

# Understanding the relation between Kant's Aesthetics (Sensibility), Teleology (Purposiveness), Knowledge (Understanding), and Morality (Duty)...i.e., the UNITY of Kant's Systematic Philosophy

Hint: **They all involve synthetic a priori judgments!!!**

Key: **Examine "Determinate" vs. "Reflective" Judgments**

Result: **They all involve Productive Imagination & Providence**

**("purposiveness of nature")**

\*\*\*\*\*

## Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-aesthetics/>

### 2.8 Aesthetics and Morality

The idea that aesthetic judgment plays a role in grounding the possibility of morality for human beings is suggested at a very general level in the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant describes the faculty of judgment as **bridging "the great gulf" between the concept of nature and that of freedom** (IX, 195). While Kant says that the concept or principle of judgment which mediates the transition between nature and freedom is that of the **"purposiveness of nature,"** which could simply be understood as referring to nature's scientific comprehensibility (see [Section 3.2](#) below), he also associates judgment in this context with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, making clear that it is not only judgment in the context of empirical scientific enquiry, but also aesthetic judgment, which plays this bridging role.

The "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" mentions a number of more specific **connections between aesthetics and morality**, including the following:

- i. **Aesthetic experience serves as a propaedeutic for morality**, in that "the beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, without interest; the sublime, to esteem it, even contrary to our (sensible) interest" (General Remark following §29, 267).
- ii. **The demand for universal agreement in judgments of the sublime rests on an appeal to moral feeling** (§29, 265–266)
- iii. **Taking a direct interest in the beauty of nature indicates "a good soul" and a "mental attunement favorable to moral feeling"** (§42, 298–299).
- iv. **Beauty serves as the "symbol" of morality** (§59, *passim*), in that a judgment of beauty "legislates for itself" rather than being "subjected to a heteronomy of laws of experience" (§59, 353); relatedly, **feelings of pleasure in the beautiful are analogous to moral consciousness** (§59, 354; see also General Comment following §91, 482n.).
- v. **Beauty gives sensible form to moral ideas** (§60, 356); this is related both to the view that there is an **analogy between the experience of beauty and moral feeling** (see (ii) above), and to **the view that beauty is the expression of aesthetic ideas** (see 2.6). Because of this, **the development of moral ideas is the "true propaedeutic" for taste** (§60, 356).

There is an influential discussion of beauty as the symbol of morality in Cohen (1982). More recently, the connection between aesthetics and morality, and in **particular the role of aesthetics in supporting the human moral vocation**, has been emphasized by Guyer; see the introduction to his (1993), and, more recently, (2003c).

- Guyer, 2003c. "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality: Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology* and the Development of his Aesthetic Theory," in *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*, Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 135–163; reprinted in Guyer (2005a).

\*\*\*\*\*

## Kant: Synthetic A Priori Judgments

<http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/5f.htm>

## Metaphysics

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/kantmeta/>

## Kant's essential argument

## Kant: Aesthetics

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest/>

In the third *Critique*, Kant's account of **judgment** begins with the definition of judgment as the **subsumption of a particular under a universal** (Introduction IV). If, in general, the faculty of understanding is that which supplies concepts (universals), and reason is that which draws inferences (constructs syllogisms, for example), then judgment 'mediates' between the **understanding and reason by allowing individual acts of subsumption to occur** (cf. e.g. Introduction III). This leads Kant to a further distinction between **determinate and reflective judgments** (Introduction IV). In the former, the concept is sufficient to determine the particular - meaning that the concept contains sufficient information for the identification of any particular instance of it. In such a case, judgment's work is fairly straightforward (and Kant felt he had dealt adequately with such judgments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*). Thus the latter (where the judgment has to proceed without a concept, sometimes in order to form a new concept) forms the greater philosophical problem here. **How could a judgment take place without a prior concept? How are new concepts formed? And are there judgments that neither begin nor end with determinate concepts?** This explains why a book about judgment should have so much to say about aesthetics: Kant takes aesthetic judgments to be a particularly interesting form of reflective judgments.

### a. The Judgment of the Beautiful

Taking up roughly the first fifth of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant discusses **four particular unique features of aesthetic judgments on the beautiful** (he subsequently deals with the sublime). These he calls '**moments**', and they are structured in often obscure ways according to the main divisions of Kant's table of categories (See article on Kant's Metaphysics).

Overview: The *Critique of Judgment* begins with an account of beauty. The initial issue is: what kind of judgment is it that results in our saying, for example, 'That is a beautiful sunset'. Kant argues that such aesthetic judgments (or 'judgments of taste') must have four key distinguishing features. First, they are **disinterested**, meaning that we take pleasure in something because we judge it beautiful, rather than judging it beautiful because we find it pleasurable. The latter type of judgment would be more like a judgment of the 'agreeable', as when I say 'I like doughnuts'.

Second and third, such judgments are both **universal and necessary**. This means roughly that it is an intrinsic part of the activity of such a judgment to expect others to agree with us. Although we may say 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', that is not how we act. Instead, we debate and argue about our aesthetic judgments - and especially about works of art - and we tend to believe that such debates and arguments can actually achieve something. Indeed, for many purposes, 'beauty' behaves as if it were a real property of an object, like its weight or chemical composition. But Kant insists that **universality and necessity are in fact a product of features of the human mind** (Kant calls these features '**common sense**'), and that there is no objective property of a thing that makes it beautiful.

Fourth, through aesthetic judgments, beautiful objects **appear to be 'purposive without purpose'** (sometimes translated as 'final without end'). An object's purpose is the concept according to which it was made (the concept of a vegetable soup in the mind of the cook, for example); an object is purposive if it appears to have such a purpose; if, in other words, it appears to have been made or designed. But **it is part of the experience of beautiful objects, Kant argues, that they should affect us as if they had a purpose, although no particular purpose can be found.**

Having identified the major features of aesthetic judgments, Kant then needs to ask the question of how such judgments are possible, and are such judgments in any way valid (that is, are they really universal and necessary).

[...]He is asking: what is it that the necessity of the judgment is grounded upon; that is, what does it say about those who judge?

Kant calls the ground 'common sense', by which he means the *a priori principle* of our taste, that is, of our feeling for the beautiful. (Note: by 'common sense' is *not* meant being intelligent about everyday things, as in: 'For a busy restaurant, it's just common sense to reserve a table in advance.') In theoretical cognition of nature, **the universal communicability of a representation, its objectivity, and its basis in a priori principles are all related.** Similarly, Kant wants to claim that the universal communicability, the exemplary necessity and the basis in an a priori principle are all different ways of understanding the same subjective condition of possibility of aesthetic judgment that he calls common sense. (As we shall see, **on the side of the beautiful object, this subjective principle corresponds to the principle of the purposiveness of nature.**) Thus Kant can even claim that all four Moments of the Beautiful are summed up in the idea of 'common sense' (CJ sect.22). Kant also suggests that common sense in turn depends upon or is perhaps identical with *the ~~saharmme~~ faculties as ordinary cognition*, that is, those features of humans which (as Kant showed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) make possible natural, determinative experience. **Here, however, the faculties are merely in a harmony rather than forming determinate cognition.**

There are two aspects to Kant's basic answer to the question of how aesthetic judgments happen. First, some of Kant's earlier work seemed to suggest that our faculty or ability to judge consisted of being a mere processor of other, much more fundamental mental presentations. These were concepts and intuitions ('intuition' being Kant's word for our immediate sensible experiences - see entry on 'Kant's Metaphysics'). Everything interesting and fundamental happened in the formation of concepts, or in the receiving of intuitions. But now Kant argues that judgment itself, as a faculty, has an fundamental principle that governs it. This principle asserts the purposiveness of all phenomena with respect to our judgment. In other words, it assumes in advance that everything we experience can be tackled by our powers of judgment. Normally, we don't even notice that this assumption is being made, we just apply concepts, and be done with it. But in the case of the beautiful, we do notice. This is because the beautiful draws particular attention to its purposiveness; but also because the beautiful has no concept of a purpose available, so that we cannot just apply a concept and be done with it. Instead, the beautiful forces us to grope for concepts that we can never find. And yet, nevertheless, the beautiful is not an alien and disturbing experience - on the contrary, it is pleasurable. The principle of purposiveness is satisfied, but in a new and unique way.

Asking what this new and unique way is takes us to the second aspect. Kant argues that the kinds of 'cognition' (i.e. thinking) characteristic of the contemplation of the beautiful are not, in fact, all that different from ordinary cognition about things in the world. The faculties of the mind are the same: the 'understanding' which is responsible for concepts, and the 'sensibility' (including our imagination) which is responsible for intuitions. **The difference between ordinary and aesthetic cognition is that in the latter case, there is no one 'determinate' concept that pins down an intuition. Instead, intuition is allowed some 'free play', and rather than being subject to one concept, it instead acts in 'harmony' with the lawfulness in general of the understanding.** It is this ability of judgment to bring sensibility and understanding to a mutually reinforcing harmony that Kant calls 'common sense'. This account of common sense

explains how the beautiful can be purposive with respect to our ability to judge, and yet have no definite purpose. Kant believes common sense also answers the question of why aesthetic judgments are valid: since aesthetic judgments are a perfectly normal function of the same faculties of cognition involved in ordinary cognition, they will have the same universal validity as such ordinary acts of cognition.

The idea of a harmony between or among the faculties of cognition is turning out to be the key idea. For such a harmony, Kant claims, will be purposive, but without purpose. Moreover, it will be both universal and necessary, because based upon universal common sense, or again, because related to the same cognitive faculties which enable any and all knowledge and experience. Lastly, because of the self-contained nature of this harmony, it must be disinterested. So, what does Kant think is going on in such 'harmony', or in common sense for that matter, and does he have any arguments which make of these idea more than mere metaphors for beauty?

[...] Briefly, the argument begins by asserting that aesthetic judgments must be judgments in some sense; that is, they are mental acts which bring a sensible particular under some universal (Kant's Introduction, IV). The four moments of the beautiful are then explicitly seen as being limitations on the conditions under which this judgment can take place (no interest, purposive without determining purpose, etc.); all these Kant summarizes by saying that **the judgments are formal only, lacking all 'matter'**.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Critique of Judgment Chapter V: THE PRINCIPLE OF THE FORMAL PURPOSIVENESS OF NATURE IS A TRANSCENDENTAL PRINCIPLE OF JUDGEMENT.**

[http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1217#Kant\\_0318\\_87](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1217#Kant_0318_87)

“That the concept of a purposiveness of nature belongs to transcendental principles can be sufficiently seen from the **maxims of the Judgement**, which **lie at the basis of the investigation of nature *a priori***, and yet do not go further than the possibility of experience, and consequently of the cognition of nature—not indeed nature in general, but nature as determined through a variety of particular laws. These maxims present themselves in the course of this science often enough, though in a scattered way, as sentences of metaphysical wisdom, whose necessity we cannot demonstrate from concepts.

If we propose to set forth the **origin of these fundamental propositions** and try to do so by the psychological method, we violate their sense. For **they do not tell us what happens**, *i.e.* by what rule our cognitive powers actually operate, and how we judge, **but how we ought to judge**; and this logical objective necessity does not emerge if the principles are merely empirical. Hence that purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties and their use, which is plainly apparent from them, is a transcendental principle of judgements, and needs therefore also a Transcendental Deduction, by means of which the ground for so judging must be sought in the sources of cognition *a priori*.”

\*\*\*\*\*

the explicitly Christian understanding of time coming to an end at God's choosing. Kant makes this point clear when he writes of this assumption of purposiveness: "But if we assume a plan of nature, we have grounds for greater hopes. For such a plan opens up the comforting prospect of a future in which we are shown from afar how the human race eventually works its way upward to a situation in which all germs implanted by nature can be developed fully, and in which man's destiny can be fulfilled here on earth".<sup>52</sup> Assuming nature has a plan that it executes for man's development then allows the future to appear welcoming and desirable, as a horizon of limitless expectation. This key assumption of the **purposiveness of nature** not only provides for the possibility of a "comforting" future, but it is also a necessary postulate for the Kantian moral law. We must act *as if* there is a plan of nature, we must "assume a plan of nature", which will give us "grounds for greater hopes" and allow us to realize the moral end of existence.

This apparent secularization of Christian time, where nature seemingly supplants God as the source of temporal order therefore masks the much deeper moral imperative that is operative in Kant's writing. Kant conflates nature with **providence** as a useful tool for understanding as he writes, "Such a *justification* of nature—or rather perhaps of **providence**—is no mean motive for adopting a particular point of view in considering the world".<sup>53</sup> Kant is somewhat wary of **providence**, but he is acutely aware that the use of nature's purposiveness plays a similar role in temporal understanding. He is convinced that such a regulative idea of nature and the consequent philosophical attempt to write history in conformity with it is essential, even if it cannot be proved to be true, as any attempt at order is preferred to the ordinary chaos of human actions. In a revealing passage, he writes, "Yet if it may be assumed that nature does not work without a plan and purposeful end, even amidst the arbitrary play of human freedom, this idea may nevertheless prove useful".<sup>54</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

**[C]ategorical imperatives are synthetic a priori**, since the statement "you shall treat people with respect," is not true by definition, and is not known by means of the senses. Kant's point is that **the categorical imperative involves a unique type of knowledge that is intuitive, yet informative.**

In view of this background, Kant presents **the single categorical imperative of morality: act only on that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.**

Although there is only one categorical imperative, Kant argues that there can **be four formulations of this principle:**

**The Formula of the Law of Nature:** "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature."

**The Formula of the End Itself:** "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."

**The Formula of Autonomy:** "So act that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxims."

**The Formula of the Kingdom of Ends:** "So act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of a kingdom of ends."

According to Kant, each of these four formulations will produce the same conclusion regarding the morality of any particular action. Thus, each of these formulas offers a step by step procedure for determining the morality of any particular action.

The formula of the law of nature tells us:

- i. to take a **particular** action,
- ii. construe it as a **general maxim**,
- iii. then **see if it can be willed consistently as a law of nature**.

If it can be willed consistently, then the action is moral. If not, then it is immoral. To illustrate the categorical imperative, Kant uses four examples that cover the range of morally significant situations which arise. These examples include committing suicide, making false promises, failing to develop one's abilities, and refusing to be charitable. In each case, the action is deemed immoral since a contradiction arises when trying to will the maxim as a law of nature. The formula of the end itself is more straight forward: a given action is morally correct if when performing that action we do not use people as a means to achieve some further benefit, but instead treat people as something which is intrinsically valuable. Again, Kant illustrates this principle with the above four examples, and in each case performing the action would involve treating a person as a means, and not an end.