthetic phenomena from the spectator's point of view. That such a point of view is quite one-sided should be evident. Kant himself was forced to recognize that the account of the beautiful given in the analytic was quite incomplete as a philosophy of art. Such incompleteness is a consequence of Kant's focus on the experience of the beautiful, rather than on its creation. But in the second part of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Judgment" Kant's focus changes. From the point of view of a philosophy of art it is this second part that contains some of Kant's most interesting observations. Here he discusses the work of art from the point of view of the creator rather than the spectator. In the course of such considerations he finds it increasingly difficult to distance himself effectively from the aesthetics of Baumgarten and more generally of what the Germans call the *Frühauflklärung*.

I would like focus on four key ideas that figure in that discussion,

- 1) on Kant's conception of **art**,
- 2) on what he calls the **aesthetical idea**,
- 3) on his understanding of the **productive imagination**,
- 4) on his understanding of **genius**.

Let me begin by returning once more to the discussion of free beauty in par. 16 on which we have already spent quite a bit of time.

Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly anyone apart from the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is [meant] to be; and even he, while recognizing it as the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural purpose when he judges the flower by taste. Hence the judgment is based on no perfection of any kind, no intrinsic purposiveness to which the combination of the manifold might refer. Many birds (the parrot, the humming-bird, the bird of paradise) and a lot of crustaceans in the sea are [free] beauties themselves [and] belong to no object determined by concepts as to the purpose, but we like them freely and on their own account. Thus designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper, etc., mean nothing on their own; they represent [*vorstellen*] nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties. What we call fantasias in music (namely, music without a topic [*Thema*]), indeed all music not set to words, may also be included in the same class (76-77)

As we saw, not only do the examples of artificial, but free beauties that Kant gives us here call themselves into question, but, on further reflection, it is by no means clear that there can be free beauty in art. For what is art? Here is Kant's definition:

Art is distinguished from nature as doing (*facere*) is from acting or operating in general (*agere*); and the product or result of art is distinguished from that of nature, the first being a work (*opus*), the second an effect (*effectus*).

By right we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason. For though we like to call the product that bees make (the regularly constructed honeycombs) a work of art, we do so only by virtue of an analogy with art; for as soon as we recall that their labor is not based on any rational deliberation on their part, we say at once that the product is a product of their nature (namely, of instinct), and it is only to their creator that we ascribe it as art. (170)

Art is here distinguished, as a productive faculty, from science, which is merely theoretical. It is distinguished from handicraft, the work of the artisan, by aiming at the creation of works that

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have their end within themselves. Art is **autotelic**. In this respect it resembles play. Art is free as craft is not. And yet, unlike play, art requires something compulsory.

It is advisable, however, to remind ourselves that in all the free arts there is yet a need for something in the order of a constraint, or, as it is called, a *mechanism*. (In poetry, for example, it is correctness and richness of language, as well as prosody and meter.) Without this the spirit, which in art must be free and which alone animates the work, would have no body at all and would evaporate completely. This reminder is needed because some of the more recent educators believe that they promote a free art best if they remove all constraint from it and convert it from labor into mere play. (171)

Kant thus warns us that art may not be allowed to become altogether free; it must be constrained. Here, too, we can say that to be truly itself, freedom must be a positive freedom, subject to rules. This suggests that in the creation of a work of art two activities must come together, one that is rather like **play**, while the other subjects such play to what Kant calls a **mechanism**.

Crucial here is the insistence that the production of art is activity governed by the will. But the will requires reasons. The artist creates having something in mind. His creating is governed by an **intention**. And yet this intention, if too insistently present to the person who is to appreciate the work of art, threatens aesthetic appreciation. The intention must therefore be disguised.

In [dealing with] a product of fine art we must become conscious that it is art rather than nature, and yet the purposiveness in its form must seem as free from all constraint of chosen rules as if it were a product of mere nature. It is this feeling of freedom in the play of our cognitive powers, a play that yet must also be purposive, which underlies that pleasure which alone is universally communicable although not based on concepts. Nature, we say, is beautiful [*schön*] if it also looks like art; and art can be called fine [*schön*] art only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks like nature. (173/174)

To repeat: the artist's freedom must unfold itself within the framework provided by rules.

It now appears that the beauty of the work of art can never be a totally free beauty. All beauty in art is adherent or dependent beauty, because all artistic production presupposes a reason, an intention. This is to say that, notwithstanding what Kant had said earlier about

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musical fantasies and ornament, a truly free beauty is encountered only in nature. The beautiful in art always involves some sort of dependence on concepts. As Kant explains:

A natural beauty is a beautiful thing: artistic beauty is a beautiful presentation (*Vorstellung*) of a thing.

In order to judge a natural beauty to be that, I need not have a prior concept of what kind of thing the object is [meant] to be; i.e. I do not have to know its material purposiveness (its purpose). Rather I like the mere form of the object while I judge it, on its own account and without knowing the purpose. But if the object is given as a product of art, and as such is to be declared beautiful, then we must first base it on a concept of what the thing is [meant] to be, since art always presupposes a purpose in the cause (and its causality). And since the harmony of a thing's manifold with an intrinsic determination of the thing, i.e. with its purpose, is the thing's perfection, it follows that when we judge artistic beauty we shall have to assess the thing's perfection as well, whereas perfection is not at all at issue when we judge natural beauty (to be that). (179)

The beautiful in art must be a dependent beauty, for it must involve a concept of the thing to be represented. This represents a significant modification of what was said before. Kant now appears very close to Baumgarten, who, after all, in his dissertation was not interested in the beauty of nature, but only in the beauty of poetry, i.e., of works of art. Free beauty is now declared by Kant to be impossible in art. And on this point it seems impossible to disagree. What today may make his position seem somewhat old-fashioned is that Kant would seem to be thinking of art primarily in representational terms: the poet, painter or sculptor **represents** a thing beautifully—that is to say, Kant would seem to continue to think of art first of all as a matter of beautifully representing reality, continuing to rely on a theory of **imitation**. This, however, is not necessary to make sense of Kant's central point: The word *Vorstellung*, above, translated as “presentation,” could indeed be read to mean just that: artificial beauty is the beautiful presentation of a thing. This would allow for abstract art. At the same time it would retain Kant's insistence that art requires a concept. Abstract art, too, is tied to certain concepts, as it has to be just because it is art. The art character of art inevitably restrains the freedom of the artistic imagination.

3

How does Kant understand here the **imagination**?

For the imagination ([in its role] as a productive cognitive power) is very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it. We use it to entertain ourselves when experience strikes us as overly routine. We may even restructure experience; and though in doing so we continue to follow analogical laws, yet we also follow principles which reside higher up, namely in reason (and which are just as natural to us as those the understanding follows in apprehending empirical nature). In this process we feel our freedom from the law of association (which attaches to the empirical use of the imagination): for although it is under that law that nature lends us material, yet we can process that material into something quite different, namely into something that surpasses nature. (182)

Significant is the distinction between two employments of the imagination, one empirical, where the imagination is subject to the laws of association, and another, where it surpasses nature and becomes genuinely productive. The former is more or less identical with Hume's faculty of association. This is a reproductive imagination, derived from sensation and closely tied to memory: I imagine what I have seen before. The productive imagination that gives birth to art is of a very different sort. While it, too, presupposes experience, it works it up in ways that are free from the principles of association. It manipulates the material nature has furnished in ways that surpass nature. In both cases the imagination is a faculty of **coordination**, as opposed to the understanding, which is a faculty of **subordination**. And as the beautiful was analyzed by Kant as a coordinated whole, it cannot surprise that the task of creating beauty is assigned by Kant to the imagination. Coordination implies that there is no explicit rule. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the imagination is therefore called **blind** (A 78/ B 103). The principles by which the imagination operates are there said to be hidden. We are reminded of the persistent attempts to root the creation of art in a subconscious faculty. Kant seems to be heading in this direction with his doctrine of the imagination. The imagination is under no control. It is free.

We should, however, note how Kant in the cited passage ties the imagination to principles said to reside in reason. It is indeed the freedom of the imagination that also makes it suspect to Kant. Thus he insists that the imagination be disciplined:

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If we ask what is more important in objects [*Sachen*] of fine art, whether they show genius or taste, then this is equivalent to asking whether in fine art imagination is more important than judgment. Now insofar as art shows genius it does indeed deserve to be called inspired [*geistreich*]. But it deserves to be called fine art only insofar as it shows taste. Hence what we must look to above all, when we judge art as fine art, is taste, at least as an indispensable condition (*sine qua non*). In order [for a work] to be beautiful, it is not strictly necessary that [it] be rich and original in ideas, but it is necessary that the imagination in its freedom be commensurate with the lawfulness of the understanding. For if the imagination is left in lawless freedom, all its riches [in ideas] produce nothing but nonsense, and it is judgment that adapts the imagination to the understanding. (188)

Thus taste — and taste also involves the understanding — appears necessary to furnish the imagination with the necessary discipline. The imagination is chaotic, rich, free, where its lawless freedom is essentially different from the freedom of the autonomous moral being, who places himself under the law of reason. In the 18th century literary feud between the Swiss Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698-1783) and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701-1776) and the East Prussian Saxon Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766) we find the former insisting on the freedom of the imagination, the latter on the importance of taste. In the cited passage Kant would appear to be more on the side of his compatriot Gottsched.

4

The product of the imagination is called by Kant an **idea**. The term "idea" is of course already familiar in its relation to reason. God is an idea of reason. What the imagination produces is, however, not an idea of reason, but what Kant calls an **aesthetic idea**.

... by an aesthetic idea I mean a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no [determinate] concept, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it. It is easy to see that an aesthetic idea is the counterpart (pendant) to the rational idea, which is conversely a concept to which no intuition (presentation of the imagination) can be adequate. (182)

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The aesthetic idea shares this with the idea of reason: both strive for something that transcends the limits of experience. Both are alike further in trying to present us with something complete: take Leibniz's idea of the cosmos as a perfect whole — here we have another idea of reason. The aesthetic idea presents us with an analogous completeness. Both are born of a dissatisfaction with the accidental. The aesthetic idea thus presents itself as having to be just as it is. Faced with such an idea, one does not want to compare it. And since beauty is understood by Kant as the expression of an aesthetic idea, it follows that every truly beautiful work of art is, according to Kant, appreciated as such beyond comparison.

And we should note how wide the scope of the aesthetic idea is according to Kant.

In a word, an aesthetic idea is a presentation of the imagination which is conjoined with a given concept and is connected, when we use imagination in its freedom, with such a multiplicity of partial presentations that no expression that stands for a determinate concept can be found for it. Hence it is a presentation that makes us add to a concept the thoughts of much that is ineffable, but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers and connects language, which otherwise would be mere letters, with spirit. (185)

“**Spirit**” is another key word in this discussion:

Spirit [*Geist*] in an aesthetic sense is the animating principle in the mind. But what this principle uses to animate [or quicken] the soul, the material it employs for this, is what imparts to the mental powers a purposive momentum, i.e., imparts to them a play which is such that it sustains itself on its own and even strengthens the powers for such a play.

Now I maintain that that this principle is nothing but the ability to exhibit aesthetic ideas. (181-182)

All beauty, according to Kant, can be understood as an **expression of aesthetic ideas!** This has enormous implications.

We may in general call beauty (whether natural or artistic) the expression of aesthetic ideas; the difference is that in the case of beautiful [*schön*] art the aesthetic idea must be prompted by a concept of the object, whereas in the case of beautiful nature, mere reflection on a given intuition, without a concept of what the

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object is [meant] to be, is sufficient for arousing and communicating the idea of which that object is regarded as the *expression*. (189)

Let me try to be more specific: say I want to paint this tree. I have a more or less clear idea of what I am up to: I want to paint a picture, of this tree, say a watercolor. This gives us our determinate concept, our A. The imagination gets hold of this A, but plays with it, develops it into an aesthetic idea so rich that it is in principle inexhaustible by concepts. This is the reason why Kant calls the aesthetic idea **unexpoundable**, while the idea of reason is **indemonstrable**. In the former case it is impossible to find an adequate concept; in the latter case impossible to find an adequate intuition. And yet, the two are related. In its freedom, the imagination surpasses the understanding's reach. The task of trying to understand the work of art is an infinite one. This does not mean that trying to understand it is a meaningless effort. On the contrary, it is precisely when I try to understand a work of art that I become aware of the aesthetic idea as transcending my understanding, as essentially unexpoundable. In this way the idea of reason and the aesthetic idea complement one another.

The work of art, Kant suggests, is related to the aesthetic idea as an imitation is to what it imitates, or as **ectype** is to **archetype** (par. 51). Given this understanding of works of art as expressions of such ideas, a classification of the arts can be made based on the different modes of expression. But the fundamental structure remains the same in each case.

Transcending the reach of concepts, an aesthetic idea is, as pointed out already, finally beyond comparison. Being beyond comparison, it strikes us as having to be just as it is. — And should we not say something similar of every person?

Perhaps this account gives us a clue as to why the table of contents leaves us quite uncertain as to where the "Analytic of the Sublime" is supposed to end. Does it include the discussion of the production of art, as the table of contents seems to suggest? There is a way in which our attempt to comprehend the beautiful suffers shipwreck on the beautiful somewhat in the way imaginative comprehension was said to suffer shipwreck on the infinity of the imaginatively apprehended in the discussion of the sublime. This invites a further rethinking of the distinction of the boundary that at first so clearly separated the beautiful from the sublime. Beauty appears increasingly in some ways rather like the sublime.

Kant's discussion of **genius** is closely tied to his analysis of the **aesthetic idea** and of the activity of the **imagination**. In turning to the problem of genius Kant is turning to a favorite topic of the day. Once again we note the two sides of Kant's thinking, with which by now we should be quite familiar: One senses on one hand a need to liberate genius, on the other a fear of that very liberty, which, Kant feels, must be harnessed if it is not to dissipate itself.

But what is genius? Kant's famous answer:

Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art. Since talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature, we could also put it this way: *Genius* is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) *through which* nature gives the rule to art.

Whatever the nature of this definition may be, and whether or not it is merely arbitrary, or rather adequate to the concept that we usually connect with the word *genius* (these questions will be discussed in the following section), still we can prove even now that, in terms of the meaning of the word genius adopted here, fine arts must necessarily be considered arts of *genius*. (174/175)

The first thing to be noted is that genius is not a faculty that belongs to all human beings. It is nature's gift to a few. It is not universal, but particular. This is perhaps the only time in the three critiques where Kant places a great deal of weight on a faculty that is a gift to particular individuals. In par. 49 Kant calls the genius *nature's favorite* and a *rare phenomenon*. (187) This means that unlike the moral person, who is governed by a law he shares with all humanity, the actions of the genius are his alone. He cannot share the secrets of his art. Indeed, he does not even understand them himself. In this respect the genius is rather like the person of taste I discussed before.

A second point follows: For Kant the faculty of judging art and the faculty of creating art would seem not to be the same. Rather, while the latter can be presupposed in all persons, the latter is possessed by those blessed by nature with this special gift.

The passage I just read may seem to contradict something Kant said before: Kant speaks of nature giving the rule to art. Is there then a rule the artist can follow after all. Didn't we say

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that there was no such rule? The definition of genius that introduces par. 46 and that I cited above gave a first answer. Kant develops this answer in that paragraph:

For every art presupposes rules, which serve as a foundation on which a product, if it is to be called artistic, is thought of as possible in the first place. On the other hand, the concept of fine art does not permit a judgment about the beauty of its product to be derived from any rule whatsoever that has a *concept* as its determining basis, i.e., the judgment must not be based on a concept of the way in which the product is possible. Hence fine art cannot itself devise the rule which it is to bring about its product. Since, however, a product can never be called art unless it is preceded by a rule, it must be nature in the subject (and through the attunement of its powers) that gives the rule to art; in other words, fine art is possible only as the product of genius. (175)

It is difficult to understand what "rule" means here. The genius is said not to have created the rule governing his creation: indeed he cannot even be said to know it. The rule is given to him as in a dream. Plato's theory of inspiration comes to mind, according to which the poet or rhapsode sings with a voice that is not really his own. The poet is only a vehicle for some higher power that speaks through him. Kant calls this higher power **nature**.

Paul Klee's lecture "On Modern Art" comes to mind, where the painter compares art to a tree:

May I use a simile, the simile of the tree? The artist has studied this world in all its variety and has, we may suppose, unobtrusively found his way in it. His sense of direction in nature and life, this branching and spreading array, I shall compare with the root of the tree.

From the root the sap flows to the artist, flows through him, flows to his eye.

Thus he stands as the trunk of the tree. standing at his appointed place, the trunk of the tree, he does nothing other than gather and pass on what comes to him from the depths. He neither serves nor rules — he transmits.

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His position is humble. And the beauty at the crown is not his own. He is merely a channel.⁴⁸

The artist's role is said to be purely passive. He is no more than a passageway. What passes through him issues from the earth in which the artist has his roots, inviting the question that Heidegger had posed with respect to Descartes' understanding of philosophy as a tree: what is the earth in which this tree is rooted. Kant speaks of nature. But how should we understand this nature?

The view sketched here is a familiar one: the artist must, as it were, lose himself; he must become free to listen to the voice of inspiration within himself, a voice over which he has no control, which may or may not speak to him. Every work of art is a gift he receives. All the artist can do to prepare himself for this call is to silence other voices that might prevent him from hearing it.

The danger with placing this much emphasis on genius is that it depends on grace. Either there is inspiration or there is not. If not, there is no way of filling the void. This kind of approach demands everything or nothing. And as genius is rare, perhaps usually there will be nothing coming forth. The child will be still-born.

But back to Kant: From what has been said it follows that genius must be **original** and not **imitative**. One cannot learn how to be a genius. In this respect art is said by Kant to be unlike science, a claim that you may want to question — that Schopenhauer did question. Genius can also not be copied. One rather has to become aware of the springs of the genius's creativity and allow these same springs to rise within oneself. Here is how Kant puts this point:

Since, then, [the artist's] natural endowment must give the rule to [fine] art, what kind of rule is this? It cannot be couched in a formula and serve as a precept, for then a judgment about the beautiful could be determined according to concepts. Rather the rule must be abstracted from what the artist has done, i.e. from the product, which others may use to test their own talent, letting it serve them as their model, not to be *copied* [*Nachmachung*] but to be *imitated* [*Nachahmung*]. How that is possible is difficult to explain. The artist's ideas arouse similar ideas in his

⁴⁸ Paul Klee, "On Modern Art," (1924), *Modern Artists On Art*, ed. Robert L. Herbert (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), 76 - 77.

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apprentice if nature has provided the latter with a similar proportion in his mental powers. That is why the models [*Muster*] of fine art are the only means of transmitting these ideas to posterity. (177-178)

And yet, at this point Kant becomes scared of the emphasis he has placed on genius and thus on the anarchic imagination. Does the present account not threaten to reduce art to arbitrariness? To mitigate this implication Kant pulls back and once again places emphasis on the role of concepts.

Even though mechanical and fine art are very different from each other, since the first is based merely on diligence and learning, but the second on genius, yet there is no fine art that does not have as its essential condition something mechanical, which can be encompassed by rules and complied with, and hence has an element of academic correctness. For something must be thought, as purpose, since otherwise the product cannot be ascribed to any art at all, but would be a mere product of chance. But directing the work to a purpose requires determinate rules that one is not permitted to renounce. Now since originality of talent is one essential component (though not the only one) of the character of genius, shallow heads believe that the best way to show that they are geniuses in first bloom is by renouncing all rules of academic constraint, believing that they will cut a better figure on the back of an ill-tempered than on a trained horse. Genius can only provide rich material for products of fine art; processing this and giving it form requires a talent that is academically trained, so that it may be used in a way that can stand the test of the power of judgment. (178)

Genius, to put the matter differently, must be subject to the controls exerted by good taste. Taste, as we have learned before, is a faculty that gives both understanding and the imagination their due. When the imagination claims more than its due, emphasis must be placed on the understanding.

Having opposed genius, as the power to produce art, to taste, as the power to judge art, in par. 48, Kant offers us in the following paragraph this definition:

Hence genius actually consists in the happy relation — one that no science can teach and that cannot be learned by any diligence — allowing us, first, to discover ideas for a given concept, and second, to hit upon a way of expressing these ideas

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that enable us to communicate to others, as accompanying a concept, the mental attunement that these ideas produce. The second talent is properly the one we call spirit. For in order to express what is ineffable in the mental state accompanying a certain presentation and to make it universally communicable — whether the expression consists in language or painting or plastic art — we find an ability [viz., spirit] to apprehend the imagination's rapidly passing play and to unite it in a concept that can be communicated without the constraint of rules (a concept that on that very account is original, while at the same time it reveals a new rule that could not have been inferred from any earlier principles or examples). (185/186)

Art is thus the expression, the language in the widest sense, of such mental states. We should note the movement described: we begin with a concept. That concept raises in the genius an aesthetic idea that exceeds the reach of that first concept and is ineffable. But the genius is capable of communicating that idea in such a way that what is communicated is once again a concept, but a concept that is original, i.e. that cannot be derived from previously available concepts, but has sufficient definition to establish an altogether new rule. But, understood in this way, is genius not also necessary to explain the progress of science? And more generally: is it not needed to explain the possibility of that empirical schematism that is a necessary condition of the very possibility of experience? Should we then follow Hölderlin and Heidegger and insist that it is poetic genius that builds the house of language?

Once again we are not so very distant from Baumgarten's understanding of the significance of clear, but confused ideas. Kant's aesthetic idea recalls this formulation, only that Kant would seem to insist that the difference between concept and aesthetic idea is one in kind rather than just a matter of degree.

Having, as it were, harnessed the imagination by insisting that "the mental powers whose combination (in a certain relation) constitutes genius are imagination and understanding" (185), Kant once again permits a freedom to genius that softens this reign.

A certain *boldness* of expression, and in general some deviation from the common rules, is entirely fitting for a genius; it is however not at all worthy of imitation, but in itself always remains a defect that [any] one must try to eliminate, though the genius has, as it were, a privilege to allow the defect to remain [anyway] because

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the inimitable [element] in the momentum of his spirit would be impaired by timorous caution. (187)

Kant is torn here between two views that are not easily reconciled: on one hand art is the production of genius and genius is original. Thus it would seem that the artist of genius need not take too much care to follow rules as this might cause his originality to be fettered too much. On the other hand, Kant is afraid of this very freedom. If the originality of the artist lets her or him forsake the rules that preside over common sense, will, what he produces, not inevitably be judged nonsense? Kant therefore argues that genius must submit to taste.

Taste, like the power of judgment in general, consists in disciplining (or training) genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized or polished; but at the same time it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread while still remaining purposive. It introduces clarity and order into a wealth of thought and hence makes the ideas durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and [hence] fit for being followed by others and fit for an ever advancing culture. (188)

As Heidegger was to put it in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” to be worthy of the name, art must find its preservers, who recognize in what the artist has produced a rule that they are willing to accept. Genius will contribute to the changing of taste, but to make such a contribution the genius must remain sufficiently responsive to the culture his work is about to advance, if his work is not to be dismissed as nonsense.

The idea of an altogether free beauty has definitely been abandoned in the arts. Concepts are necessary to guide the creator as well as the spectator. Beauty in art is inescapably dependent beauty. This, however, should not lead us to forget that these concepts only guide or regulate the imagination. The judgment that something is beautiful remains mysterious. There can be no explanation why this painting is beautiful and that one not. In other words, there is still that X, that indeterminate concept, which all determination cannot exhaust. It is precisely in our attempts to exhaust it that we realize its inexhaustibility and thus recognize beauty. And such attempts may allow us to derive from the work new concepts or rules that help change the shape of a culture, our common sense.

Whenever genius was discussed in the early nineteenth century, a number of archetypal figures offered themselves as illustrations. One such figure was Shakespeare. For a contemporary genius one could turn to Goethe. But above all it was perhaps Beethoven who was to furnish the age with an image of genius. Let me therefore conclude with two reactions to Beethoven's music. The first is from Bettina von Arnim's *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde, Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*.

In music, scholars have always stood before genius like wooden blocks. The scholar can only stand what he knows, and not because he understands it, but because he has gotten used to it, just as a donkey has gotten used to his daily path... Scholarship at best understands what is already familiar, but not what points to the future. It cannot free the spirit from the letter, from the law. Every art stands on its own, ready to conquer death, ready to lead man to heaven; but where the philistines watch over her as her masters, she stands meekly, her head shorn. What should have been free will, free life, has become clockwork. And though one may listen to it, believe, and hope, nothing will come of it. The only roads which lead to her are closed to the philistines; they are prayer and a silent heart that confidently trusts in eternal wisdom, even where it cannot understand. We stand before a mountain range which we cannot cross. And yet, only up there, is understanding to be found.

Note how the rhetoric of genius here is also a rhetoric of the sublime.

Even more telling is a review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony by the romantic poet, E. T. A. Hoffmann, who was also active as a conductor and composer.

Beethoven's instrumental music opens up an immense unfathomable realm. Rays of fire shoot through the deep night of this realm; we become aware of gigantic shadows, rising, falling, surrounding us, annihilating us, everything in us except the pain of infinite desire, into which that joy which had risen quickly and with rejoicing, falls back and disappears; and only in this pain, devouring, but not destroying love, hope and joy; threatening to disrupt us with a concord of all passions; only here do we continue to live, ecstatic visionaries. The romantic taste is rare, still more rare romantic talent. Perhaps it is because of this that there

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are so few who are able to play that lyre which opens up the wonderful realm of the infinite.

Beethoven is a purely romantic (and just because of this a truly musical) composer. Perhaps because of this he is less successful in vocal music, which does not permit indefinite longing, but rather presents us with moods, made definite by words, although experienced in the realm of the infinite. This also explains why his instrumental music rarely is popular. The people, who are unable to follow Beethoven do not deny him a high measure of fantasy; but they see in his works only the products of genius, who careless about form and selection, surrenders himself to the fire and the momentary inspirations of his imagination. Nevertheless, he is just as deliberate as Haydn or Mozart. He separates himself from the inner realm of tones and rules it as an absolute monarch.

9. The Division of the Fine Arts

1

Let me return to par. 49, where Kant has this to say about genius:

Hence genius actually consists in the happy relation — one that no science can teach and that cannot be learned by any diligence — allowing us, first, to discover ideas for a given concept, and second, to hit upon a way of expressing these ideas that enable us to communicate to others, as accompanying a concept, the mental attunement that these ideas produce. The second talent is properly the one we call spirit. For in order to express what is ineffable in the mental state accompanying a certain presentation and to make it universally communicable — whether the expression consists in language or painting or plastic art — we find an ability [viz., spirit] to apprehend the imagination's rapidly passing play and to unite it in a concept that can be communicated without the constraint of rules (a concept that on that very account is original, while at the same time it reveals a new rule that could not have been inferred from any earlier principles or examples). (185/186)

Genius, Kant insists, must first discover ideas for a given concept and then find a way of communicating these ideas by expressing them in some appropriate medium. This leads Kant in par. 51 to understand beauty as the expression of aesthetic ideas, which in turn suggests a way of classifying the arts.

We may in general call beauty (whether natural or artistic) the *expression* of aesthetic ideas; the difference is that in the case of beautiful [*schön*] art the aesthetic idea must be prompted by a concept of the object, whereas in the case of beautiful nature, mere reflection on a given intuition, without a concept of what the object is [meant] to be, is sufficient for arousing and communicating the idea of which the object is regarded as the expression. (189)

We should note that Kant applies his understanding of **beauty as the expression of aesthetic ideas** not just to art, where it more readily suggests itself, but to nature, inviting us to look at nature in the image of art, hinting at a divine artist.

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But in Par. 51 Kant is interested in art and the multiplicity of the arts. He himself would not seem to have taken his attempt at a classification of the arts very seriously. He is it not at all dogmatic about his division and speaks of it as a mere *Versuch*. As he tells us in his footnote:

The reader must not judge this sketch of a possible division of the fine arts as if it were intended as a theory. It is only one of a variety of attempts that can and should still be made. (190)

The key that guides this attempt is provided by Kant's understanding of the beautiful as the expression of aesthetical ideas.

But what Kant calls a convenient principle seems to me not at all perspicuous:

Accordingly, if we wish to divide the fine [*schön*] arts, we can choose for this, at least tentatively, no more convenient principle than the analogy between the arts and the way people express themselves in speech so as to communicate with one another as perfectly as possible, namely, not merely as regards their concepts, but also as regards their sensations. Such expression consists in word [*Wort*], gesture [*Gebärdung*], and tone [*Ton*] (articulation [*Artikulation*], gesticulation [*Gestikulation*], and modulation [*Modulation*]). Only when these three ways of expressing himself are combined does the speaker communicate completely. For in this way thought, intuition, and sensation are conveyed to others simultaneously and in unison. (189-190)

Perfect communication is thus not understood by Kant as a matter of transmitting conceptual content. The tone-fall, or the music of a discourse also communicates a great deal. There is the often repeated story about Columbia University's Sidney Morgenbesser, who is supposed to have responded in the early 1950's to an observation by the famous Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin, that, in English, although a double negative implies a positive meaning (i.e. "I'm not unlike my father..."), there is no language in which a double positive implies a negative, with a dismissive "Yeah, yeah." Tone-fall is all important here. Or take the expression: "I will take care of him." It can be said lovingly or murderously. And important, too, is the body. It has an expressive capability. We can thus communicate with our hands. Think of waving someone to come closer, or of waving goodbye. In German there is the expression, *Gebet der Beine*: we can pray with our legs.

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Kant's distinction between three modes of expression, word, gesture, and tone, leads to the claim that we also ought to divide the arts into three:

Hence there are only three kinds of fine art: the art of speech, visual art, and the art of the play of sensations (as outer sense impressions). This division could also be arranged as a dichotomy: we could divide fine art into the art of expressing thoughts and that of expressing intuitions, and then divide the latter according to whether it deals merely with form, or with matter (sensation). But in that case the division would look too abstract, and less in keeping with ordinary concepts. (190)

The suggestion, that only the conjunction of word, gesture, and tone allows for full communication, makes one wonder whether an art that similarly joined these different modes of expression, say dramatic art or even more an opera, a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, should not be placed highest, as opposed to, say, Lessing's claim that the arts of space and time, form and expression be kept separate.

But what renders the passage both thought-provoking and questionable is the way it would seem to call Kant's formalism into question: how are we to understand an art that is concerned with matter? Is such an art not ruled out by Kant's insistence that the beautiful is liked universally, that judgments of beauty demand universal agreement?

As we shall see, Kant addresses this difficulty and I find this discussion perhaps the most interesting part of paragraph 51. But, before I turn to it, let me consider briefly his treatment of the other arts.

Kant begins with the arts of speech:

The arts of SPEECH are *oratory* and *poetry*. Oratory is the art of engaging in a task of understanding as [if it were] a free play of the imagination; poetry is the art of conducting a free play of the imagination [as if it were] a task of understanding. (190)

There is nothing surprising about the way Kant places the poet above the orator:

So while the orator provides something that he does not promise, namely an entertaining play of the imagination, yet he also takes something away from what he promises and what is after all his announced task, namely that of occupying the understanding purposively. The poet, on the other hand, promises little and

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announces a mere play with ideas; but he accomplishes something worthy of [being called] a task, for in playing he provides food for the understanding and gives life to its concepts by means of the imagination. Hence basically the orator accomplishes less than he promises, the poet more. (191)

The critique of rhetoric is quite characteristic of the Enlightenment, which with it distinguishes itself from the rhetorical Baroque. John Locke comes to mind, who contrasts feminine ornamented speech and masculine straight talk. Presupposed is an understanding of rhetoric as an inessential, pretty perhaps, but at best dispensable addition to what serves the serious business of life. The critique of rhetoric and the critique of ornament go together.

The observation that the poet gives life to concepts suggests that there is something lifeless about discourse that takes its essential task to be the communication of conceptual content. It leaves us cold. In "On Truth and Lie" Nietzsche thus contrasts a honey-filled hive with what science constructs: a "columbarium of concepts, a graveyard of perception." Science succeeds precisely to the extent that the work of the imagination, its endless process of metaphor formation, comes to an end. There is then a sense in which for Nietzsche the poetic, imaginative work of language is to science as life is to death. What science builds cannot but bury perception. In the *Critique of Judgment*, to be sure, we find only the barest premonition of such sentiments.

The visual arts depend on the senses in a stronger sense. Here the medium of expression is sensible intuition.

The VISUAL [somewhat misleading translation of *bildende*, i.e. formative] arts, i.e. the arts of expressing ideas in sensible intuition (not by presentations of mere imagination that are aroused by words), are those of sensible truth (*Sinnenwahrheit*) and those of sensible illusion (*Sinnenschein*). Both express ideas by making figures in space; plastic art offers figures to two senses, sight and touch, (though it offers them to touch without regard to beauty), painting offers them only to sight. The aesthetic idea (the archetype or original image) underlies both of these arts, in the imagination. But the figure that constitutes its expression (the ectype, or derivative image) is given [differently in the two arts]: either with corporeal extension (as the object itself exists), or as that extension is pictured in the eye (i.e. as it appears on a plane). Differently put: whatever the archetype is,

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[it] is referred — and this reference is made a condition for reflection — either to an actual purpose or only [to] the resemblance of such a purpose. (191)

Kant thus draws the obvious distinction between plastic art and painting. Plastic art is then divided into sculpture and architecture, where the former presents something that might have existed in nature, while the second presupposes a concept of things that are possible only through art, where Kant understands architecture so broadly that it includes not only temples, palaces, assembly halls, houses, triumphal arches, columns, cenotaphs, etc. but also household furnishings, carriages, and the like. The chief point in architecture so understood is utility, and Kant is quite aware of the tension between the demands of utility and those of beauty with which architecture has to struggle.

Given the age, Kant's understanding of painting is interesting:

Painting, the second kind of visual art, exhibits sensible illusion artistically connected with ideas. I would divide it into painting proper, which renders nature beautifully, and landscape gardening, which arranges nature's products beautifully. For painting proper provides only the illusion of corporeal extension; landscape gardening, while providing corporeal extension truthfully, provides only the illusion of the use and utility [the garden has] for purposes other than the mere play of the imagination in the contemplation of its forms. Landscape gardening consists in nothing but decorating the ground with the same diversity [of things] (grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees, even bodies of water, hills and dales) with which nature exhibits it to our view, only arranged differently and commensurately with certain ideas. But, like painting, this beautiful arrangement of corporeal things is given only to the eye, because the senses of touch cannot provide a presentation of intuition of such a form. (192-193)

Kant's inclusion of landscape gardening among the major arts is very much part of the aesthetic culture of the Enlightenment. Questionable is the way Kant wants to keep his distance from the sense of touch, presumably also from the other senses. The landscape gardener wants to represent us with something very much like a sequence of beautiful pictures. This suggests the aesthetic category of the **picturesque**. The concern with the picturesque did indeed play a decisive role not only in the design of the English parks that were becoming so popular in Kant's day, but also in architectural design.

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Once again Kant is concerned to keep his distance from the sense of touch. In the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche was to use Kant's unwillingness to "touch" touch, to call into question what he took to be Kant's overly distanced approach to beauty. I read you the passage before, but it bears repeating:

If our aestheticians never weary of asserting in Kant's favor that, under the spell of beauty, one can *even* view undraped female statues "without interest," one may laugh a little at their expense: the experience of artists on this ticklish point are more "interesting" and Pygmalion was in any event *not* necessarily an unaesthetic man." Let us think all the more highly of the innocence of our aestheticians, which is reflected in such arguments; let us, for example, credit it to the honor of Kant that he should expatiate on the peculiar properties of the sense of touch with the naiveté of a country parson.⁴⁹

As he enlarged the category of architecture, so Kant enlarged the category of painting to include the decoration of rooms with wallpaper, beautiful furnishings and the like, designed only to create beautiful pictures; and he includes fashion design, jewelry in so far as they serve not so much utility, but the creation of beautiful pictures. (193).

Interesting is the way in which Kant here recognizes that we respond to such ornament not just as beautiful form, but as speaking to us in some way.

No matter how much the workmanship in all decoration may vary mechanically, requiring quite different artists, still any judgment of taste about what is beautiful in art is determined in the same way to this extent: it judges only the forms (without regard for any purpose) as they offer themselves to the eye, single or in their arrangement, according to the affect they have on the imagination. But how can we (by analogy) include visual art under gesture in speech? What justifies this is [the fact] that through these figures the artist's spirit gives corporeal expression to what and how he has thought, and makes the thing itself speak, as it were, by mime. This is the very common play of our fancy, whereby to lifeless things is attributed a spirit that corresponds to their form and speaks through them. (193)

⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* III, 6, trans. Walter Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 104.

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The spirit of the artist is said to be given corporal expression in such forms, a point that deserves more thought. By its style the work communicates, not a content that can be adequately grasped conceptually, but a way of standing in the world, just as that is communicated by the gestures of the human body.

The third category, “art of the beautiful play of sensations,” leaves Kant uncertain whether it should even be included in the realm of beautiful art at all. His formalism makes such a concern quite expected:

In other words, we cannot say with certainty whether a color or a tone (sound) is merely an agreeable sensation or whether it is of itself already a beautiful play of [component] sensations and as such carries with it, as we judge it aesthetically, a liking for its form. Just consider the rapidity of the vibrations of light or, in the case of tones, of the air, which probably far exceeds all our ability to judge directly in perception the ratio in the temporal division [produced] by these vibrations. This fact might well lead us to believe that we sense only the effect of these vibrations on the elastic parts of our body, but that the temporal division [produced] by them goes unnoticed and does not enter into our judging, so that we connect only agreeableness with colors and tones, not beauty in the composition of the colors and tones. (194)

But who would locate beauty in a single tone or color? Certainly not Baumgarten! A perception of relations is necessary to the experience of beauty. We are not surprised by the way the paragraph thus ends on an uncertain note that speaks to Kant’s lack of understanding of both painting or music. The discussion is driven by considerations quite removed from an actual experience of what Kant here is talking about:

If we consider all of this, we may feel compelled to regard sensation of color and tone not as mere sense impressions but as the effect of our judging of the form we find in the play of many sensations. However, the difference that the one or the other opinion would make to our judging of the basis of music would affect the definition only in this: we would declare music either, as we did above, to be the beautiful [*schön*] play of sensations (of hearing), or [to be the play] of agreeable sensations. Only under the first kind of explication will music be presented wholly

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as fine [schön] art, while under the second it would be presented (at least in part) as agreeable art. (194-195)

Kant's focus on particular colors and tones, rather than on their relationship in this paragraph is remarkable. What matters in music are not individual tones, but their relationship — and that does invite judgments of form. As his rather more thoughtful discussion of music in par. 53 will show, Kant was quite aware of the way music, ever since Pythagoras, has been linked to mathematics. But he would seem to have experienced music as an agreeable, and indeed often disagreeable art. Schopenhauer's elevation of music above all the other arts seems very distant.

2

Par. 52 discusses the possibilities of combining the different arts, words with pictorial representation in drama, with music in song; song with pictorial representation in opera; music with the play of figures in dance; also the sublime and the beautiful in tragedy, a didactic poem, or an oratorio. Kant is quite noncommittal concerning gain and loss in such combinations. That in these combinations art is more artistic he is prepared to grant; but is it therefore also more beautiful? What matters to him is something else: that the work attune the spirit to ideas.

Characteristic is the ending of this paragraph:

Unless we connect the fine arts, closely or remotely, with moral ideas, which alone carry with them an independent liking, the second of the two alternatives just mentioned is their ultimate fate [that they serve mere enjoyment and make the spirit dull]. They serve in that case only for our diversion, which we need all the more in proportion as we use it to dispel the mind's dissatisfaction with itself, with the result that we increase still further our uselessness and dissatisfaction with ourselves. For the first of the two alternatives [culture, and the spirit's attunement to ideas], it is generally the beauties of nature that are most beneficial, if we are habituated early to observe, judge, and admire them. (196).

Kant's suspicion of the pursuit of art for art's sake is here reaffirmed. When art loses its ethical function it has to degenerate into entertainment, high-class entertainment perhaps, but entertainment nonetheless. The pursuit of the aesthetic, so understood, may dispel boredom, but, Kant would agree with Kierkegaard, such a pursuit will only increase our sense of being superfluous.

3

In par. 53 Kant compares the different arts. Not unexpectedly poetry is now given the first rank.

Among all the arts poetry holds the highest rank. (It owes its origin almost entirely to genius and is least open to guidance by precept or examples.) It expands the mind: for it sets the imagination free, and offers us, from among the unlimited variety of possible forms that harmonize with a given concept, though within that concept's limits, that form which links the exhibition of the concept with a wealth of thought to which no linguistic expression is completely adequate, and so poetry rises aesthetically to ideas. (196)

We should note how firmly Kant here tethers poetry to concepts, and the preceding gives us to understand that these will be moral concepts. To be sure, poetry must rise above the concept and give expression to aesthetic ideas that alone can bring such concepts to life and thus serve to move us.

Rhetoric, on the other hand, as we have already seen, cannot be defended, since it seeks to deceive by a beautiful show, whether used in the law courts or from the pulpit. In good Enlightenment fashion Kant thus associates it with cultural decline. Even when someone's rhetorical skill gets us to do what is right, it does not lead us to do it because we recognize it to be right, and thus our action will lack moral value.

And once again music is given only a low place. To be sure, "if our concern is with charm and mental agitation," it should be ranked right beneath poetry (198). But the problem with music is that "it speaks through nothing but sensations without concepts, so that unlike poetry it leaves us with nothing to meditate about." (198) As far as reason is concerned, it therefore ranks below all the other arts. According to Kant music cannot bear repetition without becoming boring.

Kant too calls music "a language of affects," a common view, especially in the 18th century.

In this way it communicates to everyone (*allgemein*), according to the law of association, the aesthetic ideas that we naturally connect with such affects. But since these aesthetic ideas are not concepts, not determinate thoughts, the form of

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the arrangement of these sensations (harmony and melody), which takes the place of the form of a language, only serves to express, by means of [the] proportioned attunement of the sensations, the aesthetic idea of a coherent whole of an unspeakable wealth of thought, and to express it in conformity with a certain theme that is the prevalent affect in the piece.” (199)

Given his preceding analysis, Kant has to insist that only by its mathematical form can music claim beauty. And he recognizes that musical compositions do possess such a form and can thus be judged beautiful. But this aspect of music, Kant insists, is overwhelmed by its affective power; and “mathematics certainly does not play the slightest part in the charm and mental agitation that music produces” (199).

Kant’s personal experience with music, how it affected him, is hinted at by the following remark:

Moreover, music has a certain lack of urbanity about it. For, depending mainly on the character of its instruments, it extends its influence (on the neighborhood) farther than people wish, and so, as it were, imposes itself on others and hence impairs the freedom of those outside the musical party.” (200)

Rather like some perfume that one has to breathe against one's will, music too often is difficult to escape.

More in the spirit of occasional observations than of reasoned theory, pars. 51 -53 hardly add up to a weighty discussion.

4

Par. 54, the comment that concludes the “Analytic of the Sublime” is similarly light-weight. Interestingly this analytic ends with some remark on humor.

The general tone is set by Kant’s remark on Epicurus: “when Epicurus claimed that all gratification is basically bodily sensation, he was perhaps not mistaken, but only misunderstood himself in including intellectual and even practical liking among the gratifications.” (201) Aesthetic pleasure, Kant insists, is not to be included among Epicurus’ gratifications, although, as music demonstrates, the beautiful is ever in danger of degenerating into the merely agreeable.

It is worth noting that this “Comment” and thus “The Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment” concludes with some observations on naiveté, “which is the eruption of the sincerity that

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originally was natural to humanity and which is opposed to the art of dissimulation that has become our second nature.” (206) We may indeed laugh a little at such naiveté, even as we rejoice, as Kant suggests, at its existence. Our laughter here is good-natured. We almost envy what we laugh at. And we may indeed laugh a little, as Nietzsche would have us do, at Kant when he expatiates “on the peculiar properties of the sense of touch with the naiveté of a country parson” and yet “credit it to his honor,” not without a trace of envy.

5

Repeatedly I have pointed to tensions in Kant's thought. Thus I emphasized the tension between **free** and **dependent** beauty, between the **sublime** and the **beautiful**, between **genius** and **taste**. In each case we have one term that points towards the past, in particular towards Baumgarten and the Leibnitian school, another that points towards the future. It is the first moment, the proximity of certain remarks to Baumgarten, that caused Benedetto Croce to claim that Kant made no significant progress beyond Baumgarten. It is a challenge that deserves serious consideration. But opposed to this tendency is another that points forward, to the romantic movement.

We can address this tension by considering Kant's understanding of the imagination. Croce, seeing Baumgarten in Kant, accuses him of having only an associative and a reproductive imagination, not a genuinely productive one. I think that such an accusation fails to do justice to Kant: a genuinely **productive imagination** would seem to characterize the work of genius in the creation of the **aesthetic idea**. But is a productive imagination not also presupposed by every reflective judgment? If one now emphasizes the problem of the production of empirical concepts by the reflective judgment, something very much like genius and its originality is elevated into a condition of the very possibility of experience, which is thus given something like a foundation in poetry. With this the universality of knowledge is threatened. Kant suddenly begins to look more like Heidegger than like Baumgarten. The only way to counter this is to subordinate the aesthetic idea once again to reason, if to a reason that eludes us finite knowers.

Let me pursue this tension in Kant further by turning to his discussion of the supersensible in the *Dialectic of the Aesthetical Judgment* (pars. 55 - 60).

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Kant begins with a formulation of what he calls the antinomy of taste: in outline at least this antinomy should be familiar from the discussion of the four moments:

There are two commonplaces about taste. The following proposition contains the first of these and is used by everyone who lacks taste but tries to escape censure. Everyone has his own taste. That amounts to saying that the basis determining a judgment of taste is merely subjective (gratification or pain), and that such judgments have no right to other people's necessary assent. (210)

This is, as we have seen, essentially the position held by British aesthetics, e.g. by Hume. Taste in art, as we observed before, is on this view not so very different from taste in cooking. In both cases we are led by experience to expect a certain agreement, but we have no right to demand it.

The second commonplace about taste, which is used by those who grant judgments of taste the right to speak validly for everyone, is this: There is no disputing about taste. That amounts to saying that even though the basis determining a judgment of taste may be objective, that basis still cannot be brought to determinate concepts; and hence even proofs do not allow us to decide anything about such a judgment, although we can certainly quarrel about it, and rightly so. (210)

The second claim grants that judgments of taste may be objective, but, if so, we are unable to point to determinate concepts that would settle the disagreement. Nevertheless, if there is at least a claim to universality, we will be able to **quarrel**, if not to **dispute** about taste. But this, as Kant points out, contradicts the first statement. For, as Kant points out, where there is a quarrel there is an assumption that the judgment has more than just a private validity. From these considerations Kant is led to the statement of the following antinomy:

(1) Thesis: A judgment of taste is not based on concepts; for otherwise one could dispute about it (decide by means of proofs).

(2) Antithesis: A judgment of taste is based on concepts; for otherwise regardless of the variation among [such judgments], one could not even as much as quarrel about them (lay claim to other people's necessary assent to one's judgment.) (211)

Kant solves the antinomy by pointing out that the word "concept" is used in different senses in thesis and the antithesis.

There is only one way for us to eliminate the conflict between the mentioned principles, on which we base all our judgments of taste (and which are nothing but

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the two peculiarities of a judgment of taste that were set out in the analytic): We must show that the concept to which we refer the object in such judgments is understood in different senses in those two maxims [or principles] of the aesthetic power of judgment, and show that it is necessary for our transcendental power of judgment to adopt both these senses (or points of view in judging) but that even the illusion arising from our confusion of the two is natural and hence unavoidable. (211)

Where there is a legitimate quarrel there must be a truth of the matter and all truth, Kant insists, is based on concepts. But this would seem to conflict with the very nature of aesthetic judgments, which refers the judged back to a subjective state. The resolution of the conflict is spelled out as follows:

A judgment of taste must refer to some concept or other, or otherwise it could not possibly lay claim to necessary validity for everyone. And yet it must not be provable from a concept, because while some concepts can be determined, others cannot, but are intrinsically both indeterminate and indeterminable. Concepts of the understanding are of the first kind; for them there can be a corresponding sensible intuition whose predicates determine them. On the other hand, reason has a concept of the second kind: the transcendental concept of the supersensible underlying all that intuition, so that we cannot determine this concept any further theoretically. (212)

It is not clear how the rational concept of the **supersensible** can provide a particular aesthetic judgment with that basis needed to support its claim to its universal validity. For that it is all too general. All it can do is provide a basis for the assertion that aesthetic judgments can claim universal validity. And this is sufficient to establish that the concept of beauty stands in an intimate relation to that of the supersensible, that in confronting the beautiful we confront, as it were, the appearance of the supersensible.

Kant also suggests that all sensible intuition has as its basis the transcendental rational concept of the supersensible. This suggests that all sensible intuition has its basis in an aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic experience, so understood, returns us to the basis, the **arche** of all experience. This is made explicit in the following passage:

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And yet there can be no doubt that in a judgment of taste the presentation of the object (and at the same time of the subject as well) is referred more broadly [i. e. beyond ourselves], and this broad reference is our basis for extending such judgments [and treating them] as necessary for everyone. Hence this extension must be based on some concept or other; but this concept must be one that no intuition can determine, that does not permit us to cognize anything and hence does not allow us to prove a judgment of taste; such a mere concept is reason's pure concept of the supersensible underlying the object (as well as underlying the judging subject) as an object of sense and hence as appearance. (212)

How convincing is this? We can grant, given Kant's analytic of the beautiful, that the concept in question "must be one that no intuition can determine," also that "reason's pure concept of the supersensible underlying the object" is such a concept, but does the latter do justice to the specificity of judgments of beauty? We may want to follow Kant and say that judgments of beauty refer us to the supersensible. And we do have a concept of the supersensible. But is this to say that this concept is the basis of our judgments of beauty? It rather makes room for that basis.

We are given a pointer by Kant's solution of the antinomy:

However all contradiction disappears if I say this: A judgment of taste is based on a concept (the concept of the general basis [*Grund*] of nature's purposiveness for our power of judgment), but this concept does not allow us to cognize and prove anything concerning the object because it is intrinsically indeterminate and inadequate for cognition; and yet this same concept does make the judgment of taste valid for everyone, because though each person's judgment is singular and directly accompanies his intuition) the basis that determined the judgment lies, perhaps, in the concept of what may be considered the supersensible substrate of humanity. (213)

Kant here states that the ground of the aesthetic judgment should perhaps — and the somewhat hesitant "perhaps" is significant — be sought in "what may be considered the supersensible substrate of humanity." That concept names the dimension in which the ground of some specific aesthetic judgment must be sought.

Kant suggests that the antinomy rests on a **natural illusion**.

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What is needed to solve an antinomy is only the possibility that two seemingly [*dem Scheine nach*] conflicting propositions are in fact not contradictory but are consistent, even though it would surpass our cognitive power to explain how the concept involved [i. e. how what the concept stands for] is possible. Showing this [consistency] will also allow us to grasp [the fact] that and [the reason] why this illusion remains so even when it ceases to deceive us once we have resolved the seeming contradiction. (213)

The translator's clarification following "concept," "[i. e. how what the concept stands for] is possible]," points to a lack of clarity in Kant's use of *Begriff*: it is not the concept of the supersensible that underlies all intuition, but the supersensible.

The natural illusion Kant here speaks of is the same natural illusion that invites us to make definite what must remain indeterminate, e.g. when we speak of God.

Kant sums up the preceding discussion as follows:

Eliminating the conflict between the claims and counterclaims of taste is the best we can do. It is absolutely impossible to provide a determinate, objective principle of taste that would allow us to guide, to test, and to prove its judgments, because then they would not be judgments of taste. As for the subjective principle — i.e., the indeterminate idea of the supersensible in us — as the sole key for solving the mystery of this ability [i.e. taste] concealed from us even as to its sources, we can do no more than point to it; but there is nothing we can do that would allow us to grasp it any further. (213/214)

Kant understands the antinomy of taste as a decisive rejection of the empiricist and the rational understanding of beauty. Neither can do justice to it.

The antinomy I have set forth and settled here is based on the concept of taste in the proper sense, i.e. as an aesthetic power of judgment that merely reflects; and I reconciled the two seemingly conflicting principles [by showing] that *they may both be true*, and that is all we need. If, on the other hand, we assumed, as some do, that the basis determining taste is *agreeableness* (because the presentation underlying a judgment of taste is singular), or, as others would have it, that it is the principle of *perfection* (because the judgment is universally valid), with the definition of taste formulated accordingly, then the result would be an antinomy

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that we could not possibly settle except by showing that the two opposed (but opposed [as contraries,] not as mere contradictories) propositions are both false. (214)

Neither the empiricist nor the rationalist would, to be sure, be terribly impressed by these considerations, as Kant recognizes: The antinomy can be avoided, he points out, either by denying “that the principle of taste is based on any a priori principle whatever,” or by assuming “that a judgment of taste is actually a disguised rational judgment about the perfection we have discovered in a thing and [in] reference of its manifold to a purpose, so that basically the judgment is teleological, and we call it aesthetic only because of the confusion that here attaches to our reflection.” (219) But the antinomy gives us no reason to reject either of these approaches. That burden falls back on the analytic of the beautiful.

What matters to Kant here is the way the antinomy forces us to look to the supersensible:

So we see that the elimination of the antinomy of aesthetic judgment proceeds along lines similar to the solution of the antinomies of pure theoretical reason in the *Critique [of Pure Reason]*, and we see here too — as well as in the *Critique of Practical Reason* — that the antinomies compel us against our will to look beyond the sensible to the supersensible as the point [where] all our a priori powers are reconciled, since that is the only alternative left to us for bringing reason into harmony with itself. (214)

The harmonious play of understanding and imagination lets us thus seek its ground in the supersensible. The beautiful recalls us to that supersensible ground, which is presupposed by all sensible experience.

10. The Beautiful as Symbol of the Good

1

Today I want to turn to the paragraphs that conclude the “Critique of the Aesthetic Judgment.” At their center are thoughts that address the relationship between the beautiful and the good.

In the "First Comment" added to par. 57, *Solution to the Antinomy of Taste*, Kant returns to the aesthetic idea and its relationship to genius:

Just as in the case of a rational idea the *imagination* with its intuitions does not reach the given concept, so in the case of an aesthetic idea the *understanding* with its concepts never reaches the entire inner intuition that the imagination has and connects with a given presentation. And since bringing a presentation of the imagination to concepts is the same as expounding it, aesthetic ideas may be called unexpoundable presentations of the imagination in its free play. Later on I shall have occasion to make some further points about aesthetic ideas. Here I shall merely point out that both kinds of ideas, rational as well as aesthetic, must have their principles, and both must have them in reason: the principles of rational ideas must be objective principles of reason's employment, those of aesthetic ideas subjective ones.

Hence GENIUS can also be explained as the ability to [exhibit] *aesthetic ideas*. (216/217)

And where do these aesthetic ideas come from? Kant's answer: from nature, the nature of the subject:

This [explication] indicates at the same time why it is that, in products of genius, art (i.e. production of the beautiful) receive its rule from nature (the nature of the subject) rather than from a deliberate purpose. For we must judge the beautiful not according to concepts, but according to the purposive attunement of the imagination that brings it into harmony with the power of concepts as such. (217)

This raises the question: does the genius then return us to or furnish the aesthetic arche of all experience?

2

The "Second Comment" returns us to the significance of the antinomies that have cropped up in the three critiques.

Hence the following important point arises spontaneously: that there are three kinds of antinomy of pure reason, all of which are alike inasmuch as they force reason to abandon the otherwise very natural presupposition that objects of sense are things in themselves and force reason to regard them instead as mere appearances that are based on an intelligible substrate (something supersensible, the concept of which is only an idea and precludes cognition proper). If there were no such antinomy, reason could never bring itself to accept such a principle that so greatly narrows the area in which it can speculate and could never bring itself to make sacrifices that have to involve the complete destruction of so many hopes that were so brilliant otherwise. (218)

The substrate is intelligible only as having to be, even as it eludes the reach of understanding and reason.

The conclusion of the comment sums up the significance of this discussion:

On the other hand, if it is granted that our deduction is at least on the right track, even if not yet sufficiently clarified in all its details, then we are led to three ideas: first, the idea of the supersensible in general, not further determined, as the substrate of nature; second, the idea of the same supersensible as the principle of nature's purposiveness for our cognitive power; third, the idea of the same supersensible as the principle of the purposes of freedom and of the harmony of these purposes with nature in the moral sphere. (219-220)

But if there is thus a tendency to ascribe to the beautiful an **ontological significance**, to understand it as the epiphany of the supersensible ground of what we experience, in the next paragraph Kant returns to the **idealistic** orientation of his philosophy. The beautiful cannot be said to be in the object, independent of the observer.

To be sure, Kant recognizes how much argues for the **realism** of nature, and once again he returns to birds and shells, although this time he does not forget *the most common flowers*.

The realistic interpretation of the aesthetic purposiveness of nature finds much support in the beautiful formations in the realm of organized nature, for it certainly seems as if anything beautiful must have been produced on the basis of an idea of it in the producing cause, namely a purpose that its cause pursued for the benefit of our imagination. Consider flowers, blossoms, even the shapes of entire plants, or consider the grace we see in the structure of various types of animals, which is unnecessary for their own use but is selected, as it were, for our taste. Consider above all the variety and harmonious combination of colors, so likable and charming to our eyes (as in pheasants, crustaceans, insects, down to the commonest flowers): since these colors have to do merely with the surface, and even there have nothing to do with the figure [i. e. visible structure] of the creatures — which might be needed for these creatures' inner purposes after all — it seems that their sole purpose is to be beheld from the outside. All of this lends weighty support to the kind of explanation that relies on the assumption that nature pursues actual purposes directed to our aesthetic power of judgment. (221-222)

But Kant does not find such evidence sufficient to establish beauty as an objective property of natural objects, that God or nature somehow wanted there to be beautiful nature so that we might appreciate it. Kant warns us not to be too quick to look for an objective purposiveness in nature and reminds us of the many beautiful forms brought about by mechanical processes:

And yet this assumption cannot be upheld. Reason resists it with its maxims to avoid, whenever possible, unnecessary multiplication of principles. Above all, however, nature shows in all of its free formations a great mechanical tendency to produce forms that seem made, as it were, for the aesthetic employment of our power of judgment; and nature gives us no grounds whatever for supposing that [the production of such forms] requires anything more than nature's mechanism — considered as nothing but nature — since nature's mechanism can make these forms purposive for our judging of them, even if they are not based on any idea. (222)

Chemical processes, Kant insists, are sufficient to explain how what we judge to be beautiful in nature came to be. But what Kant takes to be an all but decisive argument against a realistic and

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in favor of an idealistic interpretation of the beauty of nature is provided by his own analytic of the beautiful.

But there is one fact that virtually proves the principle that the purposiveness in the beautiful in nature is ideal, that we ourselves lay this principle at the basis of all our aesthetic judgments, and that it does not permit us to explain [natural beauty] on the basis of a real purpose pursued by nature for our presentational power — namely the fact that whenever we judge any beauty at all we seek the standard for it a priori in ourselves, and that the aesthetic power of judgment itself legislates concerning the judgment as to whether something is beautiful or not. This could not be so if we adopted a realistic interpretation of the purposiveness of nature, because then we would have to learn from nature what to consider beautiful, and a judgment of taste would be subject to empirical principles. (224)

But how convincing is this argument? Even if we grant Kant that we must seek the standard for beauty “a priori in ourselves,” does finding some particular thing beautiful not require that whatever it is that we thus judge to be beautiful presents itself in such a way that it invites application of the presupposed a priori standard? Why then not attribute beauty to the phenomena? Kant seems to fear that this would transform beauty into something like a determinate property. But **does the ideality of purposiveness follow from the ideality of purposes?** One might speak with Kant of purposes that are unexpoundable. **Is the aesthetic idea not just such a purpose?**

Consider what is involved in judging a work of art beautiful? Does such a judgment not inescapably presupposes an **aesthetic realism**? Kant to be sure rejects such a claim, insisting, somewhat surprisingly, that art supports the “principle of idealism” even more decisively than does nature. (224-225) The beauty of a work of art, he insists, cannot be located objectively in the art work, for then it would become a species of the agreeable. And yet, if beauty is understood as the exhibition of aesthetic ideas, judgments of beauty cannot be adequately understood by an aesthetic idealism that would seek the basis of the judgment *x* is beautiful or a work of genius solely in that subjective a priori principle that, Kant insists, is presupposed by all our judgments of beauty. But to make such a judgment we must encounter something that answers to what this principle demands. The work of genius provides this. And is judging beauty in nature not sufficiently like judging beauty in art to turn Kant's argument around?

Kant appears to resist such considerations:

If nature had created its forms for our liking, such a purposiveness of nature would always be objective; it would not be a subjective purposiveness, based on the play of the imagination in its freedom, where it is we who receive nature with favor, not nature that favors us. This property of nature — that when we judge certain of its products nature allows us to perceive in the relation of our mental powers an inner purposiveness, and one that is declared necessary and universally valid on the basis of something supersensible — cannot be a natural purpose, or rather we cannot judge it to be that. (224)

This much we can grant Kant: we cannot justify our judgment that something is beautiful by appealing to some purpose that led to the creation of x. Such a judgment must rely on a standard that we bear within ourselves. That alone safeguards the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment. But we judge something to be beautiful because it presents itself to us as it does. In that sense beauty is a gift, in the case of a work of art the gift of genius.

3

By founding the judgment of taste in the supersensible substrate of humanity Kant is led quite naturally to establish a relationship between the beautiful and the moral. Par. 59 discusses thus the beautiful as **symbol of the moral**.

Two previously discussed points should be remembered:

1. The **analogy between the idea of reason and the aesthetic idea**. Both transcend nature, but in different directions. Nature here is understood as the manifold of sense subsumed under the concepts of the understanding, i.e. as comprehensible nature. Reason transcends nature in the sense that ideas of reason can never be demonstrated, in Kant's technical sense, that is, they cannot be represented or instantiated. Ideas of reason are indemonstrable. The aesthetic idea, on the other hand, can never be comprehended by concepts; it is unexpoundable. The imagination shows itself here to have a broader or deeper reach than the understanding. Both reason and imagination may thus be said to transcend nature. Possessing an imagination, the human being is brought to a recognition of himself as transcending nature. Here the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime threatens to blur. In this sense the beautiful presents itself as a propaedeutic to the moral.

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2. The second point we should remember occupied Kant in the immediately preceding discussion: the indefinite concept that underlies the beautiful as purposiveness without a definite purpose is linked by Kant to the supersensible substratum of both humanity and nature. The beautiful gives a sort of demonstration of that substratum. Nature as understood by science presents itself as ruled by necessity. But when nature is experienced as beautiful, it is experienced as being as we would have it be. The antithesis of freedom and necessity is thus overcome. I used the expression

a, b, c, d — X

to characterize the form of purposiveness. X here stands for the indeterminate concept that rules some manifold and lets us experience it as being just as it should be, in this sense as necessary, but this necessity is not opposed to freedom, but inseparable from it. Kant links this concept to the thought of a supersensible substrate. But Kant's understanding of the supersensible is closely linked to his understanding of the moral sphere. It was precisely the discussion of human beings as moral agents that gave some content to the dimension of the supersensible, of things in themselves.

With this in mind, let us turn to Kant's discussion of the beautiful as symbol of the moral. What does Kant mean by **symbol**?

Kant introduces his discussion by emphasizing the need for intuition.

Establishing that our concepts have reality always requires intuitions. If the concepts are empirical, the intuitions are called examples. If they are pure concepts of the understanding, the intuitions are called schemata. But if anyone goes so far as to demand that we establish the objective reality of rational concepts (i. e., the ideas) for the sake of their theoretical cognition, then he asks for something impossible, because absolutely no intuition can be given that would be adequate to them. (225)

Ideas of reason can find neither examples nor schemata. But they can be given symbolic expression. From the **example** and the **schema** we thus have to distinguish the **symbol**.

All *hypotyposis* (exhibition, *subiectio ad aspectum*) consists in making [a concept] sensible, and it is either schematic or symbolic. In schematic hypotyposis there is a concept that the understanding has formed, and the intuition corresponding to it is given a priori. In symbolic hypotyposis there is a concept which only reason can

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think and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, and this concept is supplied with an intuition that judgment treats in a way merely analogous to the procedure it follows in schematizing; i.e., the treatment agrees with this procedure merely in the rule followed rather than in terms of the intuition itself, and hence merely in terms of the form of the reflection rather than its content. (226)

At the heart of the Kantian symbol is thus analogy. Between the symbol and what is symbolized there is no similarity; there is, however, a similarity between the ways we reflect about the symbol and the symbolized, between vehicle and tenor. The later terms are of course familiar from discussions of metaphor, but then Kant's symbol is really a metaphor.

Before returning to the **analogy** involved, let me briefly note that Kant does not want us to understand symbol as logicians or mathematicians had come to understand it. It is not the sort of symbol he has in mind. (227) Symbols, as Kant here uses the term, are indirect representations of the concept:

Thus a monarchy ruled according to its own constitutional laws would be presented as an animate body, but a monarchy ruled by an individual absolute will would be presented as a mere machine (such as a hand mill); but in either case the presentation is only symbolic. For though there is no similarity between a despotic state and a hand mill, there certainly is one between the rules by which we reflect on the two and how they operate [*Kausalität*]. (227)

Kant goes on to point out how common such symbols are in ordinary language. And that also holds for philosophy. Kant points to its reliance on terms such as *foundation*, *depend*, *substance*.

Discourse about God should be symbolical. Such discourse steers a middle course between deism and anthropomorphism: the former, by omitting everything intuitive, says too little and ends up allowing “us to cognize nothing whatsoever, not even from a practical point of view” (228); the latter, by attributing to God such properties as understanding and will, says too much, creating its God in the image of man.

Having explained his use of “symbol,” Kant develops his understanding of the beautiful as symbol of the morally good.

Now I maintain that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good; and only because we refer [*Rücksicht*] the beautiful to the morally good (we all do so naturally and require others also to do so, as a duty) does our liking for it include a

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claim to everyone's assent, while the mind is also conscious of being ennobled, by this [reference], above a mere receptivity for pleasure derived from sense impressions, and it assesses the value of other people too on the basis of [their having] a similar maxim in their power of judgment. The morally good is the intelligible that taste has in view, as I indicated in the preceding section; for it is with this intelligible that even our higher cognitive powers harmonize, and without this intelligible contradictions would continually arise from the contrast between the nature of these powers and the claim that taste makes. (228-229)

The beautiful now appears as **essentially metaphorical**. It presents itself to us as a metaphor of the morally good. And it is only as such, Kant now insists, that our appreciation of it is coupled with the demand that everyone share such appreciation. The morally good is linked to the intelligible substrate of both humanity and of nature demanded by the antinomies.

Kant proceeds to spell out the analogy, calling attention to four specific points:

1. The beautiful pleases immediately in reflective intuition, while the moral pleases immediately in the concept. Once more we see Baumgarten reappearing: in the Cartesian tradition art had to be subordinated to reason; but only divine reason can reconcile intensive and extensive clarity; our finite reason cannot comprehend an infinite reality. But appreciation of the aesthetic idea suggests something like an aesthetic analogue to such comprehension. (Cf. Croce, who emphasizes that Kant subordinates the beautiful to the moral and therefore does not really progress much beyond Baumgarten).

2. The beautiful pleases without an interest. Here it seems to differ from the moral, which, as we learned before, is always tied to an interest. The moral person is interested in realizing the demands of the moral. He faces an ought. However this ought and therefore his interest are due to the fact that he stands between reason and sense, is a citizen of two worlds. If here were only a citizen of the kingdom of ends he could content himself with disinterested admiration of this divinely ordered realm. The beautiful offers itself to us a metaphor of this kingdom. In that sense the medievals could say that it gives us a foretaste of paradise.

3. The harmonious play of the free imagination and the lawful understanding is like the harmony between the free will and the universal law of reason. With respect to 3 we should perhaps ask whether when the beautiful is understood as the symbol of the morally good this should not be understood to mean as **the symbol of the highest good**. In the experience of the

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beautiful the human being is not granted his highest good, but there is something analogous to such a restoration. One again this recalls much older discussions of the beautiful, if not as translating us into the City of God, as yet doing something analogous. Just this makes the beautiful also a temptation. Perhaps this is a reason Kant does not develop this aspect of the analogy, which could also be developed with reference to the temporality of the aesthetic experience, where we would want to pay special attention to the notion of an entirely disinterested satisfaction.

4. In both cases we privilege principles that demand a universal assent, although in the one case this principle is subjective and not represented by means of a universal concept, while in the case of the moral it is so represented.

The closing remarks should be referred back to what Kant, in par. 42, had written about the way nature, as it were, speaks to us (see p. 169):

The common understanding also habitually bears this analogy in mind, and beautiful objects of nature or of art are often called by names that seem to presuppose that we are judging [these objects] morally. We call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent, or landscapes cheerful and gay; even colors are called innocent, humble, or tender, because they arouse sensations in us that are somehow analogous to the consciousness we have in a mental state produced by moral judgments. Taste enables us, as it were, to make the transition from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest without making too violent a leap; for taste presents the imagination as admitting, even in its freedom, of determination that is purposive for the understanding, and it teaches us to like even objects of sense freely, even apart from sensible charm. (230)

Taste builds a bridge from the sensible to the moral. Here we should note how Kant, who earlier had spoken of the symbol as relying on the analogous way we **reflect** on some intuition now links it to the analogous way we **feel** about nature and when we make certain moral judgments.

4

The Appendix, "Of the Method of Taste," begins by reiterating the claim that there can be no science of taste. To be sure, in so far as art aims at a truthful representation of nature, we can offer a rigorous critique. But this critique would not concern what makes beautiful art beautiful.

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It is true that in every art there is a scientific [element] whose concern is that the object of this art be exhibited [or rendered] truthfully, and which is the indispensable condition (*conditio sine qua non*) of fine art, though it is not itself fine art. (230)

But in just what sense is truthful rendition of the object an **indispensable condition**? Kant here appears committed to a representational theory of art. Truthful rendering is said to be a necessary condition of art, even if it should not be identified with art. This observation invites further reflection on just **how art should relate to nature**, according to Kant.

In this Appendix Kant repeats the claim that art knows no rules that could be taught. What can be taught never touches what makes art beautiful. The teacher can only point to examples that awaken the student's imagination:

The master must stimulate the student's imagination until it becomes commensurate with a given concept; he must inform the student if the latter has not adequately expressed the idea, the idea that even the concept cannot reach because the idea is aesthetic; and he must provide the student with sharp criticism. For only in this way can the master keep the student from immediately treating the examples offered him as if they were archetypes, models that he should imitate as if they were not subject to a still higher standard and to his own judgment, [an attitude] which would stifle his genius, and along with it would also stifle the freedom that his imagination has even in its lawfulness, the freedom without which there can be no fine art, indeed not even a correct taste of one's own by which to judge such art. (231)

Clear is once again Kant's insistence on autonomy, his rejection of a pedantic academicism. Not so clear is how we are to judge the commensurability of the imagination and some given concept or whether a student has adequately expressed the aesthetic idea, although we can expect Kant to point out that this can necessarily only be an aesthetic judgment that knows no rule.

More important to the artist than academic training would seem to be a good humanistic education:

It seems that for all fine art, insofar as we aim at its highest degree of perfection, the propaedeutic does not consist in [following] precepts but in cultivating our mental powers by exposing ourselves beforehand to what we call *humaniora*; they

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are called that presumably because *humanity* (*Humanität*) means both the universal *feeling of sympathy*, and the ability to engage universally in very intimate *communication*. When these two faculties are combined, they constitute the sociability that befits [our] humanity [*Menschheit*] and distinguishes it from the limitation [characteristic] of animals. (231)

“Sociability” requires a footnote: the first edition had indeed *Geselligkeit*, but the 2nd and 3rd editions corrected this to *Glückseligkeit*, suggesting the state of happiness enjoyed by the blessed. I prefer the second reading. What Kant wants to emphasize is that the human beings find true happiness only when affectively joined to others in a true community. This is the state figured by beauty. In that sense all beauty fills us with **hope**. And a humanist education is the best way to put human beings, and especially artists, on the road that leads towards such a state.

The suggestion that it is a humanist education that best prepares human beings, and especially artists for fulfilling their vocation, may seem in tension with what Kant had said earlier, that beautiful nature offers a bridge that allows for an ascent from the sensible to the moral. Now emphasis falls on culture. Kant here begins to address the importance of history.

In this connection Kant returns to the art of the ideal and to its ethical function, and that is to say also, to classical antiquity:

There were peoples, during one age whose strong urge to have sociability under laws, through which a people becomes a lasting community, wrestled with the great problems that surround the difficult task of combining freedom (and hence also equality) with some constraint (a constraint based more on respect and submission from duty than on fear). A people in such an age had to begin by discovering the art of reciprocal communication of ideas between its most educated and its cruder segments, and by discovering how to make the improvement and refinement of the first harmonize with the natural simplicity and originality of the second, finding in this way the mean between higher culture and an undemanding nature constituting the right standard, unstatable in any universal rules, even for taste, which is the universal human sense. (231-232)

Any appeal to the moral law will be ineffective when it falls on unreceptive ears. Pure practical reason remains impotent where not supported a robust common sense. Only such a common sense can assure lasting community. Art can help build such a common sense. In keeping with

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the ethics of neo-classicism, Kant suggests that we cannot dispense with the models of humanity provided by antiquity. — The step from these concluding remarks to Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* is not very large.

Interesting is the conclusion, which repeats the earlier elevation of the ideal over free beauty:

However, taste is basically an ability to judge the [way in which] moral ideas are made sensible ([it judges this] by means of a certain analogy in our reflection about [these ideas and their renderings in sensibility]); the pleasure that taste declares valid for mankind as such and not just for each person's private feeling must indeed derive from this [link] and from the resulting increase in our receptivity for the feeling that arises from moral ideas (and is called moral feeling); for only when sensibility is made to harmonize with this feeling can genuine taste take on a definite, unchangeable form. (232)

All three Critiques open up a gulf between principles that have their a priori foundation in the subject, such as the pure concepts of the understanding, the pure concepts of practical reason, and the pure concept of what may be considered the supersensible substrate of our humanity, on the one hand, and, on the other, by that nature, to which we, too, belong as essentially embodied beings, placed by our bodies in space and time, i.e. in an inescapably particular place and time. In each case this gulf calls for an empirical schematism. Without such a schematism pure concepts are impotent and do not have a purchase on reality. But the enactment of such a schematism is in each case inescapably historical. At the very center of that history we find the evolution of taste which alone can establish a genuinely common sense.

11. The Incomprehensibility of Nature

1

Today we come to the second part of the *Critique of Judgment*, to the *Critique of the Teleological Judgment*. It was this part of the *Critique* in which Goethe found himself most interested. It is also this part with which a modern reader of Kant may well have the most difficulty. Kant seems to come close here to arguing that to live a meaningful life we do require something like a theology, even as we have to admit that science can know nothing of God, can certainly not establish anything like God's existence. I shall turn to the heart of this argument next time. Today I want to focus on the "Analytic of Teleological Judgment," that is to say, to Kant's account of the necessity of supplementing explanations of nature in terms of efficient causation with teleological explanations. There is, according to Kant, a sense in which nature transcends what we can know objectively. And even science has to admit what eludes objective understanding.

2

That there should be such a *Critique of the Teleological Judgment* is of course only expected, given the discussion of the *Introduction*. Let me review briefly some of the most important points. Key here was the need to build a bridge between theoretical and practical philosophy: understanding and reason were said to share the same territory, but to rule different realms. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had insisted that what we experience and can know are always only phenomena, appearances, constituted by the understanding, which has always already subjected the manifold of sense to its concepts. The world presents itself, first of all, as world for the knowing subject. I cannot know things as they are in themselves. Important here was the point that the world explored by science should not be identified with the whole of reality. The distinction gains in importance when we turn to the second critique: in the *Critique of Practical Reason* human beings are understood as persons, i.e. as free, moral agents. As such agents they have the duty to act by certain principles. A rift has thus been opened up between the sensible and the supersensible. But this rift is finally unacceptable: we have to be able to act in the natural world.

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But let me not move quite so quickly here: Is it really unacceptable? The question brings to mind a conversation I had on May 13, 2009 with a colleague, Professor Drew McDermott of Yale's computer science department. What we then talked about has continued to occupy me. Professor McDermott told of how he had recently returned to the thought of Martin Heidegger, which he had encountered in college quite some time ago, but to which for many years had given little thought. But now he had come to see that what Heidegger had to say did do justice to our first person awareness of being in the world. In that sense much of what he had to say could be called true. From the third person perspective of the scientist, however, it had to be judged false.

The comment made me think of Kierkegaard's distinction between subjective and objective truth.⁵⁰ Kierkegaard knew of course very well that first of all "the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself." Why then should we oppose to it a subjective truth and how are we to understand such a truth? Kierkegaard defines it as "An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness" — Kierkegaard was thinking of love and faith. This subjective truth he calls "the highest truth there is for an *existing* person." In such attainment the individual is said to perfect him- or herself. We may well wonder whether we should speak in such cases of knowledge at all. But what is at issue is clear enough: the value of objective truth: "The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing. Away from the subject the objective way of reflection leads to the objective truth, and while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent, and this indifference is precisely its objective validity; for all interest, like all decisiveness, is rooted in subjectivity."

Kierkegaard speaks of an objective uncertainty, not of an objective falsehood. That avoids the paradoxical claim advanced by McDermott that what we are convinced is absolutely true, e.g. for him the claim that there are absolute values, must yet be judged, without overturning such conviction, objectively false.

McDermott followed this conversation up by sending me the draft of a paper on which he was still working with the thought-provoking title: "How Moral Absolutism Can Be True and False at the Same Time; Or: Non-Phenomenological Existentialism." Here the paper's abstract:

⁵⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 182, 178.

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We examine ethics from the point of view of cognitive science. Science commits one to a view in which ethics is just an arbitrary aspect of culture, and the study of cultures is value-free, so that relativism seems axiomatically true. But intelligent agents cannot take the view of pure science, because certain built-in beliefs contradict it. These inescapable framework illusions (IFI's) include a belief in free will, the persistence of the self through time, and, among humans, the universalizability of moral statements.

McDermott, too, takes us moderns to be confronted with something like an antinomy: as intelligent agents we are compelled to believe certain things, most importantly that our will is free, that we are selves that persist through time, that there are moral truths that can be universalized, beliefs that, however, as individuals committed to science, we yet know to be false. This is close to Kant, who insists, that as free, responsible actors we have to take as true what theoretical reason is unable to establish, indeed cannot even make sense of. But Kant refuses to assert that what practical reason forces us to accept as true is from an objective, third person point of view false. Thus he would not have wanted to say that "moral absolutism can be true and false at the same time."

The title of McDermott's paper brought to mind that theory of double truth condemned by the theologians at the university of Paris in 1277. Should I understand McDermott in the image of Siger of Brabant, the Aristotelian philosopher of nature, who was perhaps the leading target of that condemnation? Aristotelian science also left no room for certain key beliefs and especially for the kind of freedom demanded by Christianity. Given Aristotle's understanding of nature, such claims had to be judged false. How then could a good Christian be a follower of Aristotle? Could Aristotelian science and Christian theology, while they contradicted each other, both lay claim to truth? Must such a theory of double truth not be rejected by every right thinking person? — and there is indeed reason to wonder whether Siger ever really endorsed it. And similarly we must ask today, how can moral absolutism be true and false at the same time, except by relativizing the truth in question? Does the very essence of truth not rule out the theory of double truth? — But what is truth?

But let me return to the *Critique of Judgment*. Important here is Kant's distinction in the *Introduction* between different kinds of judgment: Recall the distinction, first between 1) the determinative judgment, which subsumes a manifold under a rule or concept, and 2) the reflective judgment, which moves in the opposite direction and ascends from some manifold to a rule or concept. The reflective judgment again divides into the aesthetic judgment, which ascends to an indeterminate purpose, and the teleological judgment, which ascends to a determinate purpose. The teleological judgment also divides into two, depending on whether the purpose is sought in the subject or in the object. We can thus distinguish formal teleology, which figures in all the sciences as a criterion of elegance, from material or objective teleology, which seems to show no reference to human being, but seems objective. Such an objective teleology continues to figure importantly in science, especially in biology.

Kant begins his Analytic by commenting on the way geometric figures display what he terms a certain **objective purposiveness**. He gives the example of a circle or an ellipse that help us solve innumerable problems. And do we not find these marvelous properties in nature as well: small wonder Plato thought he had found here a key to nature.

... [the ancient geometers] investigated the properties of the ellipse without suspecting that celestial bodies too had gravity, and without knowing the law that governs gravity at varying distances from the point of attraction and makes these bodies describe the curve when they are in free motion. While these geometers were thus unwittingly working for posterity, they took delight in a purposiveness which, though it belonged to the nature [*Wesen*] of things, is such that it can be discovered without any experience whatever, and that the mind is able to derive the harmony of beings from their supersensible principles; to [these beings] we must add the properties of numbers, with which the mind plays in music). It was this enthusiasm that lifted Plato above empirical concepts to ideas that he thought could be explained only by an intellectual community [between ourselves and] the origin of all beings. No wonder he turned away from his school everyone who was ignorant of geometry. (240-241)

Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes thus all believed that God wrote the book of nature in the language of mathematics. And there is something irresistible about such a thought: when we

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engage in mathematical investigation we seem to be in touch with the principles that presided over the creation of the world. But the Kantian, it would seem, cannot appeal to God to explain this marvelous affinity between the world and our understanding. All that science can investigate are phenomena, and the pure concepts of the understanding and the pure forms of intuition, time and space, are the transcendental presuppositions of the realm of phenomena.

Kant goes on to distinguish merely **formal** from **real purposiveness**. Consider a diagram relating to the Pythagorean theorem drawn into the sand on some beach or a garden, whose beds are arranged in geometric patterns. Here we refer what we see to a governing purpose. Something analogous would seem to apply to nature when we see such geometric patterns. But just what are we entitled to infer? In the case of the former, the referral of what is seen to an intelligent author is justified. A real purpose was at work here. But is the same true when we encounter a golden section or a perfect hexagon in nature? In such cases, too, we experience what presents itself as a purposiveness that we cannot explain. This fills us with admiration.

But we can also easily see why it is that we admire, and rightly so, a purposiveness that we perceive, though perceive in the nature [*Wesen*] of things (insofar as their concepts can be constructed): The diverse rules whose unity (which is based on a principle) arouses this admiration are one and all synthetic and do not follow from a *concept* of the object, e.g. that of a circle, but [finding] these rules require[s] that this object is given in intuition. But this makes it seem as if the rules of this unity had an empirical basis outside us and distinct from our presentational power, and hence as if the harmony [*Übereinstimmung*] of the object with our understanding's need for rules were in itself contingent and hence possible only through a purpose that aims expressly at this harmony. And yet this harmony [*Harmonie*], despite all that purposiveness, is cognized a priori rather than empirically ...

Important here is the parenthetical remark: insofar as their concepts can be constructed. That is to say: insofar as we are able to make a reflective judgment that allows us to arrive at a concept that fits what is experienced. But such ability is presupposed by the very concept of experience, and thus by our very being. When we “rightly admire” the purposiveness of nature we are filled with a sense of our own being as a gift rather than just a cosmic accident. But that sense cannot ground a proof that there exists a higher intelligence to which we owe such harmony.

I should realize, therefore, that when I draw a figure in accordance with a concept, I introduce the purposiveness into the figure, i.e. into my own way of presenting something that is given to me from outside, whatever it may be in itself, rather than this something instructing me empirically about that, and hence should realize that I need no special purpose outside me in the object [to account] for that purposive harmony. (242)

4

In Par. 63 Kant goes on to distinguish **relative** from **intrinsic purposiveness**. Given our interests it is easy to understand nature as serving our purposes. Such purposiveness is relative. If we take for granted that there should be human beings, we may thus claim that the make-up of nature which makes this possible cannot be contingent, but must have its author in a creator who cares that we are and that we thrive. But there is no reason why we should exist, let alone thrive, why our being should not be considered a cosmic accident. Indeed, there is no reason why there should be something rather than nothing.

Kant certainly does not believe that such relative purposiveness justifies the claim that nature did indeed have a purpose when, e.g., it gave the chamois horns. Some enlightened gentleman apparently argued that God did this so that these horns might serve as handles for the walking sticks needed by gentlemen. Kant would probably have laughed at any such argument.

5

Are there then natural purposes? How are they to be understood? Kant's analysis should pose no difficulties.

To say that a thing is possible only as a purpose is to say that the causality that gave rise to it must be sought, not in the mechanism of nature, but in a cause whose ability to act is determined by concepts. And seeing that a thing is possible only as a purpose requires that the thing's form could not have arisen according to mere natural laws, laws we can cognize by understanding alone as applied to objects of sense, but requires that even empirical cognition of this form in terms of its cause and effect presupposes concepts of reason. [Therefore] the form of such a thing is, as far as reason is concerned, contingent in terms of all empirical laws.

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But reason, even if it tries to gain insight only into the conditions attached to the production of natural products, must always cognize not only the product's form, but the form's necessity as well. And yet in that given form it cannot assume that necessity. Hence that very contingency of the thing's form is a basis for regarding the product as if it had come about through a causality that only reason can have.
(248)

We can explain why planets move in elliptical orbits as they do, why these orbits have the form they do. But we cannot explain why gravity operates just as it does. We can understand its form, but not this form's necessity. And suppose we could cognize that form's necessity in terms of some higher law. But that law's necessity would once again be left unexplained. To rid science of all such mysteries we would have to be able to reduce it to mathematics.

A more obvious example of a natural purpose, and the one Kant here has in mind, would be some organism.

If, on the other hand [as opposed to, say, a geometric figure drawn in the sand, which we understand as a *vestigium hominis*], we cognize something as a natural purpose — unless perhaps the very [thought] is contradictory — then we need more [than the above example provided]. I would say, provisionally, that a thing exists as a natural purpose if it is both cause and effect of itself (although [of itself] in two different senses). For this involves a causality which is such that we cannot connect it with the mere concept of a nature without regarding nature as acting from a purpose; and even then, though we can think this causality, we cannot grasp it. Before we analyze this idea of a natural purpose in full, let me elucidate its meaning by [the] example [of a tree] (249)

Important is once again the *caveat*: “unless perhaps the very [thought] is contradictory.” Is it possible that the meaning of “purpose” is so tied to human agency that it loses its meaning when read into nature? When we read purposes into nature, do we understand it in our own image? But can a similar question not also be raised about the mechanism of nature? What grounds our understanding of cause and effect? Do we have a perspicuous understanding of its necessity? When we speak of natural causes in that sense, do we not perhaps also understand nature in our own image?

But let us return to Kant's example of a tree. Reproduction, growth, grafting, the formation of leaves, the healing of a wound, they all seem to invite talk of natural purposes.

6

This leads Kant in par. 65 to develop his understanding of organisms as natural purposes:

Now in order for a thing to be a natural purpose, it must meet two requirements. *First*, the possibility of its parts (as concerns both their existence and their form) must depend on the relation to the whole. For since the thing itself is a purpose, it is covered [*befasst*] by a concept or idea that must determine a priori everything that the thing is to contain. But if we think of thing as possible only in *that* way then it is merely a work of art. (252)

Note how similar Kant's understanding of an organism is to Baumgarten's understanding of a work of art. Once again we have a manifold, presided over by a purpose or theme. To distinguish an organism from a work of art more is needed:

A *second* requirement must be met if a thing that is a product of nature is yet to have, within itself and its inner possibility, reference to purposes, i.e., if it is to be possible only as a natural purpose, without the causality of concepts, which rational beings outside it have. The second requirement is that the parts of the thing combine into the unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form. For only in this way is it possible that the idea of the whole should conversely (reciprocally) determine the form and combination of all the parts, not as a cause — for then the whole would be a product of art — but as the basis on which someone judging this whole cognizes the systematic unity in the form and combination of all the manifold contained in the given matter. (252)

If it is we, who understand nature in the image of what we can mechanically produce; it is also we, who understand an organism in the image of another human product, a work of art, which transcends mechanical production, which is not to say that there is some higher artist, who is responsible for its organization.

In such a product of nature, just as each part exists only as a *result* of all the rest, so we also think of each part as existing for the sake of the others and of the whole, i.e. as an instrument (organ). But that is not enough (for the part could

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also be an instrument of art, in which case we would be presenting its possibility as depending on a purpose as such [but not yet a natural purpose]). Rather, we must think of each part as an organ that produces the other parts (so that each reciprocally produces the other). Something like this cannot be an instrument of art, but can be an instrument only of nature, which supplies all materials for instruments (even for those of art). Only if a product meets that condition [as well], and only because of this, will it be both an organized and a self-organizing being, which therefore can be called a natural purpose. (253)

To understand an organism as such is to understand it as something that we do not know how to make, whose making surpasses our understanding.

Beauty in nature may rightly be called an analogue of art, since we attribute it to objects only in relation to our reflection on our external intuition of them, and hence only on account of the form of their surface. But intrinsic natural perfection as possessed by those things that are possible only as natural purposes and that are hence called organized beings, is not conceivable or explicable on an analogy to any known physical ability, i.e. ability of nature, not even — since we too belong to nature in the broadest sense — on a precisely fitting analogy to human art. (254)

Organisms are experienced as transcending our understanding. Kant thus does not think that the concept of an organism can be applied to nature by science as that of a mechanism can. There is a sense in which we understand what it is to be a mechanism, while we don't really understand what it is to be an organism. And yet, the concept is indispensable to us when we try to understand nature.

7

We should not think that because we don't really understand organisms, the concept is therefore useless. The concept does give direction to our investigations:

This principle, which is also the definition of organized beings, is: An organized product of nature is one in which everything is a purpose and reciprocally also a means. In such a product nothing is gratuitous, purposeless, or to be attributed to a blind mechanism. (255)

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And it is what we experience that lets us turn to teleological explanations, even though they lack the transparency demanded by science:

Now in a way this principle must be derived from experience: experience must prompt us to [adopt] it, namely the kind of experience in which we engage methodically and which we call observation. But because of the universality and necessity which that principle claims [*aussagen*] for such purposiveness, it cannot rest merely on empirical bases but must be based on some a priori principle, even if this principle turns out to be merely regulative and those purposes turn out to reside merely in the idea of the judging person and in no efficient cause. Hence we may call the above principle a maxim for judging the intrinsic purposiveness of organized beings. (256)

Even though this principle may turn out to be merely regulative, its employment is in response to and warranted by what is experienced.

8

What has been said about the concept of an organism invites extension to the whole of nature, including us human beings. To be sure we have to take care not to confuse relative with intrinsic purposes. We cannot argue that the purpose of cows is to serve human needs. Is humanity more than a cosmic episode as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were to argue? Kant clearly believes that it is, but also knows that no argument can adequately support such belief. In this connection Kant displays his European chauvinism:

We cannot arrive at a categorical purpose in this way because, after all, we cannot see why people should have to exist (a question that might not be so easy to answer if we have in mind, say, the New Hollanders or Fuegians); rather, each such purposive relation rests on a condition that we have to keep putting off: this condition (namely the existence of a thing as a final purpose is unconditioned and hence lies wholly outside a physico-teleological consideration of the world. But such a thing is also not a natural purpose since it (or its entire species) is not to be regarded as a natural product (258)

But the idea of an organism does invite extension:

Hence only as far as matter is organized does it necessarily carry with it the concept of it as a natural purpose, because the specific [purposive] form it has is at the same time a product of nature. But this concept of a natural purpose leads us necessarily to the idea of all of nature as a system in terms of the rule of purposes, and we must subordinate all mechanism of nature to this idea according to principles of reason (at least in order to test nature's appearance against this idea). This principle of reason applies to this idea only subjectively, namely as this maxim: Everything in the world is good for something or other; nothing in it is gratuitous; and the example that nature offers us in its organic products justifies us, indeed calls upon us, to expect nothing from it and its laws except what is purposive in [relation to] the whole. (258-9)

The passage can be read as looking forward to the tantalizing fragment, which has been attributed to both Hölderlin and Schelling, but is in the handwriting of Hegel, that has been published as "Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus," the "Earliest System Programme of German Idealism," dating presumably from late 1796 or early 1797 (in January 1797 Hegel joined Hölderlin in Frankfurt, where the two engaged in particularly intense philosophical discussions).⁵¹ The author, speaking in the first person, begins with the idea of "myself" as a "free absolute being"; in Fichtean fashion he turns next to the world, which is said to appear together with this I, demanding a physics guided by ideas born from the question: "how does the world have to be for a moral being?" — a demand that may be thought to foreshadow Hegel's later philosophy of nature. Kant's claim that we are called upon to expect nothing of nature than what is purposive in relation to the whole points in the same direction, although Kant might underscore: "This principle of reason applies to this idea only subjectively."

⁵¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke*, 20 vols., ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1971), vol. 1, *Frühe Schriften*, pp. 234-236.

12. The Dialectic of Teleological Judgment

1

Division II of the “Critique of the Teleological Judgment” is called the “Dialectic of Teleological Judgment.” Kant here generates yet another antinomy. This antinomy rests on the tension between the determinative and the reflective judgment.

In par. 69 Kant begins the discussion of that antinomy by returning to the distinction between these two kinds of judgment:

When judgment *determines*, it has no principles of its own that form the basis for *concepts of objects*. It is not autonomous: for it only *subsumes* under laws or concepts that are given it as principles. By the same token it is exposed to no danger of having an antinomy of its own and is exposed to no conflict in its principles. (265)

As we have seen, determinative judgments presuppose a given concept or law. Thus the concept “rose” is presupposed by judging this flower to be a rose or by seeing it as a rose. Being at home in my language, this concept is given to me. Similarly, assuming Newton’s laws, I can attempt to determine, say, the motion of the moons of Jupiter. The case of the reflective judgments is different:

When judgment *reflects*, on the other hand, it has to subsume under a law that is not yet given, and hence must subsume under a law that is in fact only a principle of reflection on [certain] objects for which we have no objective law at all, no concept of the object adequate as a principle for the cases that occur. (265)

The principle here is only subjective and yet having arrived at it, we can then use it to determine the being of objects. Think of the genesis of Newton’s laws or of the word and concept “rose.” But do reflective judgments then not turn out to provide the basis of determinative judgments? The distinction between these two kinds of judgment would appear to be not quite as perspicuous as it first presented itself.

Now between these necessary maxims of reflective judgment a conflict may arise, and hence an antinomy; and this antinomy forms the basis of a dialectic. If two conflicting maxims both have their basis in the nature of our cognitive powers,

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then this dialectic may be called a natural one, an unavoidable illusion that we must expose and resolve in the critique so that it will not deceive us. (266)

2

Kant develops the problem in paragraph 70:

Insofar as reason deals with nature as the sum total of objects of outer senses, it can use laws as a basis: in part understanding itself prescribes these laws a priori to nature, in part it can expand them indefinitely by means of the empirical attributes that occur in experience. To apply the first kind of laws, the *universal* laws of nature in general, judgment does not need a special principle for reflection; for here it is determinative, since the understanding has given it an objective principle. But [judgment does need a special principle of reflection] for the particular laws, the laws that only experience can reveal to us, and so in their case judgment must serve itself as a principle. (266)

Important here is the way the a priori laws of nature must be expanded (*erweitert*) to yield insight into the way nature actually is and operates, where “expansion” (*Erweiterung*) does not really capture what is needed. The a priori laws of nature remain too formal to shed much light on the world we actually live in. We require laws that are formulated in response to what we happen to experience, laws that are in this sense contingent. Such formulation requires reflective judgment.

The antinomy itself is easy enough to understand:

Now when [we find] such a contingent unity of particular laws, it may happen that judgment presupposes two maxims as it reflects [on this unity]: one of these the understanding gives it a priori; the other it is prompted to [adopt] by special experiences, experiences that bring reason into play so that we may judge corporeal nature and its laws in terms of a special principles. When judgment reflects on the basis of these two maxims, it may happen that they do not seem quite compatible, so that a dialectic arises that leaves judgment perplexed as to what principle it should [follow] in its reflection.

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The first maxim of judgment is the thesis: All production of material things and their forms must be judged to be possible in terms of merely mechanical laws.

The second maxim is this antithesis: Some products of material nature cannot be judged to be possible in terms of merely mechanical laws. (Judging them requires a different causal law — viz. that of final causes.) (267)

This then leads to the statement of the antinomy:

Thesis: All production of material things is possible in term of merely mechanical laws.

Antithesis: Some production of material things is not possible in terms of merely mechanical laws. (267)

We should ask ourselves: What does Kant mean here by “merely mechanical laws”? It would seem, at first blush, that these are “the *universal* laws of nature in general,” which the understanding furnishes as “an objective principle.” But to become applicable to nature, these laws, as we saw, had to be **expanded**, and such expansion could not itself rely just on this objective principle, but had to respond to nature in all its contingency, to a perception of family resemblances, of unities in nature. Even the formulation of mechanical laws requires more than the thesis offers. We need to supplement mechanistic with teleological interpretations.

... doing so does not void reflection in terms of the first maxim; rather we are told to follow it as far as we can. Nor does the second maxim say that these forms would not be possible in terms of the mechanism of nature. It asserts only that human reason, if it obeys the first maxim and acts accordingly, will never be able to discover the slightest basis for what is specific in a natural purpose, though it may acquire other cognitions of natural laws. And this assertion leaves it undecided whether in the inner basis of nature itself, which we do not know, the physical-mechanical connection and the connection in terms of purposes may not, in the same things, be linked in one principle. It is only that our reason is incapable of reconciling them in such a principle; therefore, when judgment reflects (on a subjective basis), rather than determines (in which case it follows an objective principle of the possibility of things themselves), then in the case of

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certain forms in nature it has to think of their possibility as based on a principle that differs from that of natural mechanism. (268)

Keep in mind that the laws that any mechanistic explanation of nature must presuppose cannot themselves be explained by such an explanation, but are established only by a reflective judgment and have thus a subjective basis. A purely objective understanding of nature is denied to us finite knowers. It remains at best a regulative ideal.

3

In par. 71 Kant expands on the inability of science to comprehend what he calls the inner and completely sufficient principle of the possibility of nature:

We are quite unable to prove that organized natural products cannot be produced through the mere mechanism of nature. For we have no insight into the first inner basis [responsible] for the endless diversity of the particular natural laws, because they are contingent for us since we recognize them only empirically; and so we cannot possibly reach the inner and completely sufficient principle of the possibility of nature (this principle lies in the supersensible). (269)

The key to why nature is just the way it is will always elude us. We cannot rule out that the mere mechanism of nature might be capable of producing even human beings, let alone animals or plants, that a higher physics might in principle account for all there is. But such a physics is not available to us.

Hence the following principle is entirely correct for the reflective judgment, however rash and unprovable it would be for the determinative judgment: that [to account] for the very manifest connection of things in terms of final causes we must think a causality distinct from mechanism — viz., the causality of an (intelligent) world-cause that acts according to purposes. Applied to reflection, this principle is a mere maxim of judgment; and the concept of that causality is a mere idea. We make no claim that this idea has reality, but only use it as a guide for reflection, which meanwhile continues to remain open to [the discovery of] any basis for a mechanical explanation and never strays from the world of sense. (269)

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Kant thus insists that mechanical explanations be pushed as far as is possible, where, again, we must keep in mind that even such explanations cannot claim true objectivity, but have a subjective basis in reflective judgment. The antinomy is thus resolved by insisting on the distinction between a reflective and an objective understanding of the way things are. An understanding of the way they really are is denied to us finite knowers.

4

When reading the *Critique of Judgment* we must keep in mind that the progress of science has put those who with Goethe or Kant want to insist on a significant role for teleological judgments in science have been put ever more on the defensive.

No one has ever doubted the correctness of the principle [which says] that we must judge certain things in nature (organized beings) and their possibility in terms of the concepts of final causes, even if we demand [to use] this principle only as a guide for observing these things so as to become acquainted with their character, without presuming to investigate their first origin. Therefore, the only possible question is whether this principle is merely subjectively valid, merely a maxim for our judgment, or whether it is an objective principle of nature that says that nature has not only its mechanism (governed by mere laws of motion), but also another kind of causality, that of final causes, with the mechanical causes (the motive forces) [functioning] as mere intermediate causes that are subject to the final causes. (270)

Kant takes for granted that we cannot dispense with teleological judgments. Has this changed? Would most of our scientists agree? Kant at any rate took it for granted that we cannot dispense with such judgments. But does this really tell us that nature is organized according to such principles?

Does the connection in terms of purposes in nature prove that nature has a special kind of causality? Or is it, rather, that this connection, considered in itself and according to objective principles, is identical with the mechanism of nature, or rests on one and the same basis? Perhaps, on the latter alternative, it is just that in many natural products this basis is often too deeply hidden for our investigation,

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and so we try a subjective principle instead, the principle of art, i.e. of causality in terms of ideas, attributing this causality to nature by analogy. (271)

Once again we should keep in mind that mechanistic explanations, too, retain a subjective basis, raising the question of just how we are to understand their superiority. Objectivity would seem to preside over science as a regulative ideal. Does this ideal privilege mechanistic over teleological explanations? Why? Should science perhaps seek only to describe, rather than explain?

Only when we claim that teleological principles actually track the way nature is does the dispute really get dogmatic. Here Kant distinguishes between 1) the **idealistic** and 2) the **realistic** interpretation of judgments of purposiveness. The first locates the basis of such judgments in the subject, maintaining that all appearance of purposiveness in nature is unintentional, while the second locates it in nature.

With respect to the first Kant distinguishes a **casualistic** from a **fatalistic** interpretation of purposiveness. According to the first account, whatever purposes we may read into nature, are to be explained in terms of matter subject to the laws of motion. Kant dismisses this interpretation as “manifestly absurd” in that it does not address what is to be interpreted: the appearance of objective purposiveness.

Kant takes more seriously the second, fatalistic interpretation, which appeals to something supersensible — where Kant singles out Spinoza as holding such a view.

This system appeals to something supersensible, which therefore our insight cannot reach. What makes the refutation of this system so difficult is the fact that its concept of the original being is quite unintelligible. But this much is clear: In this system the connection in terms of purposes in the world must be considered unintentional (for though the system derives the connection from an original being, it derives it not from that being’s understanding, and hence not from its intent, but from the necessity of its nature and from the unity of the world that stems from that nature). Hence the fatalistic interpretation of purposiveness is also idealistic. (272)

Turning to realistic interpretations of purposiveness, Kant distinguishes **hylozoism**, which takes all matter to possess life or soul from **theism**, which appeals to the hyperphysical to explain the purposiveness of nature.

5

In the following par. 73 Kant shows that all of these attempts are inadequate. A philosopher such as Epicurus would have blind chance explain, not only the appearance of purposiveness, but even nature's mechanism. "Hence nothing has been explained, not even the illusion in our teleological judgments, so that the alleged idealism in them has by no means been established." (274)

Spinoza, Kant points out, denies the contingency of natural forms and thereby "deprives these forms of anything intentional" (274), losing sight of what needs to be accounted for: "why things of nature are connected in terms of purposes." (274).

For the unity of a purpose is a very special kind of unity. It does not follow at all from a connection of things (beings of the world) in one subject (the original being), but always carries with it reference to a cause that has understanding. Rather, even if we were to unite all these things in a simple subject, the unity will amount to reference to a purpose only if we also think of these things, first, as inner *effects* of the substance as a *cause*, and second, as having been caused by this substance *through its understanding*. Unless these formal conditions are met, all unity is mere natural necessity; and if we nevertheless attribute it to things that we present as external to one another, then it is blind necessity. (275)

Kant cannot make sense of hylozoism. The very concept seems to him an oxymoron, "since the essential character of matter is lifelessness." (276)

We may wonder whether Kant here does not take for granted an understanding of nature as subject only to the laws the understanding prescribes to nature a priori. Kant does not seem to rule out the possibility that there might after all be matter endowed with life; he only insists that we have no a priori insight into this possibility. Hylozoism therefore does not explain the appearance of purposiveness. It assumes it. "But this means that our explanation can only move in a circle." (276)

Nor does theism provide us with the sought explanation:

For [theism to succeed in its explanation,] we would first of all have to prove, adequately for determinative judgment, that the unity of a purpose, which we find in matter, could not possibly result from the mere mechanism of nature. Only such

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a proof would entitle us to postulate determinately that the basis of this unity lies beyond nature. But in fact all we can make out is that the character and limits of our cognitive powers (which give us no insight into the first, inner basis of even that mechanism) force us to give up any attempt to find in matter a principle [that implies] determinate references [of this matter] to a purpose, so that we are left with no other way of judging nature's production of things as natural purposes than in terms of a supreme understanding as cause of the world. That basis, however, [holds] only for reflective and not for determinative judgment, and is absolutely incapable of justifying any objective assertion. (276-277)

This leaves us with the question: where does Kant stand in the controversy between realists and idealists concerning natural purposes? Does Kant assert the existence of natural purposes? Does he deny it? Or is he an agnostic?

6

Kant begins par. 74 by distinguishing a **dogmatic** from a **critical** approach:

We treat a concept (even an empirically conditioned one) dogmatically if we consider it as contained under, and determine it in accordance with, another concept of the object such that this other concept amounts to a principle of reason. We treat a concept merely critically if we consider it only in relation to our cognitive power, and hence in relation to the subjective conditions under which we think it, without venturing to decide anything about its object. Hence dogmatic treatment of a concept has the force of law for determinative judgment, critical treatment merely for reflective judgment. (277)

To be led by the perceived purposiveness of nature to the claim that there is indeed some purpose that is the reason why something appears as it does is to proceed dogmatically. Talk about natural purposes is indeed naturally conditioned, but reason is unable to prove that there are such purposes:

Hence we cannot treat this concept dogmatically, for determinative judgment — i.e., not only are we unable to tell whether or not things of nature considered as natural purposes require for their production a causality of a very special kind (a causality in terms of intentions), but we cannot even ask the question. For reason

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is quite unable to prove the concept of a natural purpose, i.e., that it has objective validity. (In other words, the concept is not constitutive for determinative judgment, but merely regulative for reflective judgment.) (278)

The concept of the thing as a natural purpose is thus said to be transcendent for the determinative judgment.

7

Kant begins par. 75 by reiterating the by now familiar distinction between determinative and reflective judgment.

There is clearly a big difference between saying that certain things of nature, or even all of nature, could be produced only by a cause that follows intentions in determining itself to action, and saying that the peculiar character of my cognitive powers is such that the only way I can judge [how] those things are possible and produced is by conceiving, [to account] for this production, a cause that acts according to intentions, and hence a being that produces [things] in a way analogous to an understanding. If I say the first, I am trying to decide something about the object, and am obliged to establish that a concept I have assumed has objective reality. If I say the second, reason determines only [how I must] use my cognitive powers commensurately with their peculiarity and with the essential conditions [imposed by] both their range and their limits. Hence the first is an objective principle for determinative judgment, the second a subjective principle for merely reflective judgment and hence a maxim imposed on it by reason. (280)

The, to Kant so evident, appearance of purposiveness in nature still does not allow us to claim that there is indeed a higher purpose, although Kant does claim that teleology leads inevitably to theology, a claim that Schopenhauer, pointing to Aristotle, will dispute. But despite the suggestive link between theology and teleology, the latter, Kant insists, cannot ever prove that God exists or anything of the sort:

But what does even the most complete teleology of all prove in the end? Does it prove, say, that such an intelligent being exists? No; all it proves is that, given the character of our cognitive powers, i.e. in connecting experience with supreme principles of reason, we are absolutely unable to form a concept of [how] such a

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world is possible except by thinking of it as brought about by a supreme cause that acts *intentionally*. Hence we cannot objectively establish the proposition: There is an intelligent original being; we can do so only subjectively, for the use of our judgment as it reflects on the purposes in nature, which are unthinkable on any principle other than that of an intentional causality of a supreme cause. (281)

We can never prove that the things we are considering could not have been produced only by mechanical causes. On the other hand, nature forces us to employ teleological principles. And these in turn lead us with necessity to thoughts of God:

Hence there is absolutely no proposition left us except one that rests on subjective conditions only, the conditions under which judgment reflects commensurately with our cognitive powers. This proposition, if expressed as holding objectively and dogmatically, would read: There is a God. But in fact the proposition entitles us human beings only to this restricted formula: The purposiveness that we must presuppose even for cognizing the inner possibility of many natural things is quite unthinkable to us and is beyond our grasp unless we think of it, and of the world as such, as a product of an intelligent cause (a God). (282)

Mechanical principles will never suffice to explain organized beings:

For it is quite certain that in terms of merely mechanical principles of nature we cannot even adequately become familiar with, much less explain, organized beings and how they are internally possible. So certain is this that we may boldly state that it is absurd for human beings even to attempt it, or to perhaps hope that some day another Newton might arise who would explain to us, in terms of natural laws, unordered by any intention, how even a mere blade of grass is produced. (282-283)

How many of today's scientists would agree with Kant's confident claim?

8

The long comment that makes up par. 76 further spells out the **middle course between realism and idealism** that Kant is here proposing:

First, if reason advances to where understanding cannot follow, it becomes transcendent, displaying itself not in objectively valid concepts, but instead in ideas, though these do have a basis (as regulative principles). But, second, since

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the understanding cannot keep pace with reason, when yet it would be needed to make [ideas] valid for objects, it restricts the validity of those ideas of reason to just the subject, yet in a universal way, i.e., [as a validity] for all subjects of our species. In other words, understanding restricts the validity of these ideas to this condition: that, given the nature of our (human) cognitive ability, or even given any concept *we can form* of the ability of a finite rational being as such, all thinking must be like this and cannot be otherwise — though we are not asserting that such a judgment has its basis in the object. (284)

But how clear is the distinction between reason and understanding? Take the concept of “cause” — is it objectively more valid than that of “purpose”? Must we not say of it, too, that “given the nature of our (human) cognitive ability, all thinking must be like this and cannot be otherwise — though we are not asserting that such a judgment has its basis in the object”?

Important here is Kant’s insistence that the distinction between possible and actual things holds only for our understanding.

It is indispensable [and] necessary for human understanding to distinguish between the possibility and the actuality of things, and this fact has its basis in the subject and in the nature of his cognitive powers. For if the exercise of these powers did not require two quite heterogeneous components, understanding to provide concepts, and sensible intuition to provide objects corresponding to these, then there would be no such distinction (between the possible and the actual). If our understanding were intuitive [rather than discursive, i. e. conceptual] it would have no objects except actual [ones]. [For] we would then be without concepts (and these deal with the mere possibility of an object) and also without sensible intuitions (which do give us something [actual], yet without allowing us to cognize it as an object). But our entire distinction between the merely possible and the actual rests on this: in saying that a thing is possible we are positing only the presentation of it with respect to our concept and our thinking ability in general; but in saying that a thing is actual we are positing the thing itself [*an sich selbst*] (apart from that concept) (284-5)

From this it follows that the idea of freedom, and thus our own being, surpasses our understanding. For where there is freedom, it would seem, there has to be possibility. But talk

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of possibility makes sense only relative to our finite thinking ability. And the same goes for the idea of a God, thought as an intelligent cause or as an absolutely necessary being. To think either freedom or God we have to think possibility. In both cases, what we attempt to think surpasses our understanding.

And yet our own experience forces us to open windows to transcendence:

Now in this [kind of case] the following maxim always holds: where cognizing [certain] objects is beyond the ability of our understanding, we must think them in accordance with the subjective conditions for exercising [our] powers, conditions that attach necessarily to our (i. e. human) nature. And if the judgment we make in this way cannot be constitutive principles that determine the character of the object (as is indeed inevitable when the concepts are transcendent), they can still be regulative principles, safe and immanent in their employment and commensurate with the human point of view. (286)

And here Kant sees a connection between theoretical and practical reason.

[We said that] reason, when it considers nature theoretically, has to assume the idea that the original basis of nature has unconditioned necessity. But when it considers nature practically, it similarly presupposes its own causality as unconditioned (as far as nature is concerned), i.e., its own freedom, since it is conscious of its [own] moral command. Here, however, the objective necessity of the action, in other words, duty, is being opposed to the necessity that the action would have if it were a [mere] event with its basis in nature rather than in freedom (i.e. the causality of reason); and the action that morally is absolutely necessary is regarded as quite contingent physically (i.e. [we see] that what ought necessarily to happen still fails to happen on occasion. It is clear, therefore, that only because of the subjective character of our practical ability do we have to present moral laws as commands (and actions conforming to them as duties) and does reason express this necessity not by *is* (i. e., happens) but by *ought to be*. (286-287)

But does freedom not also provide theory with a regulative principle?

Yet [the concept of] freedom serves us as a universal regulative principle because of the (in part sensible) character of our nature and ability, and the same applies to all rational beings connected with the world of sense, insofar as our reason is

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capable of forming a presentation of them. That principle does not objectively determine the character of freedom as a form of causality; rather, and with no less validity than if it did that, it makes the rule [that we ought] to act according to that idea, a command for everyone. (287)

But theoretical reason finds itself in an analogous situation.

For the fact that our understanding has to proceed from the universal to the particular has the following consequence: In terms of the universal [supplied by the understanding] the particular, as such, contains something contingent. And yet reason requires that even the particular laws of nature be combined in a unified and hence lawful way. (This lawfulness of the contingent is called purposiveness.) Therefore, unless the power of judgment has [its own] universal law under which it can subsume the particular, it cannot recognize any purposiveness in it and hence cannot make any determinative judgment about it. [Differently put:] It is impossible to derive the particular laws, as regards what is contingent in them, a priori from the universal ones [supplied by the understanding], [i. e.] by determining the concept of the object. Hence the concept of the purposiveness that nature displays in its products must be one that, while not pertaining to the determination of objects themselves, is nevertheless a subjective principle that reason has for our judgment in dealing with nature. The principle is regulative (not constitutive), but it holds just as necessarily for human judgment as it would if it were an objective principle. (287-288)

Once again he brings to mind the tantalizing fragment that has been published as "Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus," which demands a physics guided by ideas born from the question: "how does the world have to be for a moral being?"

9

In par. 77 Kant calls once again our attention to that peculiarity of our human understanding that is the foundation of our concept of a natural purpose: at issue is the contingency of the relationship of nature to our understanding. Consider the fable with which Schopenhauer begins the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*:

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"In endless space countless luminous spheres, round each of which some dozen smaller illuminated ones revolve, hot at the core and covered with a hard cold crust; on this crust a mouldy film has produced living and knowing beings; this is empirical truth, the real, the world."⁵²

Nietzsche was to repeat it in *On Truth and Lie*:

"Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of m 'world history,' but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die."⁵³

As far as objective knowledge is concerned Kant would have had to agree. But the asserted disproportion between the human subject and a cosmos devoid of purpose is belied by the fact that there are organisms and laws, simple enough to be understood by us, that govern, e.g. the motions of the planets.

This also allows us to see what we would otherwise have suspected, but could hardly have asserted with certainty and have proved: that although the principle of a mechanical derivation of purposive natural products is compatible with the teleological principle, the mechanical one would certainly not make the teleological one dispensable. In other words, when we deal with a thing that we must judge to be a natural purpose (i.e., when we deal with an organized being), though we can try on it all the laws of mechanical production that we know or may yet discover, and though we may indeed hope to make good progress with such mechanical laws, yet we can never [account] for the possibility of such a product without appealing to a basis for its production that is wholly distinct from the mechanical one, namely a causality through purposes. (294)

⁵² Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 3.

⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne," KSA 1: 875. Trans. "On Truth and Lie in an Unmoral Sense," *Philosophy and Truth. Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's*, trans. and ed, Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 79.

Par. 78 sums up the discussion of the antinomy. Kant begins by reiterating the investment reason has in mechanical explanations:

Reason is tremendously concerned not to abandon the mechanism nature [employs] in its products, and not to pass over it in explaining them, since without mechanism we cannot gain insight into the nature of things. Even if it were granted that a supreme architect directly created the forms of nature as they have always been, or that he predetermined the ones that in the course of nature keep developing according the same model, still none of this advances our cognition of nature in the least; for we do not know at all how that being acts and what its ideas are that are supposed to contain the principles by which natural beings are possible, and [so] we cannot explain nature by starting from that being, i.e., by descending (in other words a priori) [from that being to nature]. (295)

Kant leaves no doubt that mechanical explanations must be privileged. He is aware how silly explanations are that say that certain objects were created in order to exhibit the beauty supposed to reside, say, in the golden section or in the Fibonacci series, that they were formed by some transcendent power that likes to employ these:

Or suppose we try to explain by ascending (in other words, a posteriori), i.e., we start from the forms of objects of experience because we think they display purposiveness, and then, to explain this purposiveness, we appeal to a cause that acts according to purposes: in that case our explanation would be quite tautologous and we would deceive reason with [mere] words — not to mention that with this kind of explanation we stray into the transcendent, where our cognition of nature cannot follow us and where reason is seduced to poetic raving, even though reason's foremost vocation is to prevent precisely that. (295)

And yet Kant does not want to deny that teleological principles have a legitimate place in natural science:

On the other hand, it is just as necessary a maxim of reason that it not pass over the principle of purposes in [dealing with] the products of nature. For though this

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principle does indeed not help us grasp how these products originate, yet it is a heuristic principle for investigating the particular laws of nature. (295)

How then is the antinomy between mechanistic and teleological explanations to be resolved? Once again Kant appeals to the supersensible ground of nature.

Because of this we are authorized to adopt the following procedure, and [indeed], since the study of nature in terms of the principle of mechanism is so very important for the theoretical use of our reason, we are also called upon to adopt this procedure: we are to explain all products of nature, even the most purposive ones, in mechanical terms as far as we possibly can (we cannot tell what are the limits of our ability for this way of investigating); yet, in doing so, we are never to lose sight of the fact that, as regards those natural products we cannot even begin to investigate except under the concept of a purpose of reason, the essential character of our reason will still force us to subordinate such products ultimately, regardless of those mechanical causes, to the causality in terms of purposes. (300)

I am reminded of the *Phaedo* where Socrates points out that mechanistic explanations cannot explain his decision not to escape from his prison. His actions open a window in the realm of what we can objectively understand to what transcends it.

11

We find ourselves on the threshold of theology, even as Kant is concerned to distance teleology from theology. He is also concerned to privilege mechanistic explanations.

Why then, does teleology not constitute a distinct part of theoretical natural science, but is employed by theology as a propaedeutic or transition? This is done so that, when we study nature in terms of its mechanism, we keep to what we can observe or experiment on in such a way that we could produce it as nature does, at least in terms of similar laws; for we have complete insight only in what we can ourselves make and accomplish according to concepts. But organization, as an intrinsic purpose of nature, infinitely surpasses all our ability to exhibit anything similar through art. As for extrinsic natural arrangements that we consider purposive (such as wind, rain, and so on), physics does indeed examine the mechanism in them; but it is quite unable to exhibit their reference to purposes

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insofar as this reference is to be a condition that attaches to the cause necessarily, since that necessity in the [causal] connection concerns nothing but the connection of our concepts, and does not concern the character of things. (264)

We really understand things only to the extent that we can conceptually remake them. This recalls Descartes' *Discourse on Method*. But to experience something as an organism is to experience it as transcending such understanding. So indeed does experiencing something as simply given, as in this sense a gift.

13. Teleology Between Science and Theology

1

We have come to the end of this seminar. I want to conclude it by turning to the long *Appendix*. It begins with the question: does teleology belong to science or to theology? At issue here is the objectivity of science, where we should ask ourselves: just what is the meaning of “objectivity”? I suggest that we understand “objective” in opposition to “bound by a particular subjective perspective.” So understood, the claim to objectivity would seem to be inseparable from science, which seeks to understand the objects that make up the world of phenomena, not as they appear to a particular perceiver at some particular time and place, subject to cultural prejudice of one sort or another, but as they are. But does science, so understood, have room for teleology?

But teleology also does not seem to belong to natural science. For natural science requires determinative and not merely reflective principles in order to indicate objective bases for natural effects. Indeed since the theory of nature explains natural phenomena in mechanical terms, through their efficient causes, there would be no advantage for it if we considered them according to their relations [in terms] of purposes. Actually, positing purposes of nature in natural products insofar as these form a system of teleological concepts is only part of describing nature, namely by using a special guide. (302)

The phrase “objective bases for natural effects” invites questioning: I see the sun rise. The sun’s rising is a natural effect. What is the objective basis of this effect? How does science determine this basis? According to Kant the task of science is to explain how some state of affairs came about in terms of efficient causes, and not merely to describe it. Teleology cannot furnish us with such explanations.

So teleology as a science does not belong to any doctrine, but belongs only to critique: the critique of a special cognitive power, namely judgment. But teleology does contain a priori principles, and to that extent it can and must indicate by what method we must judge nature in terms of final causes. Hence the methodology [the study of the method] of teleology has at least a negative influence on how we must proceed in theoretical natural science, and also on how

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this science can, in metaphysics, serve as a propaedeutic in relation to theology.

(302)

Important here is the distinction between natural science (*Naturwissenschaft*) and science (*Wissenschaft*). Natural science is concerned with the objects that make up the world. In that sense science more broadly understood often cannot claim objectivity.

The distinction between critique and doctrine had been drawn already in the “Introduction”:

A critique that assesses what our cognitive powers can accomplish a priori does not actually have a domain as regards objects. For it is not a doctrine: its only task is to investigate whether and how our powers allow us (when given their situation) to produce a doctrine. (15)

But if teleology does not belong to natural science understood as a doctrine we yet cannot dispense with it. The question is: how far does the commitment to objectivity get us in our attempt to understand nature? Nature does not present itself to me objectively. How do I get to the objects? The very pursuit of truth brings with it a commitment to objectivity. But to reconstruct nature I have to have some understanding of how nature is made up:

If something is to serve as a hypothesis to explain how a given phenomenon is possible, then at least the possibility of this something must be completely certain. All I have to waive if I make a hypothesis is [the claim that I am] cognizing actuality. (In an opinion that we offer as probable this claim is still made.) More than that I cannot give up: at least the possibility of what serves as the basis for my explanation must not be open to any doubt, since otherwise there would be no end to empty chimeras. (359)

Presupposed by something that is to serve as a hypothesis is thus a determination of the being of nature, we can say, a metaphysics of nature. The *Critique of Pure Reason* laid the foundation for such a metaphysics of nature. But, we can ask, how well grounded is that metaphysics with its privileging of efficient causation? Kant’s privileging of the mechanism of nature invites question. Think of a phenomenon like gravity. Schopenhauer will speak in this connection of an **occult quality** and insist that our investigations into the being of nature cannot dispense with such occult qualities. Kant would grant this. The particular laws that govern nature must be discovered. They cannot be deduced a priori. But the form of these laws can be so deduced.

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That is to say, I can understand things only to the extent that I can make them, where such making inevitably presupposes something I cannot make. I must accept some irreducible givens if I am not to lose the distinction between natural science and mathematics.

But must we accept Kant's privileging of explanations in terms of efficient causation? Nature is understood here in the image of what we human beings are able to make. But should we not ask whether this, once more, is only a human perspective and thus does not live up to what objectivity demands?

Kant is quite clear about privileging explanations in terms of a natural mechanism:

Our *authority to try* to explain all natural products in merely mechanical terms is intrinsically quite unlimited. But, in view of the character of our understanding, our *ability to make do* with such an explanation alone, when dealing with things [considered] as natural purposes, is not only very limited, but has distinct bounds. [These consist in the fact that] there is a principle of judgment according to which we cannot accomplish anything by way of explaining such things if we proceed in mechanical terms alone, and hence our judging of such products must always be subordinated to a teleological principle as well. (303)

To be sure, we cannot claim that a mechanistic explanation of all phenomena of nature cannot in principle be found, only that we are unable to find it. More especially, we are unable, if Kant is right, to account for the organization of an organism in purely mechanical terms. We have no determinate cognition of the intelligible substrate of nature.

We saw in the preceding section that the mechanism of nature alone is insufficient to allow us to conceive of how organized beings are possible, but that (at least in view of the character of our cognitive power) we must regard mechanism as originally subordinated to a cause that acts intentionally. (308)

Not that such subordination is intelligible to us:

It is beyond our reason's grasp how this reconciliation of two wholly different kinds of causality is possible: the causality of nature in its universal lawfulness, with [the causality of] an idea that confines nature to a particular form for which nature itself contains no basis whatsoever. The possibility of this reconciliation lies in the supersensible substrate of nature, about which we cannot determine anything affirmatively, except that it is the being in itself of which we know

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merely the appearance. But the fact [that it is beyond our reason's grasp how the reconciliation of the two kinds of causality is possible] does not diminish the force of this principle: that everything we assume to belong to this nature must also be thought as connected with it in terms of mechanical laws; for without this kind of causality, organized beings, while purposes of nature, would not be natural products. (308)

Note that for Kant the very concept of nature presupposes the idea of a mechanism of nature. That this is the condition of the very possibility of nature the *Critique of Pure Reason* was supposed to have established. And yet we cannot dispense with teleology, if Kant is right.

Now if we assume (as we inevitably must) the teleological principle for the production of these beings, we may attribute their intrinsically purposive form to their cause either in terms of *occasionalism* or in terms of the theory of *pre-established harmony*. According to occasionalism the supreme cause of the world would, in conformity with its idea and on the occasion of every copulation, directly give the mingling matter its organic structure. According to the theory of pre-established harmony, the supreme cause would have imparted to the initial products of its wisdom only the predisposition by means of which an organic being produces another of its kind and the species perpetuates itself; and while nature works towards the destruction of individuals, it also continually compensates for their disappearance. (308-309)

I don't want to spend too much time on the distinction between occasionalism and the theory of pre-established harmony. Let me only note that occasionalism is dismissed by Kant as unphilosophical: the origination of individuals here becomes altogether mysterious, a miracle every time. He has more sympathy with the latter, where he distinguishes what he terms the theory of *evolution* from the system of *epigenesis*, where Kant prefers the latter, as his shown by his appreciative comments on the work of anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. "Evolution" here should not be understood to have the meaning we are likely to have in mind. It rather held that the whole individual was preformed or encapsulated in the embryo, a sort of homunculus. Kant finds such a view hardly more plausible than occasionalism. But he does give credit to epigenesis, where we should note that the debate between proponents of evolution and epigenesis was a lively issue in Kant's day. Caspar Friedrich Wolff, one of the founders of embryology,

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was to present a compelling refutation of preformationism. Kant refers us to the anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach:

No one has done more by way of proving this theory of epigenesis than Privy Councilor Blumenbach, and by way of establishing correct [*echt*] principles of applying it, which he did in part by avoiding too rash a use of it. Whenever he explains any of these structures physically he starts from organized matter. For he rightly declares it contrary to reason that crude matter on its own should have structured itself organically in terms of mechanical laws, that life could have sprung from the nature of what is lifeless, and that matter could have molded itself on its own into the form of a self-preserving purposiveness. Yet by appealing to this principle of an original organization, a principle that is inscrutable to us, he leaves an indeterminable and yet unmistakable share to natural mechanism. The ability of the matter in an organized body to [take on] this organization he calls a *formative impulse*. (311)

Although an issue of great interest in Kant's day, I don't think we need to spend much time on this. But we should note that Kant here admits teleology into natural science.

2

In Par. 82 Kant turns to what he calls *extrinsic purposiveness*. The notion is quite unproblematic.

By extrinsic purposiveness I mean a purposiveness where one thing of nature serves another as a means to a purpose. (312)

What are things good for? Nature gives us no answer. There is no being that can claim to be the final purpose of creation. To be sure, Kant does think that an argument of sorts can be made that man is the ultimate purpose for creation here on earth, since he is the only being who can form a concept of purposes:

What are the predators good for, along with the other natural kingdoms? For man, for the diverse uses to which his understanding teaches him to put all these creatures; man is the ultimate purpose of creation here on earth, because he is the only being on earth who can form a concept of purposes and use his reason to turn an aggregate of purposively structured things into a system of purposes. (314)

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But, as the reference to Linné shows, Kant does not appear to invest very much in this discussion. Does man perhaps exist “to hunt the predators in order to diminish their numbers and so to establish a certain equilibrium between the productive and the destructive forces of nature. On this alternative, though man might in a certain respect have the dignity of being a purpose, in a different respect he would hold only the rank of a means.” (314) Theory certainly cannot establish such a purpose.

Still, Kant does think that there is reason to single out man.

We have shown in the preceding section that [certain] principles of reason give us sufficient grounds for judging man — though reflectively rather than determinatively — to be not merely a natural purpose, which we may judge all organized beings to be, but also to be the *ultimate* purpose of nature here on earth, the purpose by reference to which all other natural beings constitute a system of purposes. (317)

If nature can be said to have a purpose at all, then, Kant insists, that purpose can only be man. But man must rise above his natural being. Nature must yield to culture.

Man is indeed the only being on earth that has understanding and hence an ability to set himself purposes of his own choice, and in this respect he holds the title of lord of nature; and if we regard nature as a teleological system, then it is man’s vocation to be the ultimate purpose of nature, but always subject to a condition: he must have the understanding and the will to give both nature and himself reference to a purpose, that can be independent of nature, self-sufficient, and a final purpose. The final purpose, however, we must not seek within nature at all. (318)

Autonomy demands the transformation of nature into culture. The distance from this to Nietzsche’s proclamation in the *Birth of Tragedy* that only as aesthetic phenomena can our existence and the world be justified is not so very great.

If we have reason to consider man the only purpose nature can possibly have, we can also have reason to say that nature has for its aim not just civil society, but an all-embracing world culture.

The formal condition under which nature can alone achieve this final aim is that constitution of human relations where the impairment of freedom which results

from mutually conflicting freedom [of the individuals] is countered by lawful authority within a whole called civil society. For only in this constitution of human relations can our natural predispositions develop maximally. But this constitution requires something further, even if human beings were intelligent enough to discover it and wise enough to submit voluntarily to its constraint: a cosmopolitan whole, a system of all states that are in danger of affecting one another detrimentally. Without such a whole — and given how much the very possibility of such a scheme is hindered by people's ambition, lust for power, and greed, especially on the part of those in authority — there will inevitably be war (in which some states dissolve and split up into smaller ones, while others unite with smaller ones and try to form a larger whole. Though war is an unintentional human endeavor (incited by our unbridled passions), yet it is also a deeply hidden and perhaps intentional endeavor of the supreme wisdom, if not to establish, then at least prepare the way for lawfulness along with the freedom of states, and thereby for a unified system of them with a moral basis. (320)

That man is the final purpose of nature, Kant argues more fully in par. 84.

His existence itself has the highest purpose within it; and to this purpose he can subject all of nature as far as he is able, or at least he must not consider himself subjected to any influence of nature in opposition to that purpose.... Only in man, and even in him only as a moral subject, do we have unconditioned legislation regarding purposes. It is this legislation, therefore, which alone enables man to be a final purpose to which all of nature is teleologically subordinated. (323)

3

Kant next turns to the topic of *Physicotheology*: does the order we find in nature allow us to establish the existence of a benevolent deity? Kant, as we have already seen, does insist that we must rely on teleological principles in our investigation of nature:

We certainly can, and must, follow the teleological principle in many of our investigations of nature, without needing to inquire into the basis for the possibility of purposive causation, a possibility we find [actualized] in various products of nature. (324)

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But he denies that this gives us a basis for a theology.

Now I say that, no matter how far we take physicotheology, it still cannot reveal to us anything about a final purpose of creation, for it does not even reach the question about such a purpose. It can indeed justify the concept of an intelligent cause of the world, [by showing that it is] for us the [only] suitable concept — i. e. suitable for the character of our cognitive power — of the possibility of those things that we can understand [only] in terms of purposes. But physicotheology cannot determine this concept any further, whether from the theoretical or a practical point of view, and so it fails to accomplish what it intends: to provide a basis for teleology. (325)

It is of course possible to reply that we have no suitable concept that helps us to account for certain aspects of nature, that these remain hidden from us, remain for us, as Schopenhauer was to insist, a *qualitas occulta*. Presupposed by the argument for an intelligent cause of the world is a conviction or faith in the commensurability of our finite reason and nature. Physical teleology gives no support to physicotheology.

Without a final purpose, the only concept I have of that original understanding is the very limited one that I am able to derive from my scant knowledge of the world: the concept of that original being's might to actualize its ideas, of its will to do so, and so on. What then would give me the ability to expand this concept arbitrarily and supplement it until it becomes the idea of an all-wise [and] infinite being? In order to do so theoretically, I myself would have to be omniscient, so that I could have insight into the purposes of nature in their overall coherence, and could be able moreover to conceive of all possible alternative designs, so that by a comparison with these I could have grounds for judging the present one the best. (229-330)

What indeed would allow me to attribute understanding to what we should perhaps call the ground of the world? Why personify this ground in any way? Why even think of it as an entity? God here appears as a projection born of an unwillingness or inability to accept the limits of our cognitive power. Schopenhauer was to make this point much more stridently. But, although very much an atheist, he, too, nevertheless insisted that we cannot dispense with teleological interpretations.

4

Let me turn to the question: Does Kant really believe, that God exists? Consider par. 87:

The moral law is reason's formal condition for the use of our freedom and hence obligates us all by itself, independently of any purpose whatever as material condition. But it also determines for us and a priori, a final purpose, and makes it obligatory for us to strive toward [achieving] it; and that purpose is the highest good in the world that we can achieve through freedom. (339)

This gives us reason to wonder how Kant would answer the question with which I began. What is clear is that Kant is not saying that it is as necessary to assume that God exists, as it is to accept the validity of the moral law. That assumption becomes necessary only with the introduction of the highest good as a goal we must strive for.

The subjective condition under which man (and, as far as we can conceive, any [other] rational [and] finite being as well) can set himself a final purpose under the above law, is happiness. Hence the highest physical good we can [achieve] in the world is happiness, and this is what we are to further as the final purpose as far as we can, [though] subject to the objective condition that man be in harmony with the law of morality, [since] our worthiness to be happy consists in that harmony (339)

Key here is the idea of happiness. Happiness builds a bridge between nature and morality. And that bridge must be built if we are not to despair over the point of acting morally. Belief in God is thus an expression of a profound optimism, while the pessimist will find little in Kant's remarks to convince him.

Kant is convinced that "in order to set ourselves a final purpose in conformity with the moral law, we must assume a moral cause of the world" (340). But this proof

is not trying to say that it is as necessary to assume that God exists as it is to acknowledge that the moral law is valid, so that anyone who cannot convince himself that God exists may judge himself released from all obligations that the moral law imposes. No! All we would have to give up [if we could not convince ourselves that God exists] is our aiming at that final purpose that we are to achieve in the world by complying with the moral law (in other words, our aiming

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at the highest good in the world: a happiness of rational beings that harmoniously accompanies their compliance with moral laws). (340)

Kant does not to make the authority of the categorical imperative depend on the existence of God.

But, as I pointed out, the categorical imperative would have no application if we did not encounter persons and cared for their welfare. So it would seem to depend on our ability to make teleological judgments. And such judgments must give us some insight into reality. Do they give us objective knowledge? We shall have to return to this point.

It is the confidence or faith that the idea of the highest good is not an impossible fiction that lets us assert the existence of God.

Reason determines us a priori to strive to the utmost to further the highest good in the world. (343)

But this does not at all help us to understand nature theoretically: Has the moral proof of God, if it does indeed deserve to be called a proof, given us insight into the way nature is? What good is that proof? Kant's here sees its function as mainly negative, as restricting the claims of reason.

Restricting reason, as regards all our ideas of the supersensible, to the conditions of its practical employment, has an unmistakable benefit concerning the idea of God. For it keeps *theology* from soaring to the heights of THEOSOPHY (in which transcendent concepts confuse reason) and from sinking to the depths of DEMONOLOGY (which is an anthropomorphic way of conceiving the supreme being); and it keeps *religion* from lapsing either unto *theurgy* (a fanatical delusion that we can receive a feeling from, and in turn influence, other supersensible beings) or into *idolatry* [*Idolatrie*] (a superstitious delusion that we can make ourselves pleasing to the supreme being by means other than the moral attitude). (351)

We may well wonder what room this leaves for religion, as commonly understood. Kant would put an end to all attempts to philosophize about the nature of the supersensible. For theory God is a vain hypothesis. Consider once more what Kant says about hypotheses:

If something is to serve as a hypothesis to explain how a given phenomenon is possible, then at least the possibility of this something must be completely certain. All I have to waive if I make a hypothesis is [the claim that I

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am] cognizing actuality. (In an opinion that we offer as probable this claim is still made.) More than that I cannot give up: at least the possibility of what serves as the basis for my explanation must not be open to any doubt, since otherwise there would be no end to empty chimeras. (359)

But in that case there would also seem to be no proof that there are persons. The certainty that there are persons must have another basis.

Kant pleads for something like moral faith:

Faith (as *habitus*, not as *actus*) is reason's moral way of thinking in assenting to [*Fürwahrhalten*] what is not accessible to theoretical cognition. It is the mind's steadfast principle to assume as true [*wahr*] what we must necessarily presuppose as a condition for the possibility of [achieving] the highest moral purpose, and to assume this because of our obligation to this final purpose, and despite the fact that we have no insight into whether [achieving] this purpose is possible, for that matter whether this is impossible. (365)

A question that must be raised here is: what meaning should we now give to "true." We cannot understand it as correspondence to the objects. Correspondence to the "things in themselves" then? But just how are we to think that?

Kant thinks that such faith is necessary, given the aim of reason:

Yet faith is not without an adequate basis, as, e.g. an opinion is, but has a basis in reason that is *adequate for the aim of reason* (although that aim is only practical): For without faith the moral way of thinking lacks firm steadfastness whenever it fails to fulfill theoretical reason's demand for proof (that the object of morality is possible) but vacillates between practical commands and theoretical doubts. (365-366)

We should be aware here of how close Kant gets to the Nietzschean "if God is dead, everything is allowed," notwithstanding what he had said earlier about the authority of morality not depending on belief in God. Kant's pragmatic justification of faith hardly will persuade someone assailed by theoretical doubts.

Of special interest is the following passage:

What always remains very remarkable about this is that among the three pure ideas of reason, *God*, *freedom*, and *immortality*, that of **freedom is the only concept of**

the supersensible which (by means of the causality that we think in it) proves in nature that it has objective reality [my emphasis], by the effects it can produce in it. It is this that makes it possible to connect the other two ideas with nature, and to connect all three with one another to form a religion. Therefore, we have in us a principle that can determine the idea of the supersensible within us, and through this also the idea of the supersensible outside us, so as to give rise to cognition [of them], even though one that is possible only from a practical point of view; and that is something of which merely speculative philosophy (which could provide also merely a negative concept of freedom) had to despair. (368)

Freedom, by its effects, opens a window in nature to the supersensible. And we should note that here Kant asserts that it proves that **the supersensible has objective reality**.

Kant does think that we have a cognition of human beings. This presupposes that the concept of a person is a concept of the understanding.

If I determine the causality of man, in view of certain products that are explicable only [as arising] through an intentional purposiveness, by thinking this causality as an understanding in man, then I need not stop there [i. e. at the mere thought] but can attribute this predicate to him as a very familiar property of his and cognize him through it. For I know that intuitions are given to the concept and hence under a rule. I know that this concept contains only the common characteristic[s] (and omits the particular) and hence is discursive, and that the rules for bringing given presentations under a consciousness as such are given by the understanding even prior to those intuitions, etc. Hence I attribute this property to man as a property through which I *cognize* him. Now if I want to think a supersensible being (God) as an intelligence, then for a certain point of view in my use of reason this is not only permitted but also unavoidable. But I am in no way entitled to flatter myself that I [can] attribute [an] understanding to this being and cognize this being through it as through a property. (379)

As Kant tells us in the Introduction: key to the *Critique of Judgment* is the project of finding the bond that prevents nature and morality from being separated by an abyss that could not be bridged. **Beauty promises such a bridge, even if it does not build such a bridge in a way that would allow us to claim for it what Kant calls objective reality. But our**

experience of persons does build this bridge in a way that allows us to claim for it objective reality.

And can we not claim with a similar right that a blade of grass, i.e. an organism, has objective reality? And that the world in its entirety is a purposive whole, which is inevitably also a thought of God? I leave you with these questions.

5

One final consideration relevant in this connection: Let me return to the passage on p, 351:

Restricting reason, as regards all our ideas of the supersensible, to the conditions of its practical employment, has an unmistakable benefit concerning the idea of God. For it keeps *theology* from soaring to the heights of THEOSOPHY (in which transcendent concepts confuse reason) and from sinking to the depths of DEMONOLOGY (which is an anthropomorphic way of conceiving the supreme being).

That is to say: we should not make God into a phenomenon. This should recall an earlier passage, in which Kant had insisted that discourse about God should be symbolical. Such discourse steers a middle course between deism and anthropomorphism: the former, by omitting everything intuitive, says too little and ends up allowing “us to cognize nothing whatsoever, not even from a practical point of view” (228); the latter, by attributing to God such properties as understanding and will, says too much, creating its God in the image of man. When speaking about God we have to be content with symbols, i.e. with metaphors. But in what sense then can we claim truth for such symbolic discourse?

What then does Kant mean by a symbol? This brings us back to page 226 where Kant discusses beauty as a symbol of the good. To explain what he means by symbol, Kant there had introduced the term “**hypotyposis**: “All hypotyposis (exhibition, *subiectio ad aspectum*) consists in making [a concept] sensible, and it is either schematic or symbolic.” The word “hypotyposis” has its home in rhetoric, where “hypotyposis” refers to “a vivid, picturesque description of scenes or events. Making vivid here means making a concept sensible as we do when we exhibit its manifestation in the phenomenal world. You ask me what a rose is and I show you the picture

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of a rose. Not that the picture is adequate to the concept. If you have gotten the point, you will now know how to use the word “rose.” You will have mastered the schema.

From **schematic hypotyposis** Kant distinguishes **symbolic hypotyposis**: “a concept which only reason can think and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, and this concept is supplied with an intuition that judgment treats in a way merely analogous to the procedure it follows in schematizing; i.e., the treatment agrees with this procedure merely in the rule followed rather than in terms of the intuition itself, and hence merely in terms of the form of the reflection rather than its content. (226) The Kantian symbol is thus a metaphor. And at the heart of metaphor is analogy. Between the symbol and what is symbolized there is no similarity; there is, however, a similarity between the ways we reflect about the symbol and the symbolized, between vehicle and tenor. The latter terms are of course familiar from discussions of metaphor, but then Kant's symbol is really a metaphor. Kant gave the example of a machine as symbol of “a monarchy ruled by an individual absolute will.” All talk about God has to rely on such symbols. Think of God described as a father or as an architect. But what is the truth value of such talk?

Kant, as we saw goes on to point out how common such symbols are in ordinary language. And that also holds for philosophy. Kant points to its reliance on terms such as foundation, depend, substance. But substance and accident are among the categories. What about the other categories? Is this to say that the very possibility of experience, that even the supposedly pure concepts of the understanding, including cause and effect, rest on metaphor?

And what now about the privileging of efficient causation? How are we to understand that?

What is the function of such metaphors? They do not mean to represent. They cannot be instantiated with pictures. Whatever pictures we can offer will only have symbolic value. **What they invite is ways of thinking and acting.** That is true of the categories; in a different way this is true of talk about God.

Let me therefore conclude by returning to a quote on p. 228:

If a mere way of presenting [something] may ever be called cognition (which I think is permissible if this cognition is a principle, not for determining the subject theoretically, as to what it is in itself, but for determining it practically, as to what the idea of that object ought to become for us and for our purposive employment

of it), then all our cognition of God is merely symbolic. Whoever regards it as schematic — while including in it properties of understanding, will, etc., whose objective reality is proved only in worldly beings — falls into anthropocentrism.
(228)