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**THE DISCIPLINE OF GENIUS: NATURE, FREEDOM AND THE EMERGENCE
OF THE IDEA OF SYSTEM IN KANT'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

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Philosophy

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide an account of the movement toward systematic unity in Kant's three *Critiques* by reading the discussion of artistic genius in the *Critique of Judgment* as a figure for the mediating power of the transcendental imagination. Though the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* manage to secure the domains of theoretical and practical knowledge, respectively, they do so at the expense of the coherence of Kant's transcendental philosophy and of the consciousness whose possibility it is likewise meant to establish. The "immense gulf" that is fixed between nature and freedom can be overcome only by liberating the imagination from its subordination to the understanding in the synthesis of objective cognition, granting it access to a higher order of synthetic activity embodied by the talents belonging to the genius. Once the talents of the genius are distanced from the context of the beautiful artworks with which they are ordinarily associated, their full impact upon the concepts of experience and of morality can be appreciated, and the artist can be understood as model for the essential human task of uniting nature and freedom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. THE PECULIAR FATE OF REASON.....	1
I. The Logic of Illusion: The Peculiar Fate of Reason.....	6
II. Criticism and Systematicity.....	16
III. The Synthetic Power of Imagination.....	36
IV. Imagination and the Highest Systematic Unity: Schematism Revisited.....	45
Chapter 2. INVENTING NATURE: THE EXEMPLARY ORIGINALITY OF ARTISTIC GENIUS.....	57
I. From Transcendental Synthesis to Highest Possible Unity.....	63
II. From Beauty to Genius.....	68
III. The Sources of Kant's Encounter with Genius.....	74
IV. From the Reflection on Beauty to the Production of Genius.....	77
V. The Fine Arts as Response to Natural Beauty.....	100
VI. Cultivating Genius.....	115
VII. Genius and the Perfection of Judgment.....	129
Chapter 3. KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT OBJECTS: THE WORK OF GENIUS AS SECOND NATURE.....	143
I. The Unified Standpoint of Diverging Knowledge.....	148
II. The Depths of Experience.....	155
III. The Ubiquity of Reflection.....	162
IV. The Unity of Judgment.....	175
V. From Schema to Symbol: Lawfulness Without Law.....	191
Chapter 4. BEAUTY AS A SUMMONS TO MORAL LIFE.....	203
I. The Elusive Object of Moral Judgment.....	210
II. A Priori Feeling.....	227
III. An Imagination that Emulates Reason.....	243
Chapter 5. BEAUTY, SYSTEM AND THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE UNITY.....	251
I. Criticism and Systematic Unity.....	252
II. The System of Purposes.....	262
III. The Ground of Purposiveness.....	272
IV. Lawfulness Without Law.....	280
V. The Antinomy of Pure Imagination.....	292
Bibliography.....	308

Chapter One The Peculiar Fate of Reason

Nearly the entirety of Kant's project of critical philosophy lies between the bookends of a pair of images comparing the activities and aspirations of the mind to the flight of a bird. In each case, it is a matter of guarding against a certain natural temptation that threatens to lead this flight astray. In each case, the loftiness of the goals of reason increases in proportion with the perilous heights that its powers bring within its reach, making its ambition indistinguishable from the threat of its destruction. The task of criticism is to rein in these impulses of reason, teach them their proper measure, and yet without thereby extinguishing the source of their striving.

The first is found in the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the cornerstone of the critical project, in which Kant must not only define the attitude of criticism, but further sketch the outline of its system, even without yet having a clear vision of its completion. Describing the tendency of the faculty of knowledge to become emboldened by its ability to leap beyond the limits of what is given to it in experience, Kant writes: "The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be easier still in empty space."¹ The critical delimitation of metaphysical knowledge can thus be understood as the effort to keep reason aloft by confining it to the territory in which its flight can be maintained within the boundaries proper to it. The greatest danger facing our claims to knowledge is that they venture out into the space of empty abstraction, only to discover there is nothing to support their weight.

¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1960), A5/B9.

The second image comes at the conclusion of the account of aesthetic reflection in the *Critique of Judgment*, where the task at hand is to set in place the final pieces of the system of a priori knowledge, binding together whatever disconnected pieces threaten the unity and coherence that is presupposed by the fact of experience. After having brought to light the principle of free purposiveness that grounds our judgments of taste and provides a clue to the transition between nature and freedom, Kant turns to an account of the capacity to think and act in accordance with this principle, namely the genius of the artist. While presenting the genius as a model for bringing purposive freedom into the realm of nature, Kant recognizes that the unbridled creativity associated with this power carries with it the threat of a descent into meaningless play of the imagination. In order to guard against such a possibility, creativity must be brought under the discipline of rules: “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.”²

These two images present two very distinct models of criticism; they offer different strategies for responding to different forms of the excesses of reason. In the first *Critique* reason is tamed from without, by the establishment of strict boundaries that prevent it from venturing beyond the limits of its legitimate employment. The division of the territories of theoretical and practical concepts ensures that knowledge’s desire for the unconditioned will be held in check at precisely the moment it violates these boundaries. In the taming of the genius described in the third *Critique*, however, criticism seeks to work directly upon the figure of genius, guiding and shaping its ambition from within.

² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 319.

Disciplining the creativity of the productive imagination means cultivating its desire to conform to a lawful principle, rather than imposing limits on its activity.

Such a new strategy of criticism will prove necessary in response to the transcendental power of imagination, whose essential freedom, as we will see, proves indispensable to some of the most fundamental operations belonging to the general power of cognition. One of the defining challenges of the critique of reflective judgment is thus to discover a way to keep the faculty of imagination from overstepping its limits, when these limits cannot be known in advance because they do not conform to any determinate rules. The solution that Kant discovers is to cultivate the power of imagination through the use of exemplary models for its activity to emulate, rather than enforcing rules for it to submit to. “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.”³ The example presents the advantage of simultaneously encouraging the creativity of the imagination and keeping its freedom within reasonable boundaries. Showing how this is possible will prove to be a crucial step in demonstrating how nature and freedom can be united in order to account for the overall unity of experience.

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 which 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

³ CJ 283

something that surpasses nature.⁴

In the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, after surveying the landscape of his system of critical philosophy, Kant assigns to the power of reflective judgment nothing less than the task of synthesizing the whole of experience, by uniting the theoretical and practical principles whose schism is both the hallmark of his developed philosophy and its bane. This monumental feat is entrusted largely to the transcendental imagination, here liberated from the yoke of the understanding, and in possession of powers unforeseen from the standpoint of its role in the schematism. But the “free harmony” with which the presentational power of imagination now engages the concepts that govern appearances seems, as described in this passage, to grant it powers that far outstrip the limits of its task of merely unifying experience. Imagination does not simply bring synthetic coherence to experience, it transforms it, refashioning the phenomenal realm in obedience only to an analogy with nature and its own pursuit of supersensible ideas.

The peculiar power of imagination thus described is announced in a section of the third *Critique* called “On the Powers of the Mind Which Constitute Genius,” which lies roughly at the point of transition between the two halves of the text. While the role of the account of the artistic genius within the work as a whole remains largely unexplained⁵, Kant makes this much abundantly clear: the products of genius must furnish a model for others to follow, “a standard or rule by which to judge.”⁶ If artistic genius consists in the power to transform nature and present it anew, this imaginative reconstruction of experience, if it is to be meaningful, cannot lapse into pure capriciousness. Taste, as Kant

⁴ CJ 182

⁵ See John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1992) 130; Zammito argues that the entire exposition of art is “misplaced” in terms of the architectonic of the work.

⁶ CJ 175

says, must clip the wings of genius. The ability to serve as examples of taste, or models for judgment, is what separates the works of genius from the kind of unbridled creativity of the imagination that would border on madness or mere nonsense.⁷

This dissertation will take its project from a series of interpretive problems stemming from the account of genius in the *Critique of Judgment*. It will pursue a threefold task, beginning from an analysis of genius and following the widening implications of this theory as they extend first into the other portions of Kant's systematic philosophy and then into questions of the systematic unity of the critical project and its place within the history of philosophy. First, it will seek to develop a reading of the *Critique of Judgment* capable of accounting for the organic unity of its parts by demonstrating that not only is the artistic genius the hinge between the two forms of reflective judgment, aesthetic and teleological, but in fact the focal point of the entire text and indeed a privileged figure within the issue of the unity of the critical philosophy. Second, on the basis of this reading, it will consider the consequences for both theoretical and practical philosophy, as understood in the first and second critiques, of the capacity for reflective judgment that mediates between them. I will argue that though the principles elaborated respectively in the two critiques remain essentially unchanged, their overall significance within Kant's philosophy is radically altered by the discovery of the faculty of reflective judgment. Finally, considering the central place that the third *Critique* assumes in the legacy of German philosophy following Kant, particularly around the question of the speculative unity of reason, it will turn to the question of the highest possible synthesis of our representations, in an attempt to determine the extent to which

⁷ "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." CJ 188

the discovery of aesthetic judgment resolves the deeply entrenched divisions that provide the backbone of Kant's critical philosophy, but also generate its most persistently insoluble problems.

I. The Logic of Illusion: The Peculiar Fate of Reason

In order to develop an account of the necessary emergence of the figure of the artistic genius from out of the landscape of critical philosophy, we will need to begin by returning to the decisive first gesture of the critical project, a task that Kant set into motion long before he grasped the full implications of his own ambitious thought. The purpose of this introductory chapter will be to locate the foundational insights that constitute not only the radical discoveries of Kant's project, but also the persistent and insoluble questions to which it is destined to return again and again—not for any failure in its execution, but because these questions form the fertile ground out of which the possibility of transcendental philosophy is always potentially renewed.

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer. The perplexity into which it thus falls is not due to any fault of its own.⁸

Reason is, as a matter of its ownmost fate, divided within and against itself. This is no mere feature of human reason among others, but the definitive and guiding insight driving Kant's thought through the development of the critical project. It is the task of philosophy, and of ordinary consciousness alike, to address this conflicted nature. During the course of its development, Kant's system of critical philosophy will establish its purpose in terms of exposing the numerous manifestations of this self-conflict, but all of these are essentially reducible to the most basic sense indicated here. Impelled ever

⁸ CPR Avii

forward by the tendency towards synthetic unity that belongs to it as its very nature,⁹ reason is driven up against the limits of its powers (*Vermögen*), destined to fail at the singular task it sets before itself. The demands of systematic unity, totality, and universality that make even the most modest forms of knowledge possible, simultaneously provide reason with an intoxicating taste of boundlessness, seducing it with the prospect of violating not just the specific laws that are proper to it, but lawfulness as such. “The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space.”¹⁰ Awestruck by its own freedom, feeling itself at once in flight, soaring beyond the limits of experience, Icarus-like reason seeks to shed off all hindrances and strike out on its own power into the loftiest heights to which the imagination reaches.

Even in its most nascent stages, the thought that would eventually result in the tripartite system of critical philosophy displayed a singular preoccupation with the illusions into which reason might stumble not by chance, but by the ineluctable force of its own nature. As he begins the Transcendental Dialectic, the point at which the *Critique of Pure Reason* turns finally to a direct examination of its eponymous topic, Kant establishes the boundaries necessary to guarding against reason’s inherent tendency to overstep the limits proper to it, leading the cognitive faculties as a whole into disorder and error. But as Kant makes clear from the outset of this “critique of dialectical illusion,”¹¹ the

⁹ “These questions are not arbitrarily selected; they are prescribed to us, by the very nature of knowledge itself, as being the subject-matter of our critical enquiry.” CPR Axiv

¹⁰ CPR A5/B8

¹¹ “However various were the significations in which the ancients used ‘dialectic’ as the title for a science or an art, we can safely conclude from their actual employment of it that with them it was never anything else than the logic of illusion. It was a sophistical art of giving to ignorance, and indeed to intentional sophistries, the appearance of truth by the device of imitating the methodical thoroughness which logic prescribes, and of using its topic to conceal the emptiness of its pretensions...Such instruction is quite unbecoming the dignity of philosophy. The title ‘dialectic’ has therefore come to be otherwise employed,

irregularities that it introduces into thought are not the result of simple carelessness, but rather arise from the lofty ambitions that animate reason: “I am not referring to the transcendental employment or misemployment of the categories, which is merely an error of the faculty of judgment...I mean actual principles which incite us to tear down all those boundary fences and to seize possession of an entirely new domain.”¹² These excesses of reason, in their various forms, constitute the most serious confusion into which reason can be led, and against which the tribunal of reason is established. In the Inaugural Dissertation, “logical subreption” is the name given to the confusion of principles borrowed from sensibility with concepts of a priori cognition, a problem which Kant sees as endangering the very possibility of metaphysics. Thus, in a gesture that hints toward the coming discovery of his transcendental philosophy, Kant warns that “great care must be taken lest the principles which are native to sensitive cognition transgress their limits, and affect what belongs to the understanding.”¹³ The confusion of empirical with *a priori* principles, however, is merely one form that the excesses of reason may assume. More broadly, subreption occurs wherever there is a contamination between

and has been assigned to logic, as a critique of dialectical illusion.” (CPR A61-2/B85-6) The notion of errors in philosophical thought having their source in the superficial imitation of legitimate cognitive processes will become a recurrent theme throughout the critical project, and will play a crucial role in our effort to trace the development of Kant’s system. While criticism in general can be understood as the effort to identify and interrupt such forms of imitation, the issue becomes far more complicated in the analysis of aesthetic experience, where the production and preservation of certain illusions is in fact not strictly detrimental, but necessary to the a priori demands of taste. This state of affairs, which we will discuss at length in the second chapter, will require Kant to make more subtle distinctions in his analysis of the connection between imitation and logical illusion.

¹² CPR A296/B353. In this passage, Kant is referring to the distinction between *transcendent* and *transcendental* principles, on the basis that the former profess to pass beyond the limits of possible experience while the latter provide its necessary conditions, even if they are capable of being applied in such a way as violates the proper conditions of their employment. Henry Allison regards this as “one of the most important, yet frequently misunderstood, distinctions in the *Critique*,” arguing that the force of this distinction is to illustrate the ineluctably transgressive tendencies that result from the same faculty of reason whose guidance is so crucial to promoting the systematic unity of our knowledge, thus making these transcendental illusions a singularly intractable problem for critical philosophy. (Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 327-8)

¹³ Kant, “On the form and principles of the sensible world,” in *Immanuel Kant: Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, trans. David Walford. (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2003) p. 407.

distinct principles of thought, leaving the boundaries separating the legitimate operation of the faculties indistinct or altogether unrecognized. Such confusion is the result of a general lawlessness in the operation of reason. Critical philosophy is the search for a law capable of staving off the *effect* of such subreptive aspirations, yet without thereby constraining the *impulse* that leads toward it. Without this synthetic drive, reason would never get off the ground; given over to it, it could never be brought back down into the world. Therefore, just as exigent as the constraint of reason is the protection of its ambitions, these two merely being opposite sides of a single task. In fact, Kant insists, to identify the work of critique merely with a kind of prohibition is to mistake its nature altogether; drawing boundaries around reason does not thwart its ambitions, but rather maintains the space in which they may properly be pursued.¹⁴

Reason must discover its proper limits in order to avoid violating them, yet only through violating these limits can it come to discover them. This insight, perhaps more than the epistemic reversal by which Kant sought to explain his transcendental idealism,¹⁵ constitutes the genuinely revolutionary core of critical philosophy, namely that “reason, holding in one hand its principles...and in the other the experiment which it has devised in conformity with these principles, must approach nature in order to be taught by it.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Wherever he considers the meaning of critique in general, Kant is eager to defend the position that the *negative* function of drawing limits and preventing transgressions of these limits is only the obverse of a *positive* function, whereby these same limits open and preserve the space for the proper exercise of reason: “To deny that the service which the Critique renders is *positive* in character, would thus be like saying that the police are of no positive benefit, inasmuch as their main business is merely to prevent the violence of which citizens stand in mutual fear, in order that each may pursue his vocation in peace and security.” CPR Bxxv

¹⁵ The passage in reference to which Kant makes the comparison to the method that enabled Copernicus’s astronomical discovery and which is normally understood as the basis of this comparison is the following: “Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.” (CPR Bxvi)

¹⁶ CPR Bxiii

The question of the limits of reason's access to nature must therefore be subordinated to its self-examination, the so-called tribunal of pure reason. As both subject and object of metaphysics, "reason is indeed meant to be its own pupil," and yet this thoroughly reflexive inquiry nonetheless remains "the most difficult of all its tasks."¹⁷ Reason is destined to fail at this most essential inquiry if only because the very same legislative power that grants it this autonomy also drives it toward the excesses that require such self-adjudication. Several features of this conflicted nature demand our attention. The peculiarity of such a fate consists, first of all, in the fact that only through the enactment of such failure does reason accomplish whatever measure of success is permitted to it. In coming upon its limits, the drive toward knowledge is secured, rather than stifled. Criticism, as the provocation of the confrontation of reason with its own limits, "acquires a *positive* value when we recognize that the principles with which speculative reason ventures out beyond its proper limits do not in effect *extend* the employment of reason, but, as we find on closer scrutiny, inevitably *narrow* it."¹⁸ So long as it submits willingly to the discipline of criticism, reason can be assured that in the bitter reminder of its failure it will also come to know what belongs properly to it.

If the task of critique is, as Kant suggests, the perfection of reason's self-knowledge,¹⁹ then critique will always remain a project underway. All his insistence on the completion of the critical project²⁰ in the discovery of the principles of reflective

¹⁷ CPR Axi

¹⁸ CPR Bxxiv

¹⁹ "It is a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws. This tribunal is no other than the critique of pure reason." (CPR Axi)

²⁰ Perhaps a distinction is needed between critical philosophy and critique as such, or between the philosophical search for the ground of the unity of experience, and the lived project of unifying conscious experience of the world.

judgment²¹ notwithstanding, Kant's account provides us with constant reminders why the unified ground of experience itself will constantly remain the blindspot of philosophy, generating the most pressing problems while simultaneously holding their solution always beyond reach. Reason cannot ever adequately know itself simply because, while it can assume a comprehensive standpoint from which to operate as subject of this self-interrogation, as object it lacks any such advantage as object of the investigation. Reason is complex, multiple, conflicted, and still seeks an understanding of itself that achieves simplicity, unity, and resolution. This is reason's peculiar fate, in a second sense: not simply that it cannot answer certain questions which might naturally present themselves before it in the course of experience, but rather that, having learned through experience the impossibility of settling such questions through the resources available to it, it nonetheless cannot but persist in raising them ever anew.

The nature of reason is in tension with the powers belonging to it. Though its aspirations are boundless, they are nonetheless grounded within the finite boundaries of the human intellect. The finitude of human knowledge is indicated first and foremost through the passivity of sensible intuition,²² as one of the indispensable sources of our knowledge. The very standard for the objective validity of a concept of the understanding is the possibility of its being supplied with an object in intuition that is adequate to it. To be applicable to experience, a concept must be so determined as to conform to the a

²¹ In a letter to Jakob from 1787, shortly after his completion of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes: "I shall now turn at once to the 'Critique of Taste,' with which I will have finished my critical work, so that I can proceed to the dogmatic part." Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence: 1759-99*, trans. A. Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 125. See also the preface to the *Critique of Judgment*, which declares: "With this, then, I conclude my entire critical enterprise." (CJ 170)

²² "The character of the finitude of intuition is found in its receptivity. Finite intuition, however, cannot take something in stride unless that which is too be taken in stride announces itself. According to its essence, finite intuition must be solicited or affected by that which is intuitable in it." Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 18.

priori, spatio-temporal forms of intuition. And yet to constitute an objective phenomenon, rather than the merely logical form of an object, our intuition must be occasioned by something outside of the spontaneity of our concepts. “The capacity for receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by objects is entitled sensibility...but all thought must...relate ultimately to intuitions...because in no other way can an object be given to us.”²³ All knowledge must stand in relation to sensible intuition, lest it sacrifice its claim to objectivity. But the source of intuition being heterogeneous to the intellect, sensibility constrains the spontaneity of the concepts of the understanding with which its manifold must be synthesized in order to yield objective knowledge. It is clear, then, that the passivity of sensation, its boundedness to what is given to it, acts as kind of safeguard against the pretensions of the synthetic and speculative faculties, a resistance to their thirst for the unconditioned.

But while the finitude of human reason is indicated first and foremost through the passivity of sensible intuition, it is by no means limited to it. For even once it is received and given over to the synthetic power of imagination, and thus wrested free from the object, intuition continues to assert a certain resistance in terms of the forms to which it remains bound, space and time, that place limits on the spontaneity of the concepts and prescribe the bounds of its conceptual determinability. Hence the task of the schematism is not simply to render the sensible intelligible, but to discover the intelligible dimension of sensibility, or in other words, to discover something underlying both on the basis of which they are capable of being united. “Obviously there must be some third thing (*es ein Drittes geben müssse*), which is homogeneous on the one hand with the category, and on the other hand with the appearance, and which thus makes the application of the former

²³ CPR A19/B33

to the latter possible.”²⁴ Such synthesis is necessary, according to the first *Critique*, in order to yield not only objective knowledge of nature, but even a coherent and regular experience of the phenomenal world. Experience begins with this synthesis, which is therefore presupposed by the mere fact that we can raise the question of the source of our empirical knowledge of the natural world.

Kant’s first and most decisive move, therefore, is to dissociate the essence of reason from the specific faculties at its disposal, and through whose exercise it might seek to develop this essence in the world. Reason is thus not reducible to a faculty, nor even to the shifting constellation of a set of distinctive faculties, but remains above all a vocation, a task, or a destiny. Furthermore, reason is a restless demand, instilled in a human intelligence sorely lacking the capacities necessary to its fulfillment. The peculiarity of the fate of human reason, in a third sense, therefore, is to be perpetually haunted by a self-image to which it will forever remain inadequate. If reason must aspire above all to self-knowledge, this is not least because it has projected a distorted image of itself upon the world, shunning any true self-interrogation.

Human reason is destined to progress only through a tortured path of constant setback; to relive the trauma of its failure even while recognizing it as such; and to guarantee the repetition of this failure through the constant generation of images of itself in accordance with its own impossible aspirations. This is the situation, the peculiar fate of human reason, to which the critical philosophy addresses itself. The division of the system into its theoretical and practical domains is the response to this situation, not its grounding assumption. It is the attempt to develop a system of philosophy that is adequate to the fullness of the experience of human reason, even if this means that the

²⁴ CPR A138/B177

system of critical philosophy must itself be fractured in order to reflect the fracture that runs through our experience of the world. The task of philosophy is thus not to overcome this destiny of reason, but still less can it afford to avoid or neglect it.²⁵ It demands a response, which is to say, according to the primary meaning of the ethical in Kant's thought, that it constitutes a summons to morality. In the essay "What is Enlightenment?" Kant draws a direct and explicit link between intellectual and moral freedom, asserting the dependence of the possibility of developing the latter on the existence and exercise of the former.²⁶ Thus reason is responsible for what it makes of its fate (*seiner selbst verschuldeter Unmündigkeit*), even if it is not responsible for the perplexity which results from the inheritance of such a fate (*in diese Verlegenheit gerat sie ohne ihre Schuld*). The assurance that reason owns this fate through no fault (*Schuld*) of its own therefore serves as little consolation, for reason's duty (*Pflicht*) begins precisely where its fault leaves off. That is to say, this failure is extra-moral in the sense that only through it is the space of reason's moral duty first delineated. It is this rupture that allows freedom to twist free from necessity by discovering a law for itself other than those of natural mechanism.

²⁵ Indifference to the questions that arise spontaneously from the nature of reason is, of course, another name for skepticism, a position toward which Kant's attitude is somewhat ambivalent. If the critical turn can rightly be regarded as opening a middle course between skepticism and dogmatism, then this can only be on the understanding that for Kant these are not simple alternatives standing on equal footing. Skepticism amounts to a considered response to the excesses of dogmatism, and may therefore be considered as already on the path to the assumption of the critical attitude. "But it is idle to feign indifference to such enquiries, the object of which can never be indifferent to our human nature... [Such indifference] is obviously the effect not of levity but of the matured judgment of the age, which refuses to be any longer put off with illusory knowledge. It is a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self knowledge." CPR Ax-xi

²⁶ The central concept of "self-incurred minority" (*selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit*) against which Kant defines Enlightenment amounts to a refusal to accept responsibility for the use of one's own intellect, and is therefore at least as much a moral as an intellectual failing. But for just the same reason, the pursuit of intellectual enlightenment is itself directly—that is, not merely instrumentally—a contribution to or elevation of the moral dignity of human existence. "Thus when nature has unwrapped, from under this hard shell, the seed for which she cares most tenderly, namely the propensity and calling to *think* freely, the latter gradually works back upon the mentality of the people—which thereby gradually becomes capable of *freedom* in acting." Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 22.

“Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law”—but this is true only with the further requirement that the ground of this action be a law of freedom rather than a law of nature. Reason must recognize its responsibility for this fate precisely because it is an effect of its moral freedom.

In this opening chapter of the dissertation, I will demonstrate that the fundamental problem confronting the third *Critique* is to respond to the difficulty of heeding irreconcilable laws, one of which is of our own making, and of doing so without a law for arbitrating between them. The much-noted legalistic metaphors that run throughout the critical philosophy are not simply that, but more directly, an indication of the priority of the problem of lawfulness for directing the powers constituting the human *Gemüt*. The demand for systematicity is not only the manifestation of a will to distinguish the various legislations that intersect in human experience, but also and more fundamentally an expression of the desire for a standpoint from which to mediate their claims. In order to connect the problem of lawfulness (*Gesetzmässigkeit*) with the structure of the critical project, I will first address the notion of systematicity in general, taking into consideration Kant’s own estimation of the degree to which this aim is accomplished as the project progresses toward its completion. Second, I will turn to the crucial role played by the various forms of judgment, as described in the first and third critiques, of accomplishing the synthetic unity of presentations that, in themselves, are in principle irreconcilable. The imagination is capable of performing such synthetic operations in the service of various principles precisely because it lacks any law of its own, while striving to discover a principle for itself. Thus even the purely schematic operation of the imagination reveals the intrinsic character that will enable it to function symbolically.

The basis for an understanding of reflective judgment is already latent within Kant's account of determinative judgment, and does not register explicitly primarily because judgment is not being interrogated in such a way as to highlight this aspect of its function. The third aim of this chapter, then, will be to consider the function the imagination assumes when it is liberated from its subordination to the legislation of theoretical or practical reason, as a means of demonstrating the consistency of the first and third critiques, despite their obvious contestations concerning the meaning of experience in general. Finally, in preparation for introducing the discussion of the artistic genius as the embodiment or the figure of the solution to the problem of the unity of experience, I will turn to a consideration of the general criteria for any solution to the problem of systematic unity as understood according to the basic commitments—competing legislative principles converging in a common territory of experience—of the Kantian critical philosophy.

II. Criticism and Systematicity

In the following section, I will trace the development of the meaning of systematic completeness as a task for critical philosophy, as it is transformed in the course of the publication of the three *Critiques* and the texts related directly to their project. My concern will be less to give a genetic account of how Kant came to conceive their respective topics in relation to the numerous public debates in which he was actively involved during these years, than more modestly to attend to what Kant always insisted was an inevitable outcome of criticism—namely that the negative work of limiting the illegitimate pretensions of pure reason would give rise to the discovery of new tasks proper to it. In other words, the effort to mitigate the conflicts that occur between the

various legislative domains of the cognitive powers begins to evolve into a set of questions concerning the ultimate standpoint from which to judge the validity of our representations. Only on the assumption of some unifying position does it become possible to arbitrate such disputes in which distinct principles square off against each other over the same territory of objects. The first part of this account will be to consider the systematic significance of the critical turn by investigating the problems that led Kant to be convinced of its necessity, despite its inherent tendency to reveal divisions and tensions within the complex of the cognitive faculties.

The irreducible alterity of the sources of experience makes the process of presentation (*Darstellung*) a persistent and fundamental concern for transcendental idealism. Presentation is the name Kant gives to a broad array of cognitive operations responsible for establishing the connection of sensibility to the understanding. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where this relation is governed by the interest of objective cognition of nature, the operation of schematic presentation is a necessary pre-condition for the constitution of the object of experience. Neither the bare manifold of sensation nor the pure concepts of the understanding is sufficient by itself to provide any objectively reliable information about the status of the object of its representation. As Kant writes in the emblematic line of the first *Critique*, “Thoughts without content (*Gedanken ohne Inhalt*) are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”²⁷ But this should not lead us to believe that the role of intuition is therefore simply to supply ready-made concepts with unformed material (*Inhalt*)²⁸ to be shaped by the imposition of formal structure. For, as

²⁷ CPR A51/B75

²⁸ Kant often refers to sensation (*Empfindung*) as providing the “material” (*Materie*) of sensible knowledge (*sinnliche Erkenntnis*), but here it is necessary to distinguish the intuited appearance from the form-bestowing power of intuition through which it is received. Thus while “sensation may be entitled the

this passage continues, “it is just as necessary to make our concepts sensible (*seine Begriffe sinnlich zu machen*), that is, to add the object to them in intuition (*ihnen den Gegenstand in der Anschauung beizufügen*), as to make our intuitions intelligible.”²⁹

The process of presentation through which the sensible and the intelligible aspects of the object are united, as this passage describes it, must effect a transformation in both sides of this synthesis. The category must be made sensible, just as much as the appearance must be given intelligible form. But the justification for this account of the bifurcated genesis of our knowledge of experience does not depend on an unquestioned adherence to a faculty psychology, as is often asserted. Rather, Kant’s intention is to think the possibility of finite knowledge in general, with as little dependence on the evidence supplied by human psychology as possible. The developed notion of a sensible intuition on one side, and an intellectual faculty of concepts on the other, is the product of an analysis (in the Kantian sense of a dissolution into transcendental conditions) of the coherent experience of a rulebound realm of objects—a world—rather than the reverse. The determination given to each of these two faculties (*Vermögen*) is derived from a characteristic feature of finite knowledge as such, rather than from human psychology. “If the *receptivity* of our mind, its power of receiving representations insofar as it is in any wise affected, is to be entitled sensibility, then the mind’s power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of knowledge, should be called the understanding.”³⁰ The power of human reason both to be affected through its power of

material of sensible knowledge, pure intuition...contains only the *form* under which something is intuited.” (CPR A51/B75; emphasis mine) The distinction between intuition and understanding is therefore not reducible to a difference of content and form, even though the content of knowledge must be received through intuition. Both of these sources of experience impose formal requirements on the constitution of the object.

²⁹ CPR A51/B75

³⁰ CPR A51/B75

representations (*Vorstellungen*) by causes outside itself, and to freely generate such representations from itself without any external cause—but most importantly of all, to unite these two capacities in a single act of knowledge—this is what persuades Kant of the necessity of positing two original sources in reason of the unity of experience. If our representations of objects are not in some way caused or occasioned by those (noumenal) objects, then dogmatism is the only possibility for philosophy. This point is the foundation of Kant’s repeated insistence that our finite intuition is a sensitive, rather than intellectual faculty. Through its representations it reflects the existence of its object, rather than bringing it about, as an intellectual intuition.

On the other hand, if our power of cognition were merely receptive, lacking any spontaneity whatsoever, then it would remain altogether incapable of achieving the claim to a priori universality that accompanies so many of our representations of natural objects. Nothing *applicable to* experience could be known *in advance of* experience, but the sciences of pure mathematics and geometry demonstrate that matters are otherwise. The chief innovation of the Kantian theory of knowledge is thus to be able to demonstrate the possibility of an experience that combines a priori universality and receptivity in a common representation and according to an a priori rule. The spontaneous element in our knowledge must be tempered by and tested against its receptive counterpart, lest all our representations remain either empty or blind. “But that is no reason for confounding the contribution of either with that of the other; rather is it a strong reason for carefully separating and distinguishing the one from the other.”³¹ This separation is enacted for the sake of clarifying the constitutive elements of experience, in order that their composite might in turn be determined with greater specificity. Transcendental philosophy moves

³¹ CPR A51/B75

from the givenness of experience to its sources, to ensure that these sources are synthesized into experience according to the laws that are proper to them. Only thus is a metaphysical knowledge of nature possible.

The transcendental turn amounts to a reconfiguration of the basic terms of epistemology, shifting the focus from the relation between objects (understood as things in themselves) and representations, to that between phenomena and representation. Knowledge is still understood as a relation between opposed elements, lest it devolve into dogmatism, but the problem of relation is internalized. The faculties require each other, rather than the noumenon, in order to legitimate their claims. This explanatory strategy has the advantage not only of demonstrating the possibility of objectively valid cognition, but also of explaining the source of error. According to the position of transcendental idealism, the failure of knowledge occurs not when our representations fall short of the noumenal object, but rather when one or another of the faculties exceeds the boundaries of its legitimate employment, an occurrence which Kant designates “logical subreption.” Of course certain representations will tend towards exceeding the boundaries belonging to them, and thus will generate ideas that cannot be verified according to experience. But what appears as a failing of reason from one standpoint, is from another the ground of the possibility of another form of knowledge. Only because reason is capable of creating representations of objects that cannot be given in experience is it capable of guiding and supporting our moral freedom.

At issue here are two different senses of the “object,” a matter indicated by Kant through his inconsistent use of a technical distinction between *Objekt* and *Gegenstand*.

Though both ultimately designate the referent of our representations whose place is marked by the noumenal “object=X,” they refer to distinct aspects of it. Kant ordinarily uses the term *Objekt* when referring only to the logical conditions by which an object can be represented: “An object (*Objekt*) is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united.”³² The movement from the merely logical function of concepts to their objective use is reflected by the distinction between *Objekt* and *Gegenstand*.³³ On the one hand, any independent representation capable of being thought is an object of the understanding insofar as it is sufficiently determined as to be conceptually distinct and coherent. A *Gegenstand*, on the other hand, is a schematized *Objekt*,³⁴ which is thereby capable of being made an object of sensible knowledge through its synthesis with a corresponding intuition. This distinction therefore closely parallels the more well-known distinction between thinking (*denken*) and knowing (*erkennen*), where in order to know an object “I must be able to prove its possibility” as the object of a sensible experience, while “I can think whatever I please, provided only that I do not contradict myself.”³⁵ We might say, therefore, applying greater terminological consistency than Kant himself managed, that while the *Objekt* is any referent of a lawful, and therefore universally communicable representation, the *Gegenstand* has the more restricted meaning of such an object as conforms to the more highly specified rules governing objective cognition (*Erkenntnis*), and applicable to sensible nature.

³² CPR B137

³³ For further discussion of the meaning and use of the *Objekt/Gegenstand* distinction in the first *Critique*, see Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 173-5.

³⁴ See Rudolf Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 39-41.

³⁵ CPR Bxxxvi

This separation of the logical conditions of thought from the discursive conditions governing objective cognition finds its most notable articulation in Kant's declaration that he had recognized the necessity of suspending the claims of knowledge in order to make room for belief—in other words, for the thought of certain objects whose concepts may in some respect be necessary, despite the fact that no object adequate to them can be supplied by sensible intuition. This is of course Kant's effort to articulate a space for the concepts of morality to oppose what is with what ought to be, perhaps the highest purpose for which Kant originally undertakes a critique of the faculty of knowledge and the science of metaphysics. But the profound difficulties posed by the inadequacy of this solution will require Kant to expand his critical system in order to include principles capable of reuniting what these distinctions set apart. The rest of this chapter, and somewhat less directly the whole of the dissertation, will attend to the problems that the division of faith and knowledge into separate realms of thought poses for the unity of empirical consciousness, which maintains commitments to both. But for the moment, we should simply note that the distinction proves even to be inadequate in terms of protecting the interests of morality, for the sake of whose preservation it is first enacted.

In the Canon of Pure Reason, at the conclusion of the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant finally turns to the question of whether the transcendent ideas of pure reason serve any purpose beyond their regulative employment as a *focus imaginarius* toward which the systematic unity of our knowledge of nature is directed, but which it can never achieve as a constitutive principle. In other words, Kant suggests that the humility that this highest among our faculties is made to suffer at the hands of criticism must be endured for the sake of some higher purpose toward which reason is meant to be directed,

and which it discovers “in the only other path that still remains open to it, that of its practical employment.”³⁶ Only with respect to morality can the ideas of the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God, which reason generates independently of any possible intuition of such objects, have any legitimate applicability, and yet even then their validity depends on demonstrating the independence of the realm of practical thought from theoretical cognition. Unless there is a practical faculty capable of a lawful determination that is utterly pure of anything empirical or derived from the experience of nature, then the prospect of legitimating these ideas of reason as anything more than regulative concepts remains plainly illusory. As Kant writes, “If the will be free, this can have a bearing only on the intelligible cause of our volition.”³⁷ But demonstrating that and how the will can be free in relation to our theoretical faculties will require the establishment of a second project of critical philosophy, a division in the system to reflect the division within reason itself.

Any detailed discussion of the practical philosophy that Kant develops around the *Critique of Practical Reason* will need to be deferred until the fourth chapter, where we will take it up in light of the discovery of reflective judgment and its capacity for the analogical presentation of moral concepts. For the present, and in order to note the dramatic shift that Kant’s thinking on the topic will undergo, I would like only to highlight a concern that is introduced as the transcendental inquiry of the first *Critique* opens onto a new and unfamiliar territory that threatens to compromise the critical principles it has worked so diligently to establish. As Kant warns, “we must be careful in turning our attention to an object which is foreign to transcendental philosophy, that we

³⁶ CPR A796/B824

³⁷ CPR A798/B826

do not indulge in digressions to the detriment of the unity of the system.”³⁸ In a footnote that follows this passage, Kant makes it clear that the foreign objects he is concerned about introducing into the pure system of metaphysics are the feelings of pleasure and pain that, as necessarily connected with any object of choice, could without due vigilance be smuggled in along with the practical concepts of pure reason. In other words, Kant recognizes, but here rejects as foreign to critical philosophy, the role of feeling in mediating between the concepts of morality and those of nature.

But as feeling is not a faculty whereby we represent things, but lies outside our whole faculty of knowledge, the elements of our judgments so far as they relate to pleasure or pain, that is, the elements of practical judgments, do not belong to transcendental philosophy, which is exclusively concerned with a priori modes of knowledge.³⁹

Though he clearly see the connection between feeling and practical judgment at this point, Kant does not acknowledge that pleasure and pain admit of a priori determination, and therefore he rejects as alien to transcendental philosophy precisely the same faculty that he will later come to require as necessary to establishing its unity in light of the division of theoretical and practical knowledge. All of the evidence from Kant’s letters during the time that he was composing the third *Critique* suggests that Kant considered, or at least expected, that the investigation of a priori principles of taste—something whose possibility he had expressly denied in the first *Critique*—had set him on the path toward the completion of the system of critical philosophy. The letters dating from the earliest stages of the project, during which time Kant, not yet having conceived of the critique of the application of teleological principles to nature, still referred to the text simply as the “Critique of Taste,” exhibit an unwavering conviction about the possibility

³⁸ CPR A801/B829

³⁹ CPR A801/B829n

of completing the critical system by virtue of having discovered the full variety of the principles belonging to a priori thought.

My inner conviction grows, as I discover in working on different topics that not only does my system remain self-consistent but also, when sometimes I cannot see the right way to investigate a certain subject, I find that I only need look back at the general picture of the elements of knowledge, and of the mental powers pertaining to them, in order to discover elucidations I had not expected.⁴⁰

The period in which Kant developed the ideas that would eventually become the *Critique of Judgment*⁴¹ was perhaps the time of his greatest conviction regarding the accomplishments not only of his philosophical system,⁴² but of the need for systematicity. That is to say, Kant came increasingly to identify the possibility of systematic unity with the demand for the unity of experience. The parallelism between the construction of philosophy and the organization of the mind (*Gemüt*) taken as a whole is nowhere more strongly asserted than in the years leading to the third *Critique*.

But these letters precede the completion of the third *Critique* by two years, a time during which Kant made great revisions to the scope and the aims of the project. Thus it is highly significant that this certainty is expressed not only in Kant's correspondences but as well in the introduction⁴³ to this final piece of his system, which accounts for the significance of the present investigation through an assertion of the perfection of the

⁴⁰ The passage cited continues as follows: "I am now at work on the critique of taste, and I have discovered an a priori principle different from those heretofore observed... So now I recognize three parts of philosophy, each of which has its a priori principles, which can be enumerated and for which one can delimit precisely the knowledge that may be based on them: theoretical philosophy, teleology, and practical philosophy, of which the second is, to be sure, the least rich in a priori grounds of determination." Kant, "Letter to Reinhold, December 28 and 31, 1787" (127-8). See also the "Letter to Jakob, September 11, 1887," in which Kant announces his intention to proceed to the "dogmatic" portion of his work after having finished with the critical portion.

⁴¹ Kant had initially given the project the working title of the *Critique of Taste*; see Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, p. 169.

⁴² Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, p. 6.

⁴³ These claims are made even more strongly in the unpublished First Introduction to the third *Critique*. See CJ pp. 385-441

critical enterprise. In this respect, the published introduction to the *Critique* is not truly an announcement of the text to which it is appended, in several ways, not the least of which is that it was almost certainly composed after the completion of the majority of the text.⁴⁴ Kant's reasons for abandoning the "First Introduction" to the *Critique*, which he allowed to be published elsewhere,⁴⁵ thus had less to do with modifying his views than expanding them, primarily in order to account for the late additions of teleological judgment and the analytic of the sublime, both of which are absent from the earlier but present in the later version of the introduction.

On the one hand, Kant claims, these latest insights are internally coherent with the extant portions of the system, and with the theoretical and practical principles of a priori knowledge outlined within them. Though the discovery of reflective judgment reveals legitimate principles that had in no way been anticipated by the concepts of nature and freedom, the latter are not overturned by this discovery, but rather more firmly bound together. On the other hand, an even more ambitious claim emerges here for the first time, as Kant asserts that with the discovery of the a priori principles of teleology, the critical system will achieve an outward perfection, extending the scope of its descriptive power so as to render it capable of providing the solution of any philosophical problem that may be placed before it.

The claim to self-consistency represents nothing novel or surprising within the Kantian system; in fact the project of resolving the fundamental contradictions that

⁴⁴ "The introduction does not provide a résumé of the book—neither of its content nor of the unfolding of its arguments; nor does it simply anticipate what will receive a full explanation in the course of the book. In §§I-VI, for example, Kant discusses crucial issues that will often be mentioned and recalled again in the development of the *Critique of Judgment*, but will never be taken up again systematically. The introduction constitutes an integral part of the third *Critique*." Angelica Nuzzo, *Kant and the Unity of Reason* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005), p. 88.

⁴⁵ See Nuzzo, *Kant and the Unity of Reason*, pp. 85-87.

inhabit philosophical thought is arguably the very essence of what Kant means by critique. In the Preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes the critical project as “a way of guarding against all those errors which have hitherto set reason, in its non-empirical employment, at variance with itself.”⁴⁶ The reflexive nature of this enterprise, through which reason interrogates itself according to the same laws that it applies to objects, ensures that this tribunal of pure reason will eliminate from metaphysics any ideas that, because inconsistent with themselves, are illegitimate. The difficulty arises with the recognition that reason itself, in its application to the objective synthesis of phenomena, presses the understanding toward contradictory concepts with all the force of necessity, leading to seemingly insoluble oppositions. Chief among these is the opposition between freedom and necessity, elaborated in the antinomies of pure reason, and identified by Kant as the foremost speculative problem toward which the *Critique of Pure Reason* is directed.⁴⁷

Taken together, this pair of concepts presents a genuine antinomy, an intractable conflict within reason itself,⁴⁸ insofar as the conceivability of freedom is as essential to the moral interest as the thoroughly consistent mechanism of nature is to the possibility of science. Thus Kant’s famous solution to this difficulty—“to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith (*das Wissen aufheben, um zu Glauben Platz zu bekommen*)”⁴⁹—can rightly be regarded as the inaugural and definitive gesture of critical philosophy, insofar as it resolves the opposition while at the same time preserving its two aspects. Rescuing

⁴⁶ CPR Axii

⁴⁷ Noting that the negative function of criticism is more readily apparent, Kant finds its positive meaning in the fact that it makes it possible to “without palpable contradiction, say of one and the same being, for instance the human soul, that its will is free and yet is subject to natural necessity.” (CPR Bxxvii)

⁴⁸ Kant defines an antinomy as “an entirely natural antithetic, in which there is no need of making subtle enquiries or of laying snares for the unwary, but into which reason of itself quite unavoidably falls.” CPR A407/B433-4

⁴⁹ CPR Bxxx

reason from this peculiar fate, and resolving the conflict that inhabits it, demands the separation of its domains, the theoretical from the practical, each with its characteristic interests and principles. As a result, a rift is introduced into the heart of subjectivity, which is destined to inhabit both the noumenal and the phenomenal realms, yet without any understanding of how they may be combined.

In this way, the accomplishment of systematic perfection in the first sense gives rise directly to the demand for perfection in the second sense; self-consistency is achieved at the expense of comprehensive unity, and the *Critique of Judgment* announces itself not simply as the final piece of the system, but as the connective link between its parts. The domain of theoretical philosophy must somehow be expanded to make room for an alien form of causation if the latter “is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws.”⁵⁰ The introduction of teleology, understood first through the lens of aesthetic experience, and then through the problem of nature’s aesthetic purposiveness for taste, is Kant’s attempt to discover a basis for merging the spontaneity of the will with the mechanism of nature. With the introduction of the teleological principles of judgment, the critical philosophy endeavors to secure the transcendental basis of the coherence of experience in its totality.

II. Synthesis and Judgment

Though the architectonic structure that Kant carefully unfolds in the opening sections of the first *Critique* is focused largely on articulating the divisions within the faculty of cognition and developing a systematic philosophy that reflects them, all of this is nonetheless in the service of a goal whose nature has far more to do with synthesis and unity. Consistent with his understanding of experience as the product of an a priori

⁵⁰ CJ 15

judgment, Kant undertakes first to analyze this experience into its constitutive elements, but only for the sake of clarifying the synthetic object which is generated from out of them. The task of the first section of the Transcendental Analytic, the Analytic of Concepts, is not simply, as Kant says, to dissect our concepts themselves into their constitutive elements, but rather to investigate the understanding itself as the source of these concepts.⁵¹ What this analytic reveals is that the power of understanding is quite capable of generating the rules by which objects of cognition may be cognized, and of doing so independently of any input from the faculty of sensibility. And yet, if these rules, the categories of the understanding, are to give rise to a legitimate experience of constituted *Gegenstände*, they must nonetheless be capable of application to the a priori forms of intuition. This means that the constitution of experience requires not only a conceptual or formal agreement between these sources of cognition, but—as the Transcendental Deduction will attempt to demonstrate—the performance of a synthetic act by which they are brought into relation with each other. This insight adds a further dimension to the meaning of the spontaneity of the concepts of the understanding; not only are they, as compared to the passively received manifold of sensible impressions, capable of being generated from the faculty of understanding alone, but further, their proper transcendental employment consists in the exercise of a function by which their a priori rules are legitimated in the generation of the *Gegenstand*. Only at this moment does Kant reveal the full meaning of the claim that begins the A edition Introduction, namely that experience is the *product* of understanding.

⁵¹ “By ‘analytic of concepts’ I do not understand...the procedure usual in philosophical investigations, that of dissecting the content of such concepts as may present themselves, and so of rendering them more distinct; but the hitherto rarely attempted *dissection of the faculty of the understanding* itself, in order to investigate the possibility of concepts *a priori* by looking for them in the understanding alone.” CPR A66/B90

The categories, as *a priori* concepts of the understanding, are not so much concepts *of* objects as they are concepts *for* objects, which is to say that they provide the rule according to which appearances can be organized in such a way as to become objects of knowledge. The categories derive their legitimacy from their transcendental function, “the act of bringing various representations under one common representation.”⁵² Knowledge is therefore always mediated, or rather itself a form of mediation, insofar as it consists in discursively holding together disparate elements for the sake of discovering the unity that might bind them to each other. This act of gathering together representations of the faculty of sensible intuition on the basis of their capacity to themselves be represented by a higher representation Kant entitles judgment. Judgment is the synthetic operation by which concepts are placed in relation to intuitions, giving rise to the product of experience. Since the understanding has its only lawful operation with respect to the objective cognition of phenomena in this mediating and unifying exercise, Kant declares it a “faculty of judgment.”⁵³

Judgment is the copulative act by which appearances are supplied with the rules that constitute their intelligibility. Any appearance that is not capable of being brought under such a rule cannot even rise to the level of cognitive awareness, and must thus remain an object only in the limited and derivative sense of a merely sensible appearance. And yet, in order to exercise this function whereby it gives the rule to appearances, judgment itself must be capable of deciding which appearances to connect with which concepts, lest its function be a merely haphazard and lawless association. This is precisely what Kant means in entitling the understanding a faculty of judgment; it

⁵² CPR A68/B93

⁵³ CPR A69/B94

requires a rule or a criterion for judging the suitability of particular instances to be collected under universal rules of determination. Understanding thus has two distinct aspects to its operation, one concerned with the determination of the object by a rule, but the other with the application of this rule to the appropriate object. Once the particular appearance is subsumed under the category, the understanding is free to exercise its determinative power over it, but by what rule is it to judge its right to subsume the particular appearance? General logic cannot satisfy understanding with an answer to this most crucial problem. “If it sought to give general instructions how we are to subsume under these rules, that is, to distinguish whether something does or does not come under them, that could only be by means of *another rule*. This in turn, for the every reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgment.”⁵⁴

This aporia of judgment lies at the heart of the problem of knowledge. There is no rule for the application of rules. Thus while the rules of understanding, as discursive concepts, can be determined with perfect specificity, the standard of their application to objects requires the intervention of a more elusive principle, one which Kant insists cannot be taught except through its exercise. Kant declares that the lack of sound judgment, for which the common name is “stupidity,” has no remedy, lacking in any determinate principles through which it could be taught. And yet, the success of the schematism depending precisely on this point, he then retreats from this claim, arguing that *transcendental* logic has as its sole purpose the securing of sound judgment. “[Transcendental logic] would seem to have as its peculiar task the correcting and securing of judgment, by means of determinate rules, in the use of the pure

⁵⁴ CPR A133/B172

understanding.”⁵⁵ Kant suggests that the principles of objectively valid judgment, although they cannot be acquired through instruction, because they are not themselves discursive, can be promoted and protected by the discursive rules of the understanding. If the dual hallmarks of finite knowledge are its sensibility and its discursivity, then judgment is not only the requisite condition of cognition, but also becomes the original source of the possibility of error. This concern will be greatly exacerbated by the discovery that judgment is a function that depends to a high degree on the power of imagination, a faculty whose mediating power is closely related to its tendency to deviate from the conditions of rule-bound representation.

Guarding against this form of error becomes the chief task of the Transcendental Doctrine of Judgment, and yet in order to accomplish this task, it must as much as possible bring the role of judgment, understood as a talent for the application of rules, under the guidance of an a priori rule. And yet this is essentially to say that it must make this synthesis as little dependent on judgment as necessary, insofar as the reduction of judgment to a mechanical procedure, whose rule is given in advance of a singular instance, is only an act of judgment by resemblance of its procedure. Kant writes that “transcendental philosophy has the peculiarity that besides the rule (or rather the universal condition of rules), which is given in the pure concept of understanding, it can also specify *a priori* the instance to which the rule is to be applied.”⁵⁶ A judgment that can be applied to an appearance prior to its empirical appearing is, of course, constitutive with respect to that appearance, which is precisely what Kant means in calling such judgments determinative. The schematism is thus introduced as providing the universal

⁵⁵ CPR A135/B174

⁵⁶ CPR A135/B174

rule for transcendental judgment in its application of the categories to the synthesized manifold of intuition. Its task is to discover the faculty capable of preparing the synthetically organized products of sensibility for subsumption under the discursive categories, and thus it requires a power that is at once conceptual and sensible.

If the task of the deduction is to demonstrate the necessity of the categories in transforming the manifold of intuition into coherent experience, then this leaves open, and in fact provokes and exacerbates the question of how—that is according to what power—the categories are applied to experience. The problem of the technique of application is heightened by the insistence on the uniqueness of the contributions of each of the sources of experience, and will prove to be one of the most intractable problems haunting the critical system. This is the question that the section on the schematism must address, though Kant appeals to the fact that this question is not ultimately essential to the critique of metaphysical knowledge as such. Still, leaving it entirely unanswered risks creating an insurmountable gap between metaphysics and nature, or between the conditions of the possibility of experience and the actual production of experience itself.

In order to make the transition from their status as rules for the possibility of experience to their function as determinative of an actual object, the categories must be enacted, which is to say, they must be employed as the basis for a judgment. The categories are rules for judgment, or for the subsumption of an appearance under a rule. But in order for a judgment to join together appearance and concept, it must discover in them some common basis for this synthesis. “In all subsumptions of an object under a concept the representation of the object must be *homogeneous* with the concept; in other words, the concept must contain something which is represented in the object that is to be

subsumed under it.”⁵⁷ It is not required that the object be entirely contained under the concept—in which case the judgment would be an analytic one—but merely that it share something with the concept on the basis of which they may be synthetically joined through an act of judgment. The question posed by the schematism is therefore what power of representation is capable of rendering a product that “must be pure, that is, void of all empirical content, and yet at the same time, while it must in one respect be intellectual, it must in another be sensible.”⁵⁸ That the transcendental method requires the existence of such a representational power is given; the question that is very much undecided is how this form of representation, entitled the transcendental schema, can incorporate aspects of the form of intuition and of the categories without undermining their irreducible difference.

An essential dimension of the question surrounding the schematism concerns the matter of whether it is to be regarded as a process or a product. Kant has already given us some indication insofar as he has identified judgment as the act or function that constitutes the object of experience, and yet it is not immediately clear whether schematization is something that produces the schema or rather employs a ready-made schema for the purpose of judgment. Kant attempts to clarify this problem when he designates the *schema* as “the formal and pure condition of sensibility to which the employment of the concept of understanding is restricted,” and the *schematism* as “the procedure of understanding in these schemata.”⁵⁹ But this terminological distinction between process and product does not by itself determine whether judgment incorporates the schematism as part of its own function, or whether it merely makes use of the schema.

⁵⁷ CPR A137/B176

⁵⁸ CPR A138/B177

⁵⁹ CPR A140/B179

Deciding this question will clarify the relationship of *Einbildungskraft* to judgment in general. In any case, regarded statically, the schema is capable of bridging the gap between sensibility and concept insofar as, it is a transcendental determination of time. Time is present as a priori form in every manifold of intuition, and belongs additionally to the categories “in that it is universal and rests upon an *a priori* rule.”⁶⁰ Time is thus the element of thought that binds together the categories with the forms of sensibility to which they must be applied if they are to give rise to valid knowledge of objects, rather than simply remaining logical rules of possible objects.

Insofar as it is a product to be employed in the schematization of an *a priori* representation, the schema is a product of the transcendental imagination. Thus the schematizing function of judgment is either dependent upon, or equivalent to, the function of a faculty that, while already revealed as central to the formation of experience, leaves no direct mark of its activity in the phenomenon. It is important to keep the necessarily temporal character of the schema in mind when discussing what sort of product of the imagination it is, since the temptation, as Kant recognizes, is to think the product of *Einbildungskraft* as some form of *Bild*. But the schema is itself less an image than a template for the production of images that can be brought under concepts. It is thus a kind of formula for the transformation of a singular appearance into an instance of a universal rule. “Since...the synthesis of imagination aims at no special intuition, but only at unity in the determination of sensibility, the schema has to be distinguished from the image.”⁶¹ The schema is at once a product of synthetic imagination, and yet also a “procedure” for the application of a concept to an appropriate image. The question we

⁶⁰ CPR A138/B177

⁶¹ CPR A140/B179

must ask then is why there is an apparent need to distance the imagination itself from this procedure by the creation of a mediating link, namely, the schema. For surely if the imagination is capable producing the schema that then functions as the procedure for bringing intuitions under concepts, then the imagination ought to be capable of performing this procedure itself. So why does Kant find it useful to introduce the distinction between schema and schematism, or between process and product? Why is the imagination not itself responsible for the schematism of pure concepts of the understanding?

III. The Synthetic Power of Imagination

These questions are not given any direct consideration in the Schematism chapter, nor are we likely to be able to produce an adequate answer with the resources made available in the first *Critique*. Kant devotes almost his entire discussion to explaining what the various schemata are, and to the basis on which they discover a commonality between sensible intuitions and concepts, but he largely ignores the question of the schematism itself, that is the procedure by which the schema is applied to a particular intuition. Worse yet, he pleads the inscrutability of this procedure of synthetic judgment, calling it “an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze.”⁶² But that does not have to lead us to the conclusion of the futility of the question, particularly if we attend to the reasons given for its impenetrability. The schemata are non-sensible conditions of sensibility, or rather of sensible things, since it is the transformation of the manifold of sensibility into an object of knowledge that is at stake here. In fact, the capacity of the schema to function as “a monogram, of pure *a priori* imagination, through

⁶² CPR A141/B180

which, and in accordance with which, images themselves first become possible seems indeed to entail as a consequence the fact that “the schema of a *pure* concept of understanding can never be brought into any image whatsoever.” If schemata were themselves sensible, they would be in need of a further mediation on the part of the imagination in order to be subsumed under concepts. The schema is the source—itsself neither intelligible nor sensible—not of intelligibility and sensibility as such, but of their applicability to phenomenal objects. These synthetic and synthesizing products of the imagination are the deepest and most obscured ground of experience itself, the object *par excellence* of critical philosophy—but, perhaps, maybe for just the same reasons, the blindspot of critical philosophy.

And yet, we are entitled to ask whether the conditions of the impenetrability of the schematism apply to critical reason as such, or merely to the limits of the investigation underway in the first *Critique*, and in defense of the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. Implicit in this passage is an acknowledgement that the operation of the transcendental imagination exceeds what can be known from the perspective of the problem of objective cognition, and whatever part of its function contributes directly to synthetic *a priori* judgment. Kant is insistent that the categories have no legitimate application apart from the schemata, and yet we must ask whether the reverse is equally true, or at least whether the power that is capable of manifesting itself as schematization might have some function apart from the application of the categories. Such a question is of course, beyond the limits of metaphysics, and thus outside the scope of the first *Critique*, but this is precisely the issue that Kant re-approaches in his expansion of the concept of experience through the investigation of reflective judgment.

There the imagination, set free from the need to serve the categories, assumes the prominence of attention to match the priority of its importance in the formation of the objective experience of nature.

Before we can approach the question of the function performed by transcendental imagination in establishing the unity of experience, it will be necessary to clarify the emergence and development of the account of imagination in general, as it appears in the critical and pre-critical writings. The difficulty of such a task is not limited to the fact that the imagination often functions behind the scenes of conscious mental processes, but is furthered by the wide variety of tasks that are, at various moments ascribed to this faculty. In fact, we will need to determine in what sense the imagination is even deserving of a place among the faculties properly speaking, insofar as it seems to be lacking any principle of its own. Is imagination an a priori power belonging to the *Erkenntnisvermögen*, or is it merely a function performed by and in the service of another faculty?

This question takes on a central significance in the Kantian system given that *Einbildungskraft* first emerges as a question in its own right during the most central passages of the first *Critique*, in which the decisive question of the applicability of a priori concepts to experience is called before the tribunal of reason. But whereas the passivity of intuition and the spontaneity of the concept are testified for by the qualities inherent in the nature of representation, imagination must be summoned by other means. In other words, unlike the other faculties whose contribution to the constitution of experience manifests itself directly in the character of the phenomenal object, the transcendental function of imagination is only indirectly detectable, through critical

reflection on the necessary conditions of knowledge. This is not an answer to the question of the role of transcendental imagination in the formation of experience, but simply a clarification of the source of its difficulty and a clue to overcoming it. Imagination does not appear directly because, in one sense, it has nothing of its own to contribute to the phenomenon, while in another, it is perhaps exclusively responsible for the fact of appearance itself that constitutes the essence of phenomenal knowledge. This difficulty of tracing the activity of transcendental imagination is therefore neither a failing of the critical method nor a mere accident, but a positive feature of its operation. The imagination supplies the representation with neither its content nor its form. In fact, it contributes nothing whatsoever, save the mediation that makes their synthesis possible.

Imagination performs this work of mediation so faithfully in the schematism that Kant shows great hesitation as to the question whether imagination amounts to an independent faculty in its own right, rather than a mere function of the understanding by which it applies its categories to the synthesized appearances produced by the *synthesis speciosa*. This equivocation is manifested most famously in the case of the explicit revisions made to the description of synthesis of intuitions and categories between the two versions of the Transcendental Deduction. We will return to this issue shortly, in order to respond to it, but first we should notice what is indicated merely by the fact that this question can be raised at all. That the imagination can so dutifully serve understanding, yet without being perfectly reducible to it (save in the case of the schematism, where it synthesizes under the direction of the unity of apperception) indicates the foremost feature of this constitutive power of experience, namely its freedom. Lacking any legislative force of its own, and yet so constituted as to strive

constantly towards the form of legality (*Gesetzmässigkeit*), imagination shows itself primarily as a capacity to serve various principles in turn, and importantly, even simultaneously. It is from this peculiar relationship to lawfulness that transcendental imagination gathers its unique and indispensable power.

Any attempt at a comprehensive account of the power of imagination in Kantian philosophy labors under the difficulty imposed by a pair of seemingly incompatible facts: its ubiquity and its obscurity. On the one hand, *Einbildungskraft* constitutes a far-reaching power, involved variously in a broad range of operations of the human intellect. Taken together with a number of related powers of image formation (*Bildung*) such as reproduction (*Nachbildung*) and anticipation (*Vorbildung*),⁶³ it encompasses several indispensable functions directed toward the extension, intensification and coordination of the contents of thought. Imagination is the synthetic power *par excellence*, mediating between the other resources of thought, and thus must extend its reach at least as wide as the gaps between them. On the other hand, these same facts often consign the imagination to a minimal appearance, forcing it out of the spotlight directed toward the other faculties and into a backstage position. So central is the synthetic function of the imagination that commentators like Deleuze, for example, question whether imagination amounts to a proper faculty in its own right,⁶⁴ and Kant himself often subordinates its operation to the

⁶³ For a comprehensive account of range of powers of *Bildung* categorized in the pre-critical writings, especially the *Reflexionen zur Anthropologie*, see Ch. 1 of Makreel's *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*. The fact that some of Kant's most explicit remarks on imagination come under the auspices of anthropology attests to the fact that much concerning this topic lies outside the bounds of the critical philosophy not only chronologically, but conceptually as well.

⁶⁴ Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). While Deleuze ends up granting imagination the status of a faculty on the grounds that it constitutes a "source of representations," this decision involves a denial of such status to the intuition, which is deemed a source of "presentations." For Deleuze, this involves placing considerable emphasis on the *productive* power of the imagination, in comparison to the *passivity* of intuition, and on the distinction between presentation and representation, though the latter is hardly maintained with great

service of another faculty.⁶⁵ Even in the *Critique of Judgment*, where imagination is elevated to an unprecedented standing in sustaining the “free play” of the faculties in reflection, Kant names the cognitive power (*Erkenntnisvermögen*) responsible for this operation instead as “judgment” (*Urteilkraft*).⁶⁶ Imagination is thus everywhere, and nowhere in particular, within the Kantian system as within the unified cognitive powers whose order it reflects.

These considerations, however, should by no means be taken to suggest that imagination plays an insignificant role within the critical philosophy, nor that Kant cared little to elaborate its contribution to the various forms of thought examined in the *Critiques*. On the contrary, Kant is often rightly credited with having raised the power of imagination out of the suspicion to which Cartesianism had subjected it, by demonstrating its invaluable role in the cognitive synthesis required for objective cognition of the natural world to be possible. From one side, imagination is necessary for gathering and condensing the jumbled manifold of intuition, so that it may be so arranged as to conform to the concepts of understanding with which it is, in principle, heterogeneous; and from the other, it is responsible for producing a sensible schema of

consistency by Kant. I will not attempt to solve this dispute concerning the status of the imagination, but merely to show what the question itself reveals about the function of imagination in thought.

⁶⁵ The classic example of this subordination, made famous by Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, concerns the revision of the Transcendental Deduction between the first and second editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the supposed reduction of the imagination from that status of an independent faculty to a servant of the understanding. I will return to this issue in greater detail below.

⁶⁶ CJ 198. The first sentence of the first section of the critique proper immediately identifies imagination as the central faculty in judgment, but just as immediately rescinds its claim, asserting: “If we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not, we do not use understanding to refer the presentation to the object so as to give rise to cognition; rather, we use imagination (perhaps in connection with understanding (*vielleicht mit dem Verstande verbunden*)) to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure.” (203) What separates the determinative judgments of the first *Critique* from the reflective judgments of the third, therefore, is not that the imagination operates independently of understanding, but rather that in their coordination it is not subordinated to the concepts of the latter. Nevertheless, it remains significant and telling that, while Kant is ready to designate understanding as the legislative principle in determinative judgments, he hesitates to afford the same privilege to imagination in reflective judgments, instead adopting the more neutral term “judgment.”

the concept, in order that the understanding might apply to genuine objects of experience. “Synthesis in general,” Kant explains, “is the mere result of the power of imagination, a blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which we would have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious.”⁶⁷ But if the operation of the imagination is, from the standpoint of objective cognition of the phenomenal world, both blind and indispensable, further reflection reveals even more elusive and necessary operations of its power within the deepest recesses of thought. Once Kant secures the task of the first *Critique* and broadens the scope of the critical inquiry, he discovers the synthetic activity of imagination at work on a far greater scale,⁶⁸ giving rise to a broadened conception of experience according to *a priori* principles.

The appearance of the productive imagination in the first *Critique* is restricted to its capacity to perform the “figurative synthesis” of intuition, where it appears in the guise of “an action of the understanding on the sensibility.” (B152) In other words, because the imagination’s task is the application (*Anwendung*) of the categories to the manifold of intuition, it operates entirely under the authority and according to the principles established by the understanding. To conclude, with Heidegger, that this amounts to “deleting the transcendental power of imagination, where indeed it directly forms the unity of transcendence and its objectivity”⁶⁹ is to overstate the case. Worse still, it obscures a more essential fact indicated by the susceptibility of imagination to the understanding’s conscription. As Longuenesse argues:

⁶⁷ CPR A78/B103.

⁶⁸ Makkreel 45: “While the transcendental foundation of the first *Critique* remains unchallenged, the shift from determinant to reflective judgment—from the conditions of ordinary and scientific experience to those of aesthetic consciousness—gives rise to an important redefinition and expansion of the imagination’s tasks.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* p. 117.

To speak of an ‘appropriation’ of imagination by understanding means that there is also an activity of imagination that is *not* appropriated by understanding, or even that many different degrees of ‘appropriation’ or interaction between the laws of imagination and the laws of understanding may occur.⁷⁰

Imagination is free to submit to the categories precisely because it is not ultimately reducible to them, nor to their service, and thus is equally free under other circumstances not to submit to them. Taken as a whole, its productive power comprises a broader complex of operations than those summoned to the service of the determinative synthesis. To regard the matter otherwise, taking this appropriation for servitude, is emblematic of the common tendency to give undue interpretive priority to the first *Critique*, as if it contained the definitive and comprehensive Kantian account of the faculties. But no more should absolute priority be given to the relative autonomy displayed by the transcendental imagination in reflective judgment. This further form of *a priori* judgment discovered⁷¹ in the third *Critique* does not overturn what is established in the first, but rather completes it. Grasping the comprehensive picture depends on understanding this ambivalence at the heart of imagination, which Kant will refer to as the “free lawfulness” of its exercise.

We have just seen that in the first *Critique*, the freedom of imagination is largely constrained by the application of the categories in their rule-giving function. This is not a restriction of the imagination’s essential freedom, however, but merely an expression of

⁷⁰ Beatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, trans. C. Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 207.

⁷¹ Reflective judgment, as the logical form of an *a priori* power of pleasure, genuinely deserves to be described as a discovery of the development of the critical philosophy, insofar as Kant pronounces any such power of non-empirical pleasure an impossibility in the first *Critique*: “As feeling is not a faculty whereby we represent things, but lies outside our whole faculty of knowledge, the elements of our judgments so far as they relate to pleasure or pain, that is, the elements of practical judgments, do not belong to transcendental philosophy, which is exclusively concerned with pure *a priori* modes of knowledge.” (A802/B830n) For a detailed account of when and with what motives Kant gradually revised this position, see Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment*.

it, since without such constraint, imagination has no possibility of contributing to a priori knowledge in any manner. The ability of the imagination to serve various principles—what we might call its inherent lawlessness—is precisely what will make it suited to the mediating work of connecting the heterogeneous laws that define the elements of experience. This same lawlessness, however, will indicate a constant tendency of the presentations formed by imagination to transgress the very boundaries that critique is meant to discover and enforce. But though imagination lacks a discernible, unchanging principle, it is not merely a capricious power given to the production of subreptive claims and lawless representations. The essential feature of imagination, insofar as it can be said to have one, is to perpetually seek a lawful principle for its activity, which in turn consists in interpreting an abstract principle into a concrete rule, and the reverse—discerning a law from a series of appearances. The specific task of the reproductive imagination then is providing the “fixed rule” (*beständige Regel*) according to which the isolated representations of the synthesis of intuition can be placed in relation to one another. The meaning of “rule” here, however, does not yet have the sense that a “law” (*Gesetz*) does in the case of a determinative concept legislating over the object, but instead refers merely to the fixing or the determination of an ordering link between representations. Kant makes a technical distinction between *Regel* and *Gesetz*, distinguishing them as follows: “Rules, so far as they are objective, and therefore necessarily depend upon the knowledge of the object, are called laws... The highest of these, under which all others stand, issue a priori from the understanding itself. They are not borrowed from experience; on the contrary, they have to confer upon appearances their conformity to law, and so to make experience possible.”⁷² Imagination, as the intermediating power

⁷² CPR A126

which so confers these laws of the understanding on appearances, is thus rule-bound, but not law-giving; that is, it serves to coordinate presentations in a manner that, though not itself constitutive, is nonetheless preparatory to their objective determination.

IV. Imagination and the Highest Systematic Unity: Schematism Revisited

When imagination is released from its service to the understanding, however, the question that arises is whether it is capable of discovering for its presentational power any other form of a priori operation, or whether it is left only to empirical, reproductive functions like memory and the recombination of past experiences in fantastic images. This is precisely the question that is put to the imagination in the *Critique of Judgment*, and the issue at stake is whether transcendental imagination can find any other mandate in the absence of the categories. In light of this question, the otherwise apparently trivial question of the degree to which imagination merely serves the understanding in the cognitive synthesis takes on a considerable significance. If transcendental imagination maintains a certain autonomy in its production of the schematism, then there is, before the discovery of reflective judgment, a precedent in Kant for thinking imagination as a power capable of generating representations that are neither simply reproductive (as in the case of the empirical imagination) nor exclusively discursive (as under the legislation of the concepts of the understanding). If it is the case that judgment as such, and not merely in the case of aesthetic judgment, is dependent upon an autonomous decision of the imagination according to what sort of rule to perform its generative hypotyposis, then the difference between determinative and reflective judgments is ultimately dependent on the freedom of the imagination—both in matters of cognition and in matters of taste. Again, on this assumption, even if the imagination is capable of serving the discursive

judgments presided over by the categories, it could only take this role by first freely consenting to such a service, making, transcendental imagination responsible—prior to answering the question of what meaning a particular appearance has—for determining what sort of question to address to the appearance. Rather than appearing as a special or derivative case of cognition, reflective judgment would instead be shown to be the genus of which objective cognition is a mere species.

This question of the autonomy of the imagination has further implications for our understanding of the critical system as well, particularly with respect to the relation between aesthetic and cognitive experiences. Kant's constant admonitions in the third *Critique* that, although they have a claim to universal validity, reflective judgments do nothing to directly contribute to the content of our objective cognition—that is our knowledge of objects *as* objects—make it thoroughly clear that aesthetic experience must in some way overlap or parallel our cognitive experience of nature. Though they potentially converge in a common object, these two forms of judgment each retain, or are capable of retaining, a certain purity of the principles on which they are based, such that they remain entirely conceptually independent, even when I recognize that they are merely two ways in which I consider what is essentially one and the same object for me. But their conceptual independence does not diminish the impact and the significance of their convergence, rather it heightens them by the contrast of these two modes of thought. For these judgments are not merely conjoined in the object, which is to say empirically, but, insofar as I recognize their source within my own powers of judgment, also a priori, through the transcendental power of synthetic imagination. In other words, though this empirical conjunction may occasion the critical insight that the subject itself is

responsible for grounding the relation between the objective and subjective encounters with the realm of phenomenal nature. For these reasons, much depends on demonstrating that, despite the revisions of the formulation of the Deduction, nothing of the role of autonomous imagination is taken away out of concern for the subreptive force of its synthetic power of presentation.

Commentators on this problem can, for our purposes, roughly be divided into two types, those who see between the two versions of the Deduction a major revision of the matter concerning imagination's synthetic task, and those who view this rewriting as primarily a nominal recasting of what is functionally the same synthetic process.⁷³ Those among the first type generally consider one or the other of the deductions to be more successful at achieving its assigned task, while those of the second argue that the two versions should be read as cumulative, or complementary presentations of a single argument. While I will argue that the former position is right to emphasize the more than nominal revisions taking place between the two versions, the latter is closer to the spirit of Kant's intention, which was not to remove the imagination but rather to rethink the directive behind its operation. But this does not mean that Kant retracts the claim of the A Deduction, namely that the transcendental synthesis is fundamentally an operation of imagination. This description by itself gives us insight only into the power belonging to transcendental imagination in its capacity to schematize appearances within the objective synthesis of cognition. But when the B Deduction adds that this operation is performed

⁷³ Heidegger's insistence in the *Kantbook* that the B Deduction represents a retreat from the insight into the centrality of transcendental imagination is emblematic of the former strategy; the latter is often displayed simply by virtue of a detailed treatment of the general problem of the Transcendental Deduction with little or no reference to the differences between the two versions (cf. Norman Kemp Smith, *Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), pp. 248-261), though a case for it is made quite explicitly by Longuenesse (see *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, p. 83-4) in response to Heidegger.

under the direct guidance and according to rules provided by the understanding, this begins to shed light on transcendental imagination as such, revealing that the law proper to it is to receive its law from another faculty. In order to clarify precisely how this fact is both revealed and obscured by the task of the first *Critique*, we will need to examine the description of the *synthesis speciosa* and the chapter on the schematism—the two sections most closely describing the distinct but compatible aims of transcendental imagination—more closely.

The most general and broadly applicable definition that Kant gives to seemingly irreducible variety of mental activities gathered under the concept of *Einbildungskraft* is as “the power of a priori intuitions (*Vermögen der Anschauungen a priori*).”⁷⁴ But this definition is not intended to limit imagination to any kind of subservience to the function of the faculty of intuition. Any such subordination would prevent imagination from performing precisely the functions it is called upon to contribute. The schematism is among those passages in the first *Critique* which, though indispensable to its project, nonetheless clearly mark its limits, and thus gesture toward what lies beyond them. On the one hand, it indicates the radical freedom inherent to imagination that emerges when it recedes into the deepest gaps between the faculties of knowledge, revealing its capacity to dedicate this freedom to a variety of ends. And on the other hand, it shows the demand for such a power, if thinking is to be possible in any form. For while the schematism prepares us, as it rightly should, to accept the claim that knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) cannot be reached by a discursive intellect without the intervention of an image, it makes the further step of demonstrating the necessity of the image for any thought (*Gedanke*) whatsoever. “We cannot think a line without *drawing* it in thought, or a circle without

⁷⁴ CJ 30

describing it. We cannot represent the three dimensions of space save by *setting* three lines at right angles to one another from the same point.”⁷⁵ In other words, imagination’s power of presentation is called for not only where thought is applied to sensibility in the experience of nature, but wherever it reflects on concepts that entail even the mere *possibility* of such an application. This capacity for comprehension of the phenomenally possible accounts simultaneously for the fact that imagination appears only peripherally in the second *Critique*, where the pure noumenal concepts of the will are at issue, and for the expanded treatment it receives in the third *Critique*, where aesthetic judgment considers the mere liking (*Wohlgefallen*) of appearances in the absence of any *interest*.⁷⁶ The first *Critique* expressly denies any possibility of an a priori form of pleasure (*Lust*), on the grounds that all feeling (*Gefühl*) is tied to the subjective and empirical character of private sensation.⁷⁷ “But if the question is whether something is beautiful, what we want to know is not whether we or anyone cares, or so much as might care, in any way, about the thing’s existence, but rather how we judge it in our mere contemplation of it (intuition or reflection).” (*wie wir sie in der blossen Betrachtung (Anschauung oder Reflexion) beurteilen*)⁷⁸ In such reflection, imagination is no longer subordinated to the interest of the understanding, with which it now enters into a free relationship, characterized by Kant as “play” (*Spiel*).

But the suspension of the interest in the existence of the object is not by itself sufficient to propel thought into the realm where imagination asserts its priority. It is worth noting that both the practical judgments whose basis is described in the second

⁷⁵ CPR B154

⁷⁶ “Interest is what we call the liking we connect with the presentation of an object’s *existence*.” CJ 204 (emphasis added).

⁷⁷ CPR A802/B830n

⁷⁸ CJ 204

Critique and aesthetic judgments (or more broadly, reflective judgments) require a disinterested standpoint in order to retain the purity of their respective principles. Though *in their application* moral principles attain the highest possible degree of interest, *in their constitution* they must remain entirely free of determination by interest. Any empirical determination introduces determination into moral concepts, thus destroying the freedom they require in order to serve as practical principles. As Kant puts it in the *Groundwork*: “Worse service cannot be rendered morality than that an attempt be made to derive it from examples.”⁷⁹ If imagination, with its constant reference to the spatio-temporal conditions that determine every appearance, has any place in the field of morality, then it is only in the question of the application of its noumenal concepts to the phenomenal world of experience—precisely the problem identified in the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* as its chief task in the critical system.⁸⁰ In other words, the connection between aesthetic judgment and moral freedom runs far deeper than Kant’s assertion that beauty accomplishes a symbolic presentation of the morally good;⁸¹ as Allison has argued, “the cultivation of taste and the experience of beauty contribute to the development of morality.”⁸² The suspension of interest required by the principles of

⁷⁹ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. J. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), p. 20.

⁸⁰ In considering the critical philosophy, particularly the relation between the three *Critiques*, it is helpful to attend to the difference between the *critical* interest of the texts themselves and the *speculative* interest of the unified experience they describe analytically. In one of the most oft-quoted passages from the third *Critique*, Kant remarks: “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 hence by means of the theoretical use of reason) is possible, just as if they were two different worlds... 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 cognition of it either theoretically or practically.” This passage is widely regarded as asserting that the primary aim of the text is to serve as a “bridge” uniting the first and second *Critiques*, but this should not be confused with the claim that reflective judgments themselves have such a transition between nature and freedom as their aim.

⁸¹ CJ §59

⁸² Besides referring to the notion of beauty as a moral symbol, Allison also contends that this mutual reinforcement occurs “by giving rise to an intellectual interest in the beauties of nature insofar as they

aesthetic judgment, and of the morally good alike, establishes a relationship of mutual reinforcement between them.

But Kant is adamant from the outset of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment that the disinterested liking connected with judgments of beauty is in principle distinct from that associated with morality, such that each has an entirely independent determining basis. The fundamental difference is that the good is inseparable from the concept of purpose (*der Begriff eines Zwecks*), meaning that the liking associated with it is referred to a determinate concept that secures the objective universality of the judgment concerning it. The liking of the morally good, therefore, is formally no different from an empirical claim about a natural phenomenon, determined in its validity by the existence of an object, and secured by the legislative force of the understanding. An entirely distinct arrangement of the faculties, however, is discovered in reflective judgment: “A judgment of taste must refer to some concept or other, for 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 (*unbestimmt und zugleich unbestimmbar*).”⁸³ Expressed in terms of the relationship between the faculties that constitutes it, this disinterestedness of aesthetic reflection differs from that found in the cognition of nature by the form of the interaction between the power of presentation (imagination) and the concept of the understanding in which it is grasped. The indeterminacy of the concept employed in the judgment—since all judgment requires a concept, or at least the bare form of the concept—releases imagination from its service to

provide an intimation of nature’s moral purposiveness.” Henry Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2005) p. 196.

⁸³ CJ 339

the understanding and allows it to exhibit the free lawfulness (*freie Gesetzmässigkeit*) that is its highest principle.

An aesthetic object is always an object of possible experience, though considered not in its actuality, not in its determination, but through the not yet determined freedom of the power responsible for its appearance. This makes the power of imagination, the only faculty capable of pursuing the formal unity of lawfulness in an appearance in the absence of any determinate law, the necessary basis of its presentation. “Only a lawfulness without a law, and a subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony... is compatible with... the peculiarity of a judgment of taste.”⁸⁴ As Kant explains, the freedom of imagination does not itself constitute an autonomy, since only understanding is capable of providing laws (whether determinate or indeterminate) that can be applied to appearances. Imagination contains no such principles in itself, and thus needs to discover them in another source,⁸⁵ but for precisely this same reason it is free to adapt itself to a variety of a priori relations to the concept. The difference between a subjective harmony of imagination and understanding and their objective synthesis in cognition is as pronounced as that between the freedom of reflection and the synthetic determination of appearances in cognition. As Makkreel argues, “it is misleading to call a felt harmony between the imagination and the understanding a synthesis; a harmony involves a reciprocal relation between two distinct elements; a synthesis, as Kant conceives it, involves a one-sided influence for the sake of

⁸⁴ CJ 241

⁸⁵ Not all concepts of aesthetic judgments are supplied by the understanding, though they cannot come from imagination alone. In judgments of the sublime, for example, imagination forms a *disharmony* with ideas of reason, with respect to which it finds its power of presentation to be inadequate—hence Kant’s claim that the experience of the sublime is a *negative* lesson.

a strict unity.”⁸⁶ The difference in status between the object of an aesthetic judgment and that of a determinative judgment—even when, as is most often the case, these are one and the same object regarded in two distinct manners—lies nowhere else but in the relation of imagination’s lawfulness to the source of its law.

And yet, even though this asserts a decisive difference in the constitution of aesthetic and natural appearances, their overlap in a common object is crucial for the significance of reflection in establishing the possible unity of experience. Just as the gulf between nature and freedom seems to be widening, it becomes clear that it is filled not by the passivity of aesthetic experience, but by the activity that it awakens in us, the quickening of the faculties that it provokes. The development of the *Critique* makes clear that the capacity to apprehend beauty gives rise to an interest in the cultivation of the capacity to engender beauty, in the figure of the aesthetic genius. By contributing to a re-evaluation of nature while simultaneously re-thinking the experience of freedom, Kant’s account of artistic genius *prepares for*, though it does not *bring about*, the reconciliation of the theoretical and practical realms. Critical philosophy cannot complete this task itself, but can only indicate it as *the* task for human life, and in this respect the genius serves as the exemplary figure, demonstrating the full scope of imagination’s power to establish harmony where it cannot achieve final synthesis.

With respect to the systematic horizon of our consideration of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, the central question generated by the founding of the critical project remains the one raised most provocatively by Heidegger, namely on what basis sense and intellect are meant to be united if they are not derived from a common lineage; since they must be conjoined in judgment, can we successfully maintain the radicality of

⁸⁶ Makkreel. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*, p. 47.

their heterogeneity such as Kant would have it? When Kant considers this problem in the *Anthropology*, his argument sounds less like a philosophical defense of the irreducibility of sense and intellect, and more like a foreboding sense of the danger of probing into questions that might lie beyond the grasp of human understanding. That is, he appeals more to the limits of our understanding than he does to any arguments about the impossibility of opposites arising from a common origin. For the most part, this passage, which comes at the conclusion of a discussion of the various forms of the “sensory productive faculty (*sinnlichen Dichtungsvermögen*),” recounts the story in typical fashion: sensibility and understanding, despite their inherent heterogeneity, are nonetheless capable of giving rise, through the combination of their respective representations, to a new representation which is not contained in either of them singly. In other words, these two sources of our representations manage to form a unity, just *as if* “both had a common origin (*beide von einem gemeinschaftlichen Stamme ihren Ursprung hätten*).” Yet despite the fact that they appear so when viewed through their product, Kant insists that the notion of their common provenance remains inconceivable (*unbegreiflich*) for us, given their dissimilarity.⁸⁷ In other words, Kant’s answer to this question is no answer at all, but rather—contrary to the declared spirit of criticism—a plea to the insufficiency of human reason.

⁸⁷ In a concluding footnote, Kant has recourse to an analogy to defend his point: “The play of powers in inanimate nature, as well as in the animate, in the soul as well as in the body, is based on separating and uniting the dissimilar. We reach cognition of the play of powers by experiencing the effects; the ultimate cause and the most basic ingredients into which their substance can be analyzed, cannot be found by us. What is the reason for the fact that all known organic beings are propagated through the union of the two sexes (which we call male and female)? [It] seems impossible that organic creatures can originate from the matter of this earth in any other way than through the existence of the two sexes established for this purpose. In what obscurity does the human reason lose itself when it seeks to establish the reason for our lineage, or when it only tries to make a guess at it?” Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. V. Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 68/177n. The assertion here, however, is in tension not only with the very definition of transcendental philosophy, but with the presumed knowledge of the stems of experience, sensibility and intellect, whose contributions to the cognition of nature it seeks to explain.

If the schematism does not actively shape either intuition or concept (by means of a shift in the meaning of temporality) then there is no heterogeneity between these roots of experience, and hence no need of the special function of schematizing judgment in the first place. In the first *Critique*, the transcendental imagination bears the brunt of this difficulty, achieving the necessary synthesis at the deepest level of the ground of experience, often to such an extent that Kant appeals to the inscrutability of its operation. But while this synthetic faculty enjoys this pride of place, it is taken for granted that imagination performs this schematization in the service of the understanding, which is to say, under the legislation of a determinate concept. This is precisely the basis for the distinction Kant will later introduce between schematic and symbolic presentations. But in reflective judgment, the possibility is raised—and the transcendental justification for the claim provided—that the imagination might also be capable of performing such an act of judgment in the absence of any determinate concept or rule, though nonetheless in a manner conforming to the purposive structure of *Gesetzmässigkeit*. The question, therefore, is to what end the transcendental imagination realizes this power; why is there a need to discover purposiveness in nature, and on this basis to judge nature merely regulatively? What form of experience inspires the imagination to seek beyond the limits of the objective cognition of nature for further applications of its synthetic power?

In the following chapter, we will take up these questions through an examination of the new possibilities for critical philosophy that are opened up in the discovery of the a priori form of judgment underlying our aesthetic taste. More specifically, we will argue that despite Kant's far greater attention to the analysis of the aesthetic pleasure of the reflective viewer, it is in the production of aesthetic objects that the most far-reaching

possibilities for bringing unity to the variety of our representations is realized. Thus we will turn to a consideration of the artistic genius as not only the central figure within the *Critique of Judgment*, but as emblematic of the most fundamental concerns of critical philosophy, and illustrative of the most pressing concerns facing human subjectivity in its efforts to bring order and unity to its most generalized experience of the world.

Chapter Two

Inventing Nature: The Exemplary Originality of Artistic Genius

When, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant calls upon reason to “undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge,” the task of thinking is henceforth cast into a reflexive abyss from which Kant will struggle to retrieve it over the entire course of the critical project. The synthetic drive of reason draws it ineluctably towards dialectical illusion, impelling thought beyond the boundaries of its legitimate domain. The task of critique is not simply to protect against or minimize the effects of these transgressions of reason, but to observe and learn from them; only thus can reason rise to the task of educating itself. But if the self-examination of reason demanded by the transcendental turn poses a uniquely intractable problem for thought, this is not merely because it places reason simultaneously in the position of teacher and pupil. What the critical gaze reveals, once it has reconciled the conflicting demands of reason, is a subject divided within and against itself.⁸⁸

It is within the framework of this crisis of subjectivity that I would like to consider Kant’s account of the artistic genius, and not from the standpoint of a theory of

⁸⁸ This rift is all the more troubling in light of the conciliatory task which transcendental philosophy has set for itself. Not only is the *Critique of Pure Reason* meant to settle the philosophical debates between skepticism and dogmatism, it also represents for Kant the only possible justification of two seemingly irreconcilable but equally given facts of experience: natural necessity and the purposive freedom of human activity. Without presupposing that all human knowledge is a cognition of mere phenomena rather than things in themselves, Kant argues, “I could not...without palpable contradiction, say of one and the same being, for instance the human soul, that its will is free and yet subject to natural necessity.” Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1960), Bxxvii. If the solution to the Third Antinomy dissolves this contradiction between freedom and nature, it does so at the expense of the subject. The human being is preserved in both the finite receptivity of its objective knowledge and in its spontaneous activity, and yet these two facts remain so at odds with each other that they must be held entirely apart, grounded in distinct and incompatible principles, even as they are united within the individual subject. If, as Kant writes in the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, “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...just as if they were two different worlds,” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 175.) then it must be recognized that this gulf is fixed within the subject itself, who must act as a citizen of each of these worlds in turn.

the artwork or of aesthetics, understood as a science of the beautiful. That freedom and natural necessity are both possible has been demonstrated; how they can belong together in accordance with the demand that “freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws,”⁸⁹ remains to be discovered. The guiding and overarching problem that serves as the common basis for the two forms of reflective judgment (aesthetic and teleological), and to which the genius provides the solution is this: How can the unconditioned ideas of the supersensible merge with the determinate realm of sensible appearances in which they tread? Or, to put it differently, how can a being endowed with a capacity for purposive spontaneity belong to a natural world, utterly indifferent as it shows itself to be to any such purposes?

By contributing to a re-evaluation of nature while simultaneously re-thinking the experience of freedom, Kant’s account of artistic genius *prepares for*, though it does not *bring about*, the reconciliation of the theoretical and practical realms. Critical philosophy cannot complete this task itself, but can only indicate it as *the* task for human life, and in this respect the genius serves as the exemplary figure. Thus, to the question of what the products of genius are meant to serve as examples of, I will suggest that the answer is exemplarity itself. Exemplarity, I will argue, offers a special and illuminating insight into the problem of presentation (*Darstellung*), a recurring issue within the Kantian system. Part of the difficulty of presenting an account of Kant’s conception of genius owes itself to the degree to which this single figure gathers together so many of the loose threads of the third *Critique*, and does so within the space of so few pages. The common thread that unites all the others, however, is that the genius is meant to serve as an example, not for

⁸⁹ CJ 176

how to produce beautiful artworks, but far more broadly, “as a standard or rule by which to judge.”⁹⁰

In its most basic form, the aesthetic judgment is an act⁹¹ of the utmost simplicity. It says only: “This is beautiful,” and in this respect every aesthetic judgment is roughly equivalent to every other. A crucial ambiguity in this utterly simple formula, however, commands our immediate attention. The “this” indicates at once the absolute singularity of the judgment—its applicability merely to the appearance in question—and the indeterminacy of its object. As pure aesthetic judgment, it forbids even the inclusion of any identification of the object, of the sort “This flower is beautiful.” The “object” of the judgment is not yet a *Gegenstand*,⁹² still lacking the determinacy needed to stand over and against the subject who beholds it. The aesthetic object thus appears as something questionable. To judge an object beautiful, then, is necessarily to hold it in question. “This is beautiful” naturally gives way to “What is this beautiful thing?”

It is a mistake, therefore, to understand judgment as if it were a synonym for pronouncement or conclusion. A reflective judgment does not settle or determine anything other than the questionability of the object. It gives precise expression to the indeterminacy of the appearance that stands before it. This highly specified ambiguity of the aesthetic object is what Kant calls its “purposivity without purpose,” (*zwecklose Zweckmässigkeit*) the encounter with which is merely the beginning of aesthetic experience. The aesthetic object is provocative and unsettling; it provokes the free play of

⁹⁰ CJ 308

⁹¹ See Beatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, trans. Charles Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1997)

⁹² On the terminological distinction between *Objekt* and *Gegenstand* in Kant, see Rudolf Makreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1990) p. 55.

the reflective faculties, and though it must be disinterested in its judgment of the appearance, it nonetheless gives rise to a question in which we take the strongest interest. “How are we to explain why nature has so extravagantly spread beauty everywhere, even at the bottom of the ocean, where the human eye rarely penetrates?”⁹³ This question marks the point of transition from disinterest to interest, from freedom to nature, and from aesthetics to teleology.

Not only does the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment appear to enforce an exclusion of the perspective of artistic creation, regarding beauty instead from the side of its reception by the observer, but even more troublingly for our argument, it seems to trivialize the presence of beauty in art, rather than in nature, altogether. The justifications that Kant gives for privileging natural over artistic beauty are several, but they all develop out of a common observation related to the nature of the mental attitude required for a pure aesthetic judgment. For in order to discover the basis in an appearance for judging it aesthetically, we must apprehend it as conforming to the concept of purposiveness in the absence of a purpose. An appearance that is entirely lacking any suggestion of intentionality underlying its organization would be incapable of stimulating the interest required to produce the free harmony of the faculties that is the hallmark of aesthetic contemplation. It would give the cognitive faculties no food for thought whatsoever. And yet, any appearance in which the presence of purposiveness is immediately explained away by the equally visible existence of a determinate purpose would fail equally in producing such a harmony. This is especially true if the purpose causing the appearance is aimed at our liking; the beautiful pleases precisely insofar as and to the extent that it seems to us to have come about according to a causation that is

⁹³ CJ 142

utterly indifferent to and unaware of our capacity for taking pleasure in its product. It is therefore easy to see why nature would enjoy a privilege over art in the realm of the beautiful. Not only is the causal mechanism of nature, insofar as it is intelligible to us, entirely devoid of intentionality, but even if it were somehow to include purposes we cannot presume that they would be directed towards the production of a pleasure based on awakening a feeling of human freedom. In products of art, the suspicion is always present that perhaps this appearance is designed precisely for the sake of my pleasure, and hence the purity of the aesthetic judgment is clouded insofar as the object carries with it the appearance of having been generated from the intention of an artist.

But this observation is not intended to exclude the genius from the aesthetic sphere, so much as to clarify its place within it. For if the products of genius are to succeed in provoking the kind of aesthetic response that their natural counterparts elicit so easily, then the genius must in some way obscure the traces of his efforts and keep them from rising to the surface of the artwork. In other words, the genius must take the beautiful objects of nature as a model for his own activity, seeking to generate appearances that are as free of the signs of intentionality as those found in the natural world, and yet also as confoundingly inexplicable without at least some reference to their apparent striving towards some end. It should be made abundantly clear, however, that the task of genius here, in a manner that perfectly prefigures the problem of human freedom in general, cannot be reduced to a matter of straightforward imitation. For it is not in its products, but rather in the form of its productive activity, that nature serves as the model for the artistic genius to follow. Even in his pre-critical writings on genius, Kant already dissociates this “spirit” from learning and from imitation (*Nachahmung*),

connecting it instead with the ability to decipher examples or models as a source of inspiration without slavishly following them. Genius therefore becomes a synonym for pure originality⁹⁴ in those fields where such a facility deserves a place, namely in the creative arts.

And yet, the identification of genius with originality *simpliciter* clearly has its limitations, and seems to have its purpose in distinguishing the essential features of this power from those talents of the mind that can be acquired through diligent study and instruction.⁹⁵ For in addition to this kind of spontaneity, the aesthetic products of genius require a certain restraint that can only come from the contribution of certain rules or guidelines to prevent their crossing over into pure unintelligibility. Prior to the third *Critique*, Kant understood these limitations on the creativity of genius as mechanical rules or formulas capable of reining in genius precisely by lending an opposing force, one devoid of aesthetic considerations and reducible to a function of the intellect.⁹⁶ But by the time Kant returns to his consideration of the genius within the framework of the problem of reflective judgment, he describes this discipline of the creative imagination in different terms. For while the concern that unbridled creativity will simply give rise to meaningless

⁹⁴ “But we call him a genius who makes use of originality and produces out of himself what must ordinarily be learned under the guidance of others.” Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. V. Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 22.

⁹⁵ The impossibility of acquiring the talent of genius through learning is one of its most obvious parallels with the capacity for judgment, and an indication of the fact that the two talents must be combined in order to make full use of the genius’s power. In the first *Critique*, Kant writes: “Deficiency in judgment is just what is ordinarily called stupidity, and for such a failing there is no remedy...It is not unusual to meet learned men who in the application of their scientific knowledge betray that original want, which can never be made good.” (CPR A135/B174n)

⁹⁶ “However, every art requires certain mechanical and basic rules (*gewisser mechanischer Grundregeln*) like the conformity of the product with the underlying idea, that is, truth in the presentation of the object (*Wahrheit in der Darstellung des Gegenstandes*) one has in mind. This is something that must be learned through the discipline of schooling, and it is always a function of the art of imitation (*eine Wirkung der Nachahmung*). But to set the imagination free from this constraint also, and to allow the inborn talent, even though it is contrary to its nature, to proceed without rules and ramble about, would result perhaps in original nonsense, which would surely not be exemplary, and hence could not be counted as genius.” *Anthropology* 124

phantasms remains, Kant now suggests that this danger can be avoided simply by the addition of a qualification: “the products of genius must also be models (*Muster*), i. e., they must be exemplary (*exemplarisch*).”⁹⁷ A subtle shift takes place, according to which the responsibility for reining in the imagination of the creative spirit, in accordance with the discovery of the autonomy of aesthetic experience—that is, its not being derivative of nor otherwise dependent upon objective cognition—is now attributed to the power of judgment itself, rather than to a discipline imposed by objective rules. For the ability to judge the suitability of an appearance to serve as an example of a rule is, as we have already seen, precisely the unique and irreplaceable contribution of judgment to cognition. The genius must first interpret nature in order to then discover within its own creative freedom a power for bringing about products in conformity with purposiveness, and yet with no specific purpose at hand to guide it. Genius, paradoxically, is the talent for learning from nature how to bear freedom responsibly.

I. From Transcendental Synthesis to Highest Possible Unity

In the previous chapter, we saw that the fundamental principles that enable the transcendental turn, the founding gesture of the Kantian critical philosophy, necessitated the search for a principle that Kant had not fully anticipated at the outset of the project. The various tasks belonging to cognition in general—which include objective cognition of nature, the determination of our moral freedom through the will, and the maintenance of the overall unity of experience—require a variety of synthetic or mediating functions in order to coordinate the conflicting interests of the principles contributing to them. Wherever such a priori synthesis of the elements of thought is required in order to give rise to a representation with universal validity, an act of judgment is called upon: “all

⁹⁷ CJ 308

judgments are functions of unity among our representations (*Vorstellungen*).”⁹⁸ The unity of our representations in a higher representation becomes the hallmark, and the condition *sine qua non*, of our mediate knowledge.

Accordingly, the principle tasks of the first and second *Critiques* involve a determination of the rules governing the respective forms of judgment by which they are capable of producing representations that meet the standards of genuine knowledge (*Wissen*). In each case, theoretical and practical knowledge, judgment follows a law that is imposed upon it by the principle that legislates in its own proper domain—the understanding in the case of nature, and pure practical reason in the case of freedom. While this versatility of judgment, through which it is capable of synthesizing representations according to various rules, means that both cognition of nature and moral freedom can be possible in the same subject,⁹⁹ it also means that our theoretical and practical representations are formed according to disparate rules, and thus themselves suffer from a constitutive and lawful disunity. Thus the syntheses accomplished by the activity of judgment, while they do succeed in producing higher order representations, nevertheless fail to secure the total unity of experience, and in fact introduce an equally higher order of division between its representations. Disunity is merely displaced, rather than eradicated, and driven deeper into the heart of the transcendental subject.

This constitutive disunity of the theoretical and practical forms of knowledge, both of which must nonetheless be contained within the common consciousness of the

⁹⁸ CPR A69/B93

⁹⁹ “Now let us suppose that the distinction, which our critique has shown to be necessary, between things as objects of experience and those same things as things in themselves, had not been made. In that case all things in general, as far as they are efficient causes, would be determined by the principle of causality, and consequently by the mechanism of nature. I could not, therefore, without palpable contradiction, say of one and the same being, for instance the human soul, that its will is free and yet is subject to natural necessity, that is, is not free.” CPR Bxxvii

subject, thus calls for a still higher form of mediation, that sought by the *Critique of Judgment*. But between the autonomous legislations of our theoretical and practical representations, no rule is given in advance for balancing their competing claims. Here judgment itself must not only perform the mediating synthesis, but provide the lawfulness of its activity as well. How it might accomplish this is precisely what Kant has in mind to discover when he asks: “Does judgment, which in the order of our specific cognitive powers is a mediating link between understanding and reason (*die in der Ordnung unserer Erkenntnisvermögen zwischen dem Verstande und der Vernunft ein Mittelglied ausmacht*), also have a priori principles of its own?”¹⁰⁰ That Kant answers this question affirmatively is for us a foregone conclusion. The coherence of the critical system depends on the possibility of demonstrating that the a priori principles that the first two *Critiques* worked so hard to hold apart can nonetheless be reunited in a single representation produced according to an a priori lawfulness that is irreducible to the laws governing either theoretical or practical knowledge.

The decisive question is thus not so much whether judgment contains such a principle, but rather what kind of principle this is, and through what form of experience it is capable of manifesting itself in a manner that allows the critical gaze to apprehend it. For while both theoretical and practical cognition generate representations whose object—in one case the phenomenon, in the other the noumenon—can be clearly determined according to observable rules, it is an altogether different matter with judgment. For although judgment must perform its mediation between the representations of the understanding and those of reason in a manner that attains universal validity, this validity is not demonstrated through the production of an objective representation. In fact,

¹⁰⁰ CJ 168

judgment gives rise only to a subjective representation indicating a particular arrangement of the faculties within the mind of the subject, making its mediating operation more difficult to detect, and its elusive transcendental basis more difficult to determine. “The nature of the power of judgment...is such that an attempt to discover a principle of its own must plainly be accompanied by great difficulties...for this principle must, nevertheless, not be derived from a priori concepts.”¹⁰¹ If the rule guiding judgment were based on a concept, it would be an objective rule belonging to the understanding, in which case the judgment would be a determinative one, and not a representation mediating between nature and freedom. But more importantly, this would also mean that the task of judgment itself—the application of a rule to a particular case¹⁰²—were surrendered to another power, and its singular and indispensable task merely abandoned, “since then we would need another power of judgment in order to decide whether or not the judgment is a case of that rule.”

Such a power of judgment is precisely what is sought in the third *Critique*. This explains why, though judgment plays an essential role in each of the *Critiques*, only here does it deserve its place in the title of the text, which might more appropriately be called the critique of *autonomous* judgment. For what is at issue here is the capacity of judgment not simply to adapt itself to the various rules to which it must submit in order to produce the variety of kinds of representations that cognition in general contains, but rather to discover on its own a higher rule according to which same representations may be coordinated with each other in order to inhabit the same space. Accordingly, the object of such judgments is no object at all, but the subject itself, which explains why these

¹⁰¹ CJ 169

¹⁰² CJ 169

functions of autonomous judgment are referred to under the designation of reflection. “For though these judgments do not by themselves contribute anything whatever to our cognition of things, they still belong to the cognitive power alone and prove a direct relation of this power to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure according to some a priori principle.”¹⁰³ Distinct from either our capacity for knowledge or our faculty of desire, feeling represents only the mental state of the subject, and thus must serve as the mediating link between them. The task of the critique of reflective judgment is therefore to discover the principle according to which our capacity to judge in the absence of a determinate rule is connected a priori with a feeling of pleasure. It is therefore little surprise that such a principle “arises mainly in those judgments called aesthetic, which concern the beautiful and the sublime in nature or in art,” especially when we attend to Kant’s insistence on thinking aesthetic experience in the strict sense of *aesthesis*. The beautiful and the sublime are those forms of feeling in which the power of judgment that is also responsible for mediating between the various representations included in the mind is most readily visible. Any attempt to determine this principle must therefore proceed through the realm of the aesthetic object, and yet its ultimate goal remains the discovery of the possibility of the merger of nature and freedom. The beautiful is the opening onto such a possibility.

But we must recall, given the elusiveness of the form of judgment we are after, that the form of experience in which it is sought is not necessarily the same as the one in which it is most fully actualized. Though Kant needs the investigation of aesthetics to set him on the path to reflective judgment, this does not mean that the sought after merger of nature and freedom is accomplished in the contemplation of the beautiful. To be sure, the

¹⁰³ CJ 169

presence of beauty in the objects of nature awakens in the mind the hope that its own purposive freedom may be supported, rather than limited or opposed, by nature. But the feeling of pleasure connected with the apprehension of a mere appearance is the beginning, rather than the conclusion of aesthetic experience. Beauty points beyond itself, and provokes within the mind of whoever beholds it a series of questions whose ultimate answer is discovered only on the other side of the aesthetic object, namely in the figure of the artistic genius. Though the account of genius occupies few pages within the overall argument of the third *Critique*, I will attempt to demonstrate that this peculiar talent is not, as it first appears, merely the counterpart of taste, but rather its inevitable fulfillment and the highest claim of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. Furthermore, it is only through the genius that the accounts of the two forms of reflective judgment, aesthetic and teleological, can be linked, as the capacity of the genius to furnish examples for the interpretation of natural purposiveness becomes a model for the merger of human freedom with the world of nature.

II. From Beauty to Genius

Reading the *Critique of Judgment* from out of the account of genius cannot be attempted without encountering a number of resistances, not least the entire tradition of aesthetic theory by means of which the text has been received. To begin with, the sections dealing with genius do not appear to occupy a particularly significant place within the overall structure of the text. Even granting that the architectonic rigor characteristic of the first *Critique* is somewhat less pronounced in the third, the topic is nonetheless introduced seemingly as an afterthought, long after Kant has introduced, explained, and demonstrated the a priori validity of pure aesthetic judgments. The

prevailing concern with judgment, of course, presents an even greater obstacle to our interpretation. The theory of aesthetic judgment is almost universally regarded as presenting an aesthetics of reception, one directed not towards the production of beautiful objects, but rather toward the reflection upon them. In fact, in identifying the phenomenon of beauty with an act of judgment—and a purely subjective judgment no less—Kant appears to make a definitive statement concerning the intended object of his analysis: aesthetic experience.

The genius, by Kant's own account, lies at the other end of this experience, distanced from it by the aesthetic object. This distance is emphasized by Kant's insistence on the distinctness of the powers constituting taste and genius. Taste is the ability to judge beautiful objects, genius the talent for producing them, and the two need not necessarily coincide in one and the same mind.¹⁰⁴ So if the *Critique of Judgment* is concerned with the subjective experience of reflection—a point which can hardly be contested—how can it be maintained that the productive talent of the genius constitutes the pinnacle of the analysis of reflective judgment? The inclusion of an account of the artistic genius at the conclusion of the Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment has led various commentators to regard this as a matter of peripheral interest, only tangentially related to Kant's overarching concern.¹⁰⁵ Indeed the very presence of this discussion comes as something of a surprise given Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgment as an entirely subjective experience. Not only does the aesthetic judgment add nothing to the cognition

¹⁰⁴ Aesthetic taste, no matter how refined, is not sufficient to produce genius, though the genius, for reasons we will discuss later, must at least possess all the qualities contributing to taste, even if they are not exercised.

¹⁰⁵ See Timothy Gould, "The Audience of Originality: Kant and Wordsworth on the Reception of Genius," in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. T. Cohen and P. Guyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) who introduces a discussion of the account of genius in the third *Critique* with the acknowledgement that "the topic of genius... is after all a marginal one for Kant" (p. 181); see also Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, p. 25.

of the object but, as Kant repeatedly emphasizes, beauty is in no way a quality which inheres in objects. Accordingly, it is to be expected that the account will proceed, as it does throughout the majority of the *Analytic*, according to an analysis of the *experience* of the beautiful; beauty concerns the way things are seen and judged, not made or produced.

Nevertheless, the analytic of the beautiful as a subjective experience is not the primary aim of the *Critique*, which remains directed toward the discovery of a principle according to which freedom can be manifested in the objective sphere of nature. If taste is the capacity to recognize such a causal synthesis in the appearance of an object, it yet calls for a corresponding capacity for bringing it about. Due to certain peculiarities of the principles belonging to theoretical and practical knowledge, their synthesis cannot be accomplished on an entirely level playing field, and requires a principled form of experience capable of acknowledging this incongruity. As the frequently cited passage from the Introduction suggests, an “immense gulf” separates the principles of freedom and nature, inasmuch as reflective judgment does not supply the possibility of their mediation in a higher supersensible principle. And yet, what is often neglected is the simultaneous demand that such a synthesis occur, according to the essence of the supersensible moral principle. As Kant writes:

No transition from the sensible to the supersensible... 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.¹⁰⁶

In other words, the overcoming of this separation into distinct and incompatible spheres, besides requiring the intervention of a mediating concept, does not raise both nature and

¹⁰⁶ CJ 176

freedom into a higher sphere, but rather demands the insertion of freedom into the causal order of nature. The synthesis of nature and freedom is indicated through reflective judgment, but connected with a demand that the basis of this judgment realize itself in an objective product. With respect to this requirement, the genius, rather than the person of taste, represents the highest exemplar of the possibility of uniting the various aspects of cognition in general into a single, cohesive experience.

But there is a far more serious set of issues interfering with any analysis of the third *Critique* that places emphasis on the role of genius, namely Kant's sustained suspicion concerning the lawlessness of the imagination entailed in the creative capacity. Kant did not assign a systematic significance to this talent until he discovered a place for it in his account of reflective judgment, but that did not prevent him from responding to the ongoing debate taking place around him, and weighing in with his own considerations. In fact, insofar as Kant addresses genius prior to the critical period, he regards it largely as a dangerously seductive temptation to philosophical thought, a kind of enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) squarely opposed to the sober spirit of criticism.¹⁰⁷ Unbridled creativity of the imagination has, as its only conceivable outcome, the kind of recklessness that leads to logically subreptive representations. The account of genius in the third *Critique* must thus be understood as a rehabilitation of the concept of genius, or an attempt to discipline the boundless productivity of the imagination. But while the other cognitive powers all submit to the discipline of critique, genius cannot be brought under a determinate law without being destroyed. Genius cannot be made to submit to rules, or it ceases to do the work of genius. A subtler form of discipline is required to sustain the

¹⁰⁷ Giorgio Tonelli, "Kant's Early Theory of Genius (1770-1779)," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1966), p. 110.

creativity of genius without allowing it excessive and reckless liberty in the exercise of its powers. Such an influence comes not from a legislative force, but from the capacity to act lawfully in the absence of a law; taste, therefore, is alone able to “clip the wings of genius.”

But in order to understand precisely how the mere contemplation of a beautiful appearance becomes a summons for the power of the artistic genius, we will need to attend to the nature of the disinterested attitude that lies at the basis of every aesthetic judgment. For in order to distinguish the liking associated with a pure aesthetic judgment according to a priori rules from any merely empirical and hence private feeling of pleasure, Kant appeals to the fact that the beautiful is what is liked without any particular interest as the determining basis of this liking. The key feature connected with interest that necessitates its absence from the merely reflective attitude of aesthetic judgment is the concern for the objective existence of the object. This exclusion of interest from aesthetic judgment helps Kant to dissociate the beautiful from, on the one side, the merely agreeable, and on the other side, the morally good. Both what is agreeable to mere sensation and what is judged to be morally good bring us a pleasure that is directly connected to the actual presence of their object, even though in the latter case it is a merely possible presence. And yet the transition from the analytic of taste to the account of artistic genius implies that disinterest is not in itself the definitive attitude for encapsulating the full range of aesthetic experience. Rather what is made possible in its beginning by the disinterestedness of reflection quickly transforms itself into a powerful interest, not in the existence of the object that occasions this transition, but in the subjective mental state of the one who undergoes it.

The interest that arises from out of the encounter with the beautiful and the sublime is an interest in the causal power that is capable of producing appearances that are subjectively purposive for the harmonious attunement of our cognitive faculties. Such a power belongs in most exemplary fashion to the artistic genius, whose talent consists in the ability to generate appearances capable of serving as models for the free exercise of reflective judgment. In this respect, the genius is not only the pinnacle of the exercise of reflective judgment, but through the products of his labor helps to cultivate and maintain this capacity in others as well. If judgment is, above all, about a mental facility for producing examples—establishing the relation between the rule and its application to objects—then genius can be said to be the exemplary figure of dexterity with examples.

In the following chapter, I will demonstrate this central but neglected role that Kant assigns to genius in the development of his account of reflective judgment. Beginning with (III) a discussion of the flourishing of discourse on the figure of genius in the 18th century, I will situate Kant's account within the prevailing attitudes concerning this pivotal yet enigmatic talent. Though Kant's account borrows much from his contemporaries in terms of his appraisal of the powers constituting genius, Kant was far more bold in the possible horizons he envisioned for this talent which he took to be a figure for the most indispensable mental, but also social and moral activities. Thus my next task (IV) will be to demonstrate that not only does the question of genius follow quite naturally from out of the experience of the beautiful itself, but further that it points toward (V-VI) the most comprehensive solution possible to the more general problem of reflective judgment. In the activity of the genius, we discover (VII) a model for interpreting the productivity of nature in such a way as to transform it into fertile ground

for the introduction of human freedom. The genius, therefore, becomes an exemplar not just for the creative artist concerned with beautiful appearances, but for the creation of a space within which political life can unfold according to our moral vocation and yet in a manner fully compatible with the mechanism of nature. Placing the account of genius at the center of our interpretation of the *Critique of Judgment* will thus enable us to connect aesthetic and teleological judgments in an organic manner, and both of these to the space for the organization of social life that opens beyond them.

III. The Sources of Kant's Encounter with Genius

Situating Kant's reflections on the artistic genius within the historical discussion of the topic presents a certain difficulty, not because his analysis is not pointedly responding to a rich and ongoing discussion, but rather because its place within the development of such a discussion resists precise articulation. As Gadamer has noted, Kant's construction of his account of aesthetics around the concept of taste cuts against the tide of the eighteenth century's interest in genius, making his place within this trajectory of thought one of pivotal resistance rather than simple influence. "To that extent Kant is old-fashioned and adopts an intermediate position inasmuch as, for transcendental purposes, he steadfastly maintained the concept of taste which the Sturm und Drang not only violently dismissed but also violently demolished."¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it is impossible to thoroughly appreciate the transcendental meaning that Kant ascribes to genius without considering some of the sources informing his thought, to which we will now turn our attention.

Wherever Kant discusses genius, whether in the *Critique of Judgment* or elsewhere, he consistently restricts the concept to the realm of artistic creativity. In this

¹⁰⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 57.

he departs not only from the nineteenth century's enlargement of the scope of genius, perhaps most notably in Schelling, but furthermore from the classical understanding of genius to which he seems only indirectly to be responding. With only minor exceptions to seek an alternative term in the German language,¹⁰⁹ Kant uses the Latinate *Genie*, sometimes referring as well to the Latin *ingenium*, referring to an inborn talent or capacity and derived from the roots *gen-* or *gignere*, meaning to bring about or produce.¹¹⁰ But the original Latin meaning of genius referred to the pagan belief in a tutelary god or attendant spirit assigned to a person at birth to watch over their fortune, rather than to the productive or creative power that belongs to a person of distinguished accomplishments. According to this conception, genius thus has less to do with the creative spirit that an individual possesses as a talent than with the definitive moment of their own begetting, which nonetheless is not merely an origin, but a guiding force that the individual carries forward and actively maintains.

By the eighteenth century, the lively debate that has emerged around a growing interest in questions of aesthetics in the French and English Enlightenment, and to which Kant is most directly responding, has shifted the meaning of genius away from its original Latin sense. Despite his active interest in the thought of his British contemporaries, Kant did not read English, and thus relied on certain figures within the Berlin *Aufklärung*, among them Mendelssohn, for access to the aesthetic theories of Burke and Baumgarten. Through Mendelssohn, Kant was exposed to the chief contribution of German thought to the ongoing discussion of the artistic genius, namely

¹⁰⁹ Anthropology 124

¹¹⁰ "genius, *n.*" *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 4 March 2008
<http://dictionary.oed.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/cgi/entry/50093688?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=genius&first=1&max_to_show=10>.

the effort to interpret it in terms of the Leibnizian idea of an activism in the subject that was opposed to any training or education as the source of artistic creativity.¹¹¹ Kant therefore seems to thoroughly adopt this modified conception that departs from the Latin *ingenium*, defining genius as “the animating principle in a person” responsible for their original and creative production according to an inspiration that cannot be acquired by mechanical instruction or imitation. “We also call a talented mind a genius; then this word is to mean not merely a person’s gift of nature, but the person himself as well.”¹¹²

An important precursor to Kant’s discussion of the fine arts, and to the entire eighteenth century discussion of aesthetics, can be found in Joseph Addison’s 1711 essay on genius, in which he articulates a decisive distinction between the unschooled and the learned varieties of genius.¹¹³ Though Kant will of course insist that genius is a talent implanted by nature and impossible to acquire through learning, he nonetheless also emphasizes that this talent must be brought under the discipline of certain rules in order to prove meaningful. Thus while Kant clearly demonstrates a readiness to accept the emerging distinction between the creative inspiration of genius and the order imposed on this creativity by formulas and techniques of artistry, he rejects the impulse illustrated, for example, in Warton’s association of such learning with the destruction of the genius’s originality.¹¹⁴ While Kant wants to liberate the conception of genius from all the constraints of conceptuality, he is nevertheless unwilling to accept the irrationalism that would separate it from principles of lawfulness altogether. His effort to maintain this balance manifests itself in the conception of a “free lawfulness” that the artist brings to

¹¹¹ John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 24-6.

¹¹² Anthropology 123

¹¹³ Zammito 28

¹¹⁴ Zammito 28

the productive activity, and implants in the artwork as the basis for its appeal to the faculty of taste.

Kant's account of genius thus appears to merely reverse the generative activity, from something received by the subject to something it produces from out of itself. And yet, his thoroughgoing restriction of the term to artistic creativity preserves something of the earlier meaning of genius, insofar as it is only in the non-conceptual inventiveness of artistic production that something like an inborn creative spirit is required to account for a talent that cannot be obtained through any deliberate practice or study. "Genius is the talent for discovering what cannot be taught nor learned. One can be taught by others how to make good verses, but not how to make a good poem, because that must come spontaneously from the author's nature."¹¹⁵ What this passage illustrates is the profound indifference or ambivalence in Kant's analysis of the direction of the generative quality of genius. The artistic genius possesses a profound power to generate original presentations for aesthetic reflection, and yet this power not only is originally implanted in the genius by nature, but continues to draw its inspiration from a constant observation and interpretation of natural beauty. The genius, then, is that through which the productivity of nature is transformed into human activity; though this capacity is highlighted in artistic creation, its significance, as we will see, is felt throughout the full range of human experience.

IV. From the Reflection on Beauty to the Production of Genius

One of Kant's chief sources of inspiration in his effort to discover the meaningful contribution to knowledge from pure aesthetic experience was Mendelssohn's essays on

¹¹⁵ Anthropology 234n

aesthetics dating from the 1750s.¹¹⁶ A serious exchange of ideas between the two began, in spite of their differences, following their rivalry over the Berlin Academy Prize Competition of 1761-3, in which Mendelssohn eventually won out. In positing beauty as a unique form of pleasure not directly connected with the arousal of desire, Mendelssohn provided Kant with a model for his own conception of “disinterestedness,” which would play such a pivotal role not only in his aesthetics, but in his moral philosophy as well. In both aesthetic and moral spheres, our capacity to judge and even to grant approval to things that do not appeal to or even conflict with our particular inclinations depends on an ability to set any interest aside and judge from a kind of neutral standpoint. But where Mendelssohn had failed to thoroughly distinguish the form of disinterest associated with aesthetic experience from its counterparts in the merely agreeable and the morally good, Kant found this step absolutely necessary to his goal of transforming aesthetic judgment into the link between morality and nature.

Initially, Kant argues that all feelings of pleasure fall, according to their determining basis, into one of three categories: the agreeable, the beautiful, and the morally good.¹¹⁷ Though any particular object may give rise to any of the three in various

¹¹⁶ Zammito, *Genesis* 24

¹¹⁷ This statement, of course, excludes the sublime, as does Kant’s initial discussion in the *Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment*, which does not even mention judgments of the sublime until after the conclusion of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. Several explanations can be given for this exclusion. Strictly speaking, judgments of the sublime are not based upon a simple feeling of pleasure, but rather a displeasure, or a “negative pleasure.” Furthermore, as Zammito argues in his genetic account of the development of the third *Critique*, the account of the sublime was a rather late addition to the text, not forming part of its original scope. “The sublime did not figure at all in the original ‘Critique of Taste.’ It was added only late in the composition of the *Critique of Judgment* as a result of Kant’s elaboration of the theory of reflective judgment, and even more as a result of his “ethical turn.” (Zammito 276) A still more substantive reason for its omission, however, and one which will justify its secondary treatment relative to the beautiful in the present investigation, concerns its unsuitability for serving many of the speculative aims of the third *Critique*, particularly those related to the synthesis of the principles of nature with those of freedom. “For the beautiful in nature we must seek a basis outside ourselves, but for the sublime a basis merely within ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into our presentation of nature. . . [This] separates our ideas of the sublime completely from the idea of the purposiveness of nature.” (CJ 246) Thus

combinations, they nonetheless remain distinct as sources or causes of pleasure. Only pure aesthetic pleasure, however, can be maintained in the absence of an interest in the object, making the differentiation of aesthetic pleasure from these close relatives an essential means to clarifying what is involved in the disinterested attitude of reflection. “Agreeable is what the senses (*Sinnen*) like in sensation (*Empfindung*).” While such a form of gratification is clearly connected to an interest in the existence of the object, this fact is not by itself sufficient to exclude it from the sphere of aesthetic judgment. Nevertheless, what this dependence on the object to sustain the sensation entails is that such a pleasure never succeeds in rising above the immediacy and the passivity of mere *Empfindung*, a shortcoming that by definition excludes any such representation from a claim to universal agreement. For what merely gratifies the senses never achieves the level of cognitive synthesis required for it to be raised to the level of imagination, where it can be preserved in the formal qualities of its appearance and transformed into an object for reflection. A gratifying sensation may be remembered, and yet this memory is in itself incapable of reproducing the feeling of pleasure.

In other words, the concern is not merely, as it is in cases of moral judgment, that the mere presence of an inclination associated with the object will cloud our discernment, or even supplant the pure principle altogether. Rather, since the nature of this principle itself is what is in question, the point is to demonstrate that brute sensation alone is incapable of furnishing the material for a universally binding judgment. And yet, this raises a crucial question about Kant’s effort to turn to aesthetics, understood as referring

while we will attend to the role of the sublime in the cultivation of moral feeling (Ch. 4), the rest of the analysis presented here is based on the conviction that the presentation of purposiveness in nature that occurs in the beautiful is alone suited to demonstrate the compatibility of the concepts of morality with the realm of nature.

to pure sensibility,¹¹⁸ in order to discover the basis for a form of universal, a priori representation. For the exclusion of sensibility seems to create a serious tension with Kant's purpose of identifying a universally valid experience that arises "when pleasure is connected with mere apprehension (*apprehensio*) of the form of an object of intuition (*Anschauung*), and we do not refer the apprehension to a concept so as to give rise to determinate cognition."¹¹⁹ If sensation, as the subjective element of the presentation of an object, necessarily belongs to the private experience of the individual, then according to what principle can anything like an aesthetic form of judgment take place?

Kant attempts to address this confusion by appealing to a common equivocation in our use of the word *Empfindung*. Sensation comprises both an objective and a subjective aspect, the former referring to whatever in the manifold of sensation is gathered together by the figurative synthesis and subsumed under a concept (whether it be the categories or empirical concepts), and the latter to whatever merely indicates the subjective mental state in which the sensation is apprehended. Hence, Kant argues, "the green color of meadows belongs to *objective* sensation, i.e., to the perception of an object of sense; but the color's agreeableness belongs to *subjective* sensation, to feeling."¹²⁰ This latter meaning of sensation, which Kant designates as *Gefühl* in order to distinguish it from its counterpart, "requires no judgment at all" due to the intensity and immediacy of the gratification it provides; objective sensation, meanwhile requires no judgment insofar as provokes no such feeling at all. While this distinction does not by itself resolve the confusion surrounding the universalizability of a sensation, it does point the way toward

¹¹⁸ "What is merely subjective in the presentation of an object (*an der Vorstellung eines Objekts*), i.e., what constitutes its reference to the subject and not to the object, is its aesthetic character." CJ 188

¹¹⁹ CJ 189

¹²⁰ CJ 206

it. The sensation capable of providing the material for a reflective, aesthetic judgment must fall somewhere between objective and subjective sensation, combining aspects of each. It must be as far removed from any interest in the existence of the object as if it were mere cognition, and yet as free of the concept as if it were uncognized feeling.

Thus, while the source of the pleasure associated with the beautiful is fairly easily distinguished from that of the merely agreeable (*angenehm*), matters are considerably more complicated with respect to the morally good. The agreeable is meant merely to drop out of the discussion altogether, since it contributes nothing with any claim to a priori universality, and yet morality is meant to have a direct link to the aesthetic, even though its distinction from it is also being sought. The beautiful must have a far deeper kinship with the good than its merely superficial resemblance to the agreeable. For although the morally good must be distinguished on the basis that always involves the concept of a determinate purpose, and therefore by extension is connected with an interest, it must have something in common with the aesthetic object by virtue of which the latter can serve to connect our moral concepts with nature. This is the demand for the highest synthetic unity of the faculties, as expressed in the introduction: “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 determination of it either theoretically or practically.”¹²¹ Now if this basis, the transcendental principle of aesthetic judgment, were nothing more than a crypto-moral concept, this would mean that the theoretical would ultimately be absorbed by the practical. And yet if, on the other hand, it had no relation or resemblance to morality, then it could not possibly aid in the transition to the theoretical, since judgment can connect

¹²¹ CJ 176

only things which have some common, underlying basis. Because they are based on concepts, our practical representations are determinative of their objects, rather than merely reflective, a fact which distances them from aesthetic experience. By the same token, however, the basis of their pleasure in the concept gives them a dissimilarity to the sensory gratification of mere *Gefühl*, a fact by which they are brought into a relation of structural similarity to the beautiful. Hence, Kant writes:

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 the aesthetic power of judgment and its formal conditions.¹²²

All of the forms of pleasure have, as one of their effects, a determination of the subject's mental state, but the merely pleasant determines this state directly as a subjective sensation. What unites the feeling the moral species of pleasure with the aesthetic is their capacity to receive pleasure not directly from sensation, but in fact from a free and purposive suspension of the inclination that arises from out of it. This is why Kant will argue, in fact, that the sublime contains a far more direct indication of the proximity between the aesthetic and moral attitudes than does the beautiful. The failure of the imagination in judgments of the sublime provokes a reaction “against sensibility but at the same time, and within the very same subject, for the purposes of practical reason.” Because it produces a negative pleasure, based on the overcoming of a direct and unpleasant opposition to our interests, rather than a mere suspension of them, the sublime has a unique capacity to demonstrate the irreducibility of pleasure to private, subjective interests.¹²³ But this does not mean that the principle of judgment supporting the

¹²² CJ 267

¹²³ CJ 267

experience of the sublime is more closely connected with morality, only that it is able to indicate this link more directly and demonstratively than the beautiful. The beautiful requires only that we set our interest aside, while the sublime demands that we celebrate its loss.¹²⁴

In any case, it is clear that aesthetic judgment as such does not demand a presentation that directly opposes our own immediate gratification—even though it necessarily entails such displeasure in the special case of the sublime—but only that such a subjective standard be momentarily held aside, in order to allow judgment to search for another standard on which to base its approbation. In other words, the discussion of disinterest is merely a preparatory and negative way of accounting for the possibility of aesthetic experience; the transcendental interest of the *Critique* demands that we press beyond this propaedeutic insight to discover how judgment operates when it has neither concept nor interest to guide it. The formal proximity of aesthetic to moral judgments offers a clue towards answering this question. Any moral judgment, in order to preserve the purity of the principle according to which it deserves to be so called, must exclude the influence of any empirical presentation—be it a mere sensation or a fully comprehended object—from its determining basis. This exclusion is demanded not because whatever is available to sensibility in general is in itself opposed to the concepts of morality, but simply because, as sensible, it is by definition passively received from outside the subject. Therefore the intrusion of anything empirical into the basis of an action sacrifices

¹²⁴ Kant does not present any entirely consistent account of this problem, sometimes seeming to favor the link of beauty and morality; in §59, for example, he will declare beauty, rather than sublimity, to be nothing less than a symbol of the morally good. Some of this equivocation is doubtless due to the fact that the analysis of the sublime was, by most accounts, a rather late addition to the *Critique*, and one which failed to produce many extensive revisions in the relevant sections. I will return to a consideration of the roles of beauty and the sublime in relation to morality in the fourth chapter.

the autonomy of that action; only a desire that is determined according solely to the rational principle of the will, the categorical imperative, is capable of activating the freedom that is necessary in the subject for its action to accede to the category of morality. In other words, the sensible must be bracketed in order that its influence not supplant the place of freedom, and prevent a truly moral judgment from being made.

The situation is almost perfectly analogous with respect to aesthetic judgments, the sole exception being that, because these are judgments which are occasioned by the effect of a particular, empirical sensation (hence, aesthetic), a distinction must be introduced between what is merely and irremediably subjective in sensation, and on the other hand what is capable of transcending sensation—not by the aid of the concept, but as belonging to the imagination, our power of a priori presentation. Something must present itself by means of the appearance alone, without recourse to any cognitive synthesis, which nonetheless is capable of indicating the presence of a supersensible principle in the apprehension of this appearance. For aesthetic judgment to be possible, the supersensible must admit of sensible presentation. The element in every appearance that aesthetic judgment attaches to, abstracting from the immediacy of its sensible character, is the formal quality of its presentation, the arrangement and order of whatever in it is merely sensible. Reflection is thus a mental disposition that attends not to what is given, but rather the manner in which it is given, or as Kant puts it in the title of §11, “a judgment of taste is based on nothing but the *form of purposiveness* of an object (or the way of presenting it).”¹²⁵ The purposiveness that forms the basis of an aesthetic judgment thus crosses the gap between the supersensible and the sensible, making the suitability of the object to be adapted towards final purposes a feature of its appearance. It is at once a

¹²⁵ CJ 221

sensibly apprehended property of the object's manner of presentation and an indication concerning the form of causation underlying the object and accounting for its existence before sensibility.

So far, all of this is perfectly consistent with an attitude of total disinterest concerning the existence of the objects that occasion our aesthetic response. Beauty is merely a property of the way things appear to me, not of objects themselves, and therefore I care nothing of the reality of the beautiful, so long as I am capable of sustaining its image before my capacity for contemplation. Though the sensation of a beautiful appearance itself may be inextricably bound to the presence of the object before my senses, the purposiveness of its mere presentation is lifted up and preserved from out of the sensible, which mental activity is nothing other than the contemplation of, or lingering in the presence of, the beautiful. This fact alone can explain why the disinterest in the object is in no way inconsistent with the pleasure we derive from its apprehension. And yet while Kant begins by referring to this purposive arrangement as if belonged to the object in the form of its presentation, his language takes a quick shift, and begins to attribute this source of aesthetic pleasure instead to the viewer contemplating the beautiful appearance. "The very consciousness of a merely formal purposiveness in the play of *the subject's cognitive powers*, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given, is that pleasure."¹²⁶ This shift is not a simple inconsistency on Kant's part. Rather, it indicates a shift or a transfer that takes place in the experience of the beautiful, from recognizing the harmony between the purposive arrangement of the object's formal presentation and the purposiveness of our own cognitive powers. This difference is

¹²⁶ CJ 222 (emphasis added)

indicated by the distinction between objective and subjective purposiveness.¹²⁷ An objective purpose always requires a determinate concept, such as the idea of the practical utility or the perfection of the object, while beauty merely signals the subjective mental state that, without a concept, nonetheless achieves a deliberate and complex organization. Beauty thus serves as the impetus for the subject becoming aware that the mental powers of representation display an innate tendency or striving towards purposive freedom in their activity, even when it is not guided by any concept of this purpose.

Now although no direct interest attaches to the object of aesthetic judgment in its determining basis, the feeling of purposiveness that beauty awakens in the subject makes it clear that the judgment is directed towards another kind of interest, namely an interest in the cognitive state of the subject itself. Being disinterested in the beautiful object does not, and in fact cannot, mean being disinterested in beauty itself. And because the subjective dimension of this aesthetic feeling indicates only a free and harmonious attunement of the faculties such as cannot be circumscribed by any determinate concept or definite purpose, our interest in reaching and preserving such a state within ourselves can serve as an interest motivating aesthetic judgment without compromising its purity. In other words, it is not interests as such that preclude free judging, but interests that are connected with objects belonging to the causal mechanism of nature, and thus outside the sphere of human freedom. In fact, once we understand in precisely what way beauty is

¹²⁷ CJ 228; Kant will also make further use of this distinction between objective and subjective purposiveness to differentiate aesthetic from practical judgments, the latter of which must refer to a definite purpose, and thus qualify as a form of cognition: "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."

not a property of objects, we cannot help but take an interest in the beautiful. To do so is merely to take an interest in our own freedom.

But if our interest in the beautiful were exhausted there, where the purposiveness of our cognitive freedom contained within itself ends, not yet in contact with the realm of nature, then aesthetic experience could never provide what the principles of moral freedom are so sorely wanting—a transition into the phenomenal world. In addition to this subjective interest, beauty must also spark an objective interest in us, one that forces the subject to seek beyond itself, as its purposive freedom demands of it. This interest, not responsible for but born out of our aesthetic reflection, is pursued simultaneously along two related courses. On the one hand, the feeling of universality, the expectation that others should agree, that attends our free judgment in the absence of the ordinary basis for such communicability (the concept) stirs within the aesthetic subject an interest in the possibility of a community with other subjects that is not mediated through objective concepts, but rests on some other basis. And on the other hand, even when it acknowledges that the purposiveness that commands its attention is not a property of the object, the aesthetic subject nonetheless begins to inquire about the origin of a presentation that is capable of harmonizing with its capacity for reflection. The disinterested aesthetic encounter engenders active interests in both nature as the source of beauty, and other judging subjects as an audience for nature's products. The key in understanding how these two questions lead from the disinterested basis of aesthetic judgments to the interest they engender will be to see that these are not two questions, but rather one.

As we have already seen, aesthetic judgments stand in a peculiar position not just with respect to the difficulty of demonstrating their universality, but indeed also in respect of the form that this universality takes. The subjective universality of aesthetic feeling places a considerable epistemic strain on the subject who experiences it, by simultaneously enforcing the expectation that others should also be susceptible to this feeling, and yet without offering any articulable basis for this shared judgment. While the claim to universality, the *sensus communis*, rises to the level of a consciously posited consequence of free, disinterested judgment, the justification of this expectation, revealed only through the feeling of a free harmony in the cognitive powers, does not. Only the perspective of critical reflection can reveal the legitimacy of this expectation, and only by distancing itself from the mental state of aesthetic experience. Within the subject undergoing this experience there is a considerable demand, particularly in the face of empirical disagreement about which appearances merit our aesthetic approbation, for some standard by which to defend the conviction that accompanies aesthetic feeling. And while any empirically determined example, by definition, clearly serves as insufficient demonstration of an a priori power, the absence of a determinate concept on which the judgment is based leaves the subject with no other resource for giving a communicable illustration of an incommunicable feeling. Out of this desperation, this strain between what is felt and what can be given external demonstration, is born the search for what Kant calls the “ideal of beauty,” an exemplary illustration of the potential generality of aesthetic taste, even if this generality falls short of the universality to which it aspires:

This criterion, although weak and barely sufficient for 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 them. That is why we regard some products of

taste as *exemplary*.

The ideal of beauty serves as a kind of archetype that stands for the universalizability of aesthetic judgment. Its purpose is not to arbitrate what should or should not be judged beautiful, since its very existence is meant to compensate for the fact that no such formulas or guidelines can govern our aesthetic choices. The exemplarity of such an archetype serves not as a model for imitation, but rather as an example or a sign of the possibility of forming valid judgments under the conditions of the merely aesthetic apprehension of an appearance. “The archetype of taste is a mere idea, an idea which everyone must generate within himself and by which he must judge any object of taste, any example of someone’s judging by taste, and even the taste of everyone else.”¹²⁸ Such a model of taste thus serves the enlargement of consciousness that is required in order to pretend to make a judgment capable of requiring universal assent. It is not the product, but rather the prerequisite of our capacity to form pure aesthetic judgments.

We cannot help but notice, however, that reference to such exemplary standards of taste seems rather plainly to violate the absolute singularity of the aesthetic judgment, its reference only to an individual appearance. Thus on purely aesthetic grounds we can, to recall Kant’s chief example, declare that “This rose is beautiful,” but not that “All roses are beautiful.” The reason for this total inability to universalize, or even to generalize, such judgments has an even more basic explanation than the lack of a universal concept; the mere judgment as such fails even to cognize the appearance, and thus fails to recognize it is an individual case of a category such as “roses.” The very idea of an archetype of taste presupposes not only the belonging of an individual presentation to a general category, but further entails the inclusion of some purpose according to

¹²⁸ CJ 232

which to measure the perfection of the imagined ideal. Kant plainly acknowledges therefore that the ideal of beauty cannot itself be generated from out of pure aesthetic judgments, but requires the assistance of a cognitive contribution to support and preserve the possibility of taste.¹²⁹ Without such a standard, which exists only as an “individual exhibition” of the imagination, aesthetic judgment can make no connection between the felt universality of its liking and the actual judgments of the potential community of those whose judgment agrees. So while the emergence of an ideal of beauty is not itself brought about by mere reflective judgment, it arises from an interest that develops directly from the effort to take the claims of aesthetic feeling seriously.

In addition to the tension between the *sensus communis* and the empirical non-universality of the claims of taste, there is another conflict that develops from out of aesthetic reflection and forces the judging subject to seek beyond the limits of the appearance itself. For insofar as taste indicates a free, subjective harmony, there is a seeming ambiguity concerning the precise nature or location of this harmony. On the one hand, the pleasure experienced as taste depends on the free and mutual agreement between the various cognitive powers, not directed toward the goal of a determinative synthesis. And yet, on the other hand, this free harmony of imagination and understanding does not result from the spontaneous release of such cognitive concerns, but rather from the intervention of an appearance that, in some respect, frustrates and interrupts our cognitive relation to the manifold of sensible intuition. This confusion as to

¹²⁹ “Hence this beauty must belong not to the object of an entirely pure judgment of taste, but to the object of a partly intellectual one. In other words, if an ideal is to be located in any kind of bases for judging, then there must be some underlying idea of reason, governed by determinate concepts, that determines a priori the purpose on which the object’s inner possibility rests.” (CJ 233) We will return to this issue of the simultaneity of aesthetic and cognitive judgments, and their convergence in a common object, in the third chapter below.

whether the basis of aesthetic experience is grounded in the purposiveness of the subject, or rather of the object, is largely addressed by the difference between the beautiful and the sublime.¹³⁰ But even though the ultimate source of the purposiveness is in nature in one case and in reflective consciousness in the other, both still involve an interplay between the subject and object that holds this question open for the subject undergoing the experience. As the “Third Moment” of the judgment of taste is summarized, “Beauty is an object’s form of purposiveness insofar as it is perceived in the object without the presentation of a purpose.”¹³¹ Such an appearance commands our attention insofar as it seems to indicate the presence of something intelligible behind the mere presentation, and yet any attempt to discover a purpose at the origin of the presentation which could account for its harmony with our own cognitive powers ends in failure. But what is a mere failure from the standpoint of cognition, the appearance of purposiveness for which no purpose can be discovered, is the ground out of which aesthetic reflection first emerges. Beauty begins where knowledge meets its limit.

¹³⁰ The beautiful indicates an objective purposiveness and yields an feeling of pleasure, the sublime a subjective purposiveness that produces an “intellectual feeling.” “Our receptivity to a pleasure arising from our reflection on the form of things (both of nature and of art) does not always indicate a purposiveness of objects in relation to the subject’s reflective power of judgment, in accordance with the concept of nature: sometimes, on the contrary, it indicates a purposiveness of the subject with regard to objects in terms of their form, or even their lack of form, in conformity with the concept of freedom. And this is why not all aesthetic judgments are judgments of taste, which as such refer to the beautiful; but some of them arise from an intellectual feeling and as such refer to the sublime.” (CJ 192) This formulation, however, can hardly be taken as the definitive and binding statement on the issue, as Kant equivocates in the following section of the Introduction, employing the distinction between subjective and objective purposiveness in nature as a basis for distinguishing aesthetic from teleological judgments: “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.” (CJ 193) Thus Kant calls the purposiveness at the basis of judgments of the beautiful objective when he wants to distinguish them from the sublime, and subjective when he needs to separate them from teleological judgment. This vacillation is due to the indecision within the experience of the beautiful itself as to where the true source of the feeling of pleasure is located, an ambiguity that undermines the very difference between subject and object.

¹³¹ CJ 237

And yet it is one thing to maintain that beauty can emerge in those instances when it is not held at bay by the predominance of a determinate concept of the object, quite another to assert that will necessarily do so. Against the possible objection that aesthetic feeling requires a more substantial basis than the mere apprehension of purposiveness without a purpose, Kant offers the following example:

It might be adduced as a counterinstance to this explication that there are things in which we see a purposive form without recognizing a purpose in them but which we nevertheless do not consider beautiful. Examples are the stone utensils sometimes excavated from ancient burial mounds, which are provided with a hole as if for a handle. Although these clearly betray in their shape a purposiveness whose purpose is unknown, we do not declare them beautiful on that account. And yet, the very fact that we regard them as works of art already forces us to admit that we are referring their shape to some intention or other and to some determinate purpose. That is also why we have no direct liking whatever for their intuition. A flower, on the other hand, e.g., a tulip, is considered beautiful, because in our perception of it we encounter a certain purposiveness that, given how we are judging the flower, we do not refer to any purpose whatever.¹³²

This is one of the first occasions within the *Critique* that Kant makes a direct reference to the difference between beauty in art and in nature.¹³³ In fact, prior to this point, he takes his examples of aesthetic objects almost indiscriminately from art and from nature, and yet here Kant seems to assert that pure aesthetic pleasure is disrupted wherever or insofar as its source is an object that appears to us as a product of human making. The mere fact that something is understood as a product of art immediately entails the concept of its being directed toward a purpose, even if this purpose is merely to produce pleasure in its viewer. Only the products of nature, understood as a system of pure causal mechanism, are understood to be entirely free of actual purposes. Anything resulting from human activity, conversely, is understood to contain a determinate purpose, insofar as a purpose

¹³² CJ 236n

¹³³ In fact this is the first place that the words *Kunst* or *Kunstwerk* appear in the text, outside of the Introduction, where art and nature are spoken of interchangeably with respect to their suitability as objects for aesthetic judgment.

is precisely that concept which we employ as a guideline of practical knowledge whenever we freely engage in any activity whatsoever. This privileging of natural over artistic beauty that emerges here for the first time will become a recurring and decisive theme in the development of the trajectory of the *Critique*, as well as the unfolding of the aesthetic experience that it mirrors. The object that first appears to belong to nature, but then reveals itself as a product of art—the artificial flower, the imitated birdsong, the geometrical figure sketched in the sand on a deserted island—will become a persistent trope by which Kant will indicate a basic truth about the experience of beauty. Wherever the beautiful is encountered, whether in the works of the artist or of nature, it is always toward nature that this experience will direct the subject. To find something beautiful simply means to regard it as having emerged in a manner that is in conformity with purposiveness, yet without the support of a purpose to guarantee its outcome. The beautiful is the teleologically organized purpose unto itself in search of a purpose.

As a sort of surrogate formula for the beautiful, required to suffice in light of the irreducibility of aesthetic pleasure to a formula, “purposivity without a purpose” (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*) is perfectly sufficient for indicating that quality that is required in the presentation of an object. And yet as difficult as Kant finds it to generate examples from art in which the “*ohne Zweck*” is as certain as judgment requires it to be, we might wonder conversely whether there should be equal difficulty in finding the “*Zweckmässigkeit*” of natural objects so irrefutably present. The supposed priority of natural beauty depends on the difficulty of attributing determinate purposes to the mechanistic causation of nature, but the obvious implications of this radical separation of nature from the intentionality of actions resulting from rational deliberation could just as

easily lead to an apparent absence of purposiveness from all natural products. For the sake of sustaining taste and the interest that results from the appreciation of beauty, it suffices perfectly that such formal organization merely be recognizable on the structure of natural appearances. But as we turn toward our consideration of the activity of genius, the primary model for which is found in the processes by which objects are generated in nature, it becomes crucial that we further discover some manner of accounting for this purposiveness of nature, that quality of its arrangement and presentation that sustains its resemblance to the products of intentionality, even in the face of our knowledge that such causation is nowhere to be found in nature.

In order to pursue this question, let us examine one of Kant's privileged examples of natural beauty, around whose paradigmatic appearance the account of aesthetic experience is seamlessly constructed, the wild, uncultivated flower. We should recall that this is the example Kant appeals to whenever he needs to call to mind the perfect purposelessness of beauty, as in the footnote to the conclusion of the Third Moment of the judgment of taste. The question we are now raising is merely an extension of the objection raised there: If beauty depends not just upon our ignorance of an object's purpose, but rather on the purposelessness of its appearance, as a positive fact, then how does this absence, this lack, manifest itself in the presentation of an object? That such a negative characteristic of the appearance must be capable of a positive presentation is directly implied by Kant's assertion that in judging aesthetically we tacitly decide whether the object owes its causal origin to nature or to human skill, the former supporting the perceived absence of a determinate purpose necessary to the disinterested liking of taste, and the latter disrupting it, even if we remain entirely incapable of

determining the specific end to which the artifact is directed. We regard an appearance as the product of artistic skill whenever we so much as detect “in their shape of a purposiveness whose purpose is unknown,” and on this basis we judge the object cognitively rather than reflectively.¹³⁴ Therefore if we are to maintain that aesthetic judgments are pure and independent products of the a priori principle of reflection—understood according to the idea of the greatest possible free and harmonious unity of our cognitive powers—and do not require the assistance of a cognitive judgment capable of determining the appearance’s belonging to nature or to art, and thereby to a purposive or a non-purposive causation, then we must regard this lack of a purpose as a positive feature of the object’s appearance. In other words, the judgment that a given object belongs to nature must follow from, rather than precede, the judgment concerning its beauty.

The wildflower, then, is judged first as an aesthetic object, and then consequently as an object of nature, because something in its appearance indicates that, despite the faint indications of intentionality in its form, it nonetheless fails to conform to anything that could serve as an intention. It is the uselessness of the flower’s intricate organization and the unity of its structure, both in itself and for anything else for which it could become a purpose, that provides the basis of its usefulness to the viewer who takes notice of its beauty. This provides us a reminder and a clarification of the specific manner in which aesthetic liking must be disinterested; aesthetic pleasure must not be based in the expected utility of an object for the sake of some further purpose, but must be delight taken directly in the object itself. Only an object regarded merely in its appearance, rather than in its existence, remains entirely free of the suspicion that our interest in it concerns

¹³⁴ CJ 236n

whatever might result from our possessing it. Aesthetic disinterest is not indifference, but its opposite, a profound approval of the beautiful for its own sake. The aesthetic object must therefore at once create in the viewer the expectation of a purposive movement in its organization and must equally indicate the decisive disruption of this movement, its failure to reach any end—and beyond this, its failure even to have settled itself on a determinate goal. As Derrida describes this conflicted appearance of the beautiful, “Everything about it seems finalized, as if to correspond to a design... and yet there is something missing from this aiming at a goal—the end.”¹³⁵ But this absence does not indicate a mere uselessness; the beautiful is at once a greater disappointment and a faint indication of the possibility of greater triumph than any merely unformed, useless matter. “The being cut off from the goal only becomes beautiful if everything in it is straining toward the end.”¹³⁶ Beauty provokes an interest in the viewer because it indicates, or rather perhaps simply is itself, a kind of pure possibility, an unfulfilled and therefore completely unlimited potential for the pursuit of ends. It is this quality of the beautiful, which we might call its insufficient givenness, that at once explains how the quality of purposiveness without a purpose can belong to a mere, uncognized appearance, and equally how art must adapt its own activity to the production of appearances if it is to be capable of bringing forth objects whose aesthetic claim rivals that of nature.

Throughout the third *Critique*, as indeed throughout the entire critical project, Kant employs a conception of nature that is always doubled, indicating at once two things that are quite distinct, and yet whose intelligibility is mutually interdependent. On the one hand, nature takes on the meaning of the realm of sensible experience, the phenomenal

¹³⁵ Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McCleod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 85-86.

¹³⁶ Derrida 87

world insofar as it is capable of being brought under the rules of the understanding that render these appearances intelligible for us. And on the other hand, because whatever enters into such an aggregate of phenomenal experience must conform to the legislation of the cognitive power by which it is constituted, we find that nature in the first sense is not merely an aggregate, but rather constitutes a system of organized beings conforming to laws. These laws, as guaranteed by the transcendental status of the categories of the understanding, are so perfect in their completeness and their regularity that in principle they allow us to not only account for, but also to predict the total system of causes and effects in the natural world. These two senses of nature are mutually reinforcing; neither is capable of standing on its own, and Kant seems nearly to regard the two as if they were simply alternative iterations of the same insight, secured by the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹³⁷ In describing the appearance of a natural beauty as insufficiently given, therefore, we are indicating the fact that an object belonging to nature in the first sense seems through its mere appearance to betray some manner of organization or arrangement that cannot be accounted for simply by appeal to nature in the second sense. Such an object thus appears to be quite literally supernatural, to go beyond nature as a system of laws, and yet not to leave nature entirely behind. It exists as something out of nature, in the sense that this implies both belonging and not-belonging.

The question of what this something is supplementing nature in the causation of the beautiful appearance, is pressing not only for us, but for the unfolding of the interest that arises from out of the experience of the beautiful. All the same, it matters little that

¹³⁷ “We saw in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that nature as a whole, as the sum total of all objects of experience, constitutes a system in terms of transcendental laws, those that the understanding itself gives a priori (to appearances insofar as, connected in one consciousness, they are to constitute experience.)” CJ 208

this question remains insoluble, as it is not so much the answer as the persistence of the question that concerns us. For if an answer were discoverable through the investigation of beautiful objects in nature, capable of accounting for whatever in their organization cannot be explained through the mechanism of natural laws, then such a newly discovered cause would simply constitute an addition or amendment to the known laws of nature. In other words, this absence in the appearance of the beautiful is of interest precisely insofar as its absolute insuperability seems to demand some kind of response, the indeterminability of which opens the space for aesthetic reflection. This explains equally why the artwork, as the product of a determinate intention, stands at an inherent disadvantage in its claim to aesthetic approbation. “If *Kunstwerk* designates a work of artifice in general and not the object of fine arts, the experience of beauty would be absent from it to the extent that the supposed intention implies a determinable end and use: there would not be merely finality but end, because the pure end could be bandaged.”¹³⁸ In order to appeal to our sense of beauty, then, the artwork must seem to exceed whatever can be explained by reference to anything conceivable as a definite end. The object must appear as if it is in conformity with purposiveness, and yet not just incompletely determined, but in principle imperfectly determinable to our faculty of knowledge because incompletely given either by nature or by human skill.

As we continue to follow the transition that reflective consciousness undergoes on the course from disinterested judgment to the pursuit of an interest in its object, we are moving towards an ever clearer statement concerning the meaning of judgment’s claim to serve as a transition between the principles of nature and those of freedom. The beautiful appearance belongs to freedom insofar as it is organized in a manner consistent with

¹³⁸ Derrida 88

intention and to nature insofar as it comes into being without any intention whatsoever. Neither in the realm of nature nor that of practical freedom *as they are ordinarily experienced* is such an appearance encountered. The discovery of such a possibility thus transforms the experience, if not the principled meaning, of both nature and freedom for whoever undergoes it. The apparent harmony or convergence of mechanistic causation with causation through freedom in the aesthetic object forces the subject to reexamine familiar experiences, in order to explain how the natural world could seem to favor us through its adaptation of its products to our own capacity for aesthetic judgment. As Kant writes, “We may regard nature as having held us in favor when it distributed not only useful things but a wealth of beauty and charms as well.”¹³⁹ In other words, the existence of beauty in the world seems to indicate that human freedom has a place within the order of nature.

In the literature on the third *Critique*, much attention is devoted to the construction and the development of the text, particularly the apparent lack of order or organization governing the sequence of certain sections of the text.¹⁴⁰ While there is without doubt a pronounced tension between the structure suggested by the architectonic organization Kant developed in the first and second *Critiques* and his efforts to impose this arrangement on the arguments of the third, I would nonetheless argue that this does

¹³⁹ CJ 380. As Kant himself notes, however, he had asserted precisely the opposite in §58, arguing that “it is we who receive nature with favor, not nature that favors us.” (350) This equivocation can again be explained by appealing to the ambiguity regarding the location of the purposiveness in an aesthetic judgment, whether in the subject or in the object. If understood objectively, reflection treats this purposiveness as a teleological principle of nature, if subjectively, as a principle of human freedom.

¹⁴⁰ Of the structure of the text as a whole, Arendt writes: “The links between its parts are weak... There are two important links. The first is that in neither of the two parts does Kant speak of man as an intelligible or a cognitive being... The second link lies in the fact that the faculty of judgment deals with particulars, which ‘as such contain something contingent in respect of the universal.’” (*Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 13) A similar position is argued throughout Zammito’s *Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, especially at pp. 24-6 and p. 276.

not justify the conclusion that the order in which the exposition unfolds is careless—particularly if this claim is used to justify an interpretive decision concerning the meaning of Kant’s argument. Every effort must first be made to show that, on the contrary, the order of the text is essential to illustrating the general concern of the *Critique*, quite apart from the variety of minor issues through which this account must pursue its own exposition. One of the primary sections of the text that is widely regarded as being out of place, or of not properly having a place at all within the text, lies between the conclusion of the Deduction and the beginning of the Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment.¹⁴¹ According to the table of contents, §39-54 are included under the heading of the Deduction, and yet they clearly follow the completion of the deduction itself, creating the impression that they have merely been appended here for lack of a more suitable place. As I will attempt to demonstrate, however, the topics covered in this section of the text form a natural and logical progression from the deduction of the principle of aesthetic judgments to the presentation of its antinomy in the dialectic. Furthermore, this transition in the text mirrors the transition in reflective consciousness itself from the disinterest of aesthetic feeling to the interest that motivates a teleological interpretation of nature. Thus the discussion of the communicability of aesthetic judgment, the interest that arises from it, and the consideration of the artwork, all play a role in making the transition into the second half of the text, the Critique of Teleological Judgment.

V. The Fine Arts as Response to Natural Beauty

The conclusion of the Deduction deserves a claim to the pinnacle of the *Critique*, but only insofar as the task at hand is understood as demonstrating “the universal validity,

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Zammito, who regards this section of the text as evidence that Kant is “unjustifiably lax in the organization of his book.” (130)

for the power of judgment as such, of a singular judgment that expresses the subjective purposiveness of an empirical presentation of the form of an object.”¹⁴² But the *Critique* taken as a whole has a much greater agenda, as established by the systematic concerns of the project of transcendental philosophy discussed in the introduction. Expressed differently, this also entails the goal of accounting for the preservation of the unity of experience in general, in spite of its comprising heterogeneous and indispensable principles for theoretical and practical cognition. The overall task of the *Critique* is therefore prepared, rather than secured, by the legitimation of the principle of reflective judgment. What is still wanting is an explanation of how this subjective principle for the purposive harmony of the cognitive powers obtains any traction in the objective realm of nature. The ground for the movement between the subjective and the objective purposiveness of aesthetic experience still needs to be accounted for. In fact, this further move is necessitated by the very conception of the transcendental method that Kant had developed even prior to envisioning the task of a critique of judgment. The critical method truly fulfills its purpose only when, after having discovered the principle underlying a complex form of empirical experience, it can then employ this principle in undertaking a purified reconstruction of the form of experience that it grounds.¹⁴³ This task alone constitutes the true apex of the *Critique of Judgment*, and is fulfilled in the analysis of the figure that most highly exemplifies this capacity, the artistic genius. But before Kant can introduce his account of the powers constituting genius, he must demonstrate why, in spite of his earlier privileging of natural beauty, art is nonetheless an

¹⁴² CJ 281

¹⁴³ Zammito describes the procedure of critical philosophy in precisely these terms, and relates this method to the motivation for the inclusion of the discussion of the fine arts in the *Critique*: “Kant’s transcendental method was to distill from a complex mental process a pure a priori principle, and make that principle the warrant for the reconstruction of the more complex problem from which he initially regressed.” (124)

essential step in the transition from nature to freedom, the becoming object of subjective purposiveness.

Readings of the third *Critique* that attempt to account for the presence of the discussion of the fine arts by appealing to concerns about the viability of its argument, therefore, fail to take seriously the profound differences that Kant finds between nature and art, not so much in terms of their capacity to provoke aesthetic feeling, but rather in terms of their meaning for reflective consciousness. Zammito, for example, explains the turn to art as a gesture through which Kant sought to mitigate the effects of a theory of the beautiful that had seemed, puzzlingly, to exclude the arts from the most basic aesthetic categories. He therefore regards the discussion of the fine arts as Kant's effort to square his own theory with prevailing attitudes concerning the meaning of the beautiful,¹⁴⁴ so as to acknowledge that the artist, and not nature alone, might also have some claim to the realm of aesthetic pleasure. Such arguments, however, while not without merit, fail to consider the full agenda that Kant pursues in opening the possibility of a free purposiveness issuing from human activity in the work of the artist. The artwork is not simply another source of the beautiful, in addition to nature, but another form of the experience of beauty. Hence, the first point Kant makes in his discussion of the artwork is to distinguish it from natural beauty, not in terms of the difference in their products, but rather the opposition in their relation between the product and its causal basis. While a product of nature is rightly regarded as an effect, the product of art is understood as a work, which is to say the result of a deliberate and goal-oriented activity. "By right we

¹⁴⁴ "Any 'critique of taste' which could account for the beauty only of foliage but not of da Vinci, of sea shells but not of Shakespeare, would not have had great standing in eighteenth-century culture. To prove the power of his new insight, Kant had to be able to clarify the questions of criticism that arose in the context of works of art." Zammito 124

should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, art is distinguished from nature as a causal power by virtue of the fact that the purposiveness it displays in the presentation of its products is attended by an intention (*Absicht*), or a purpose.

This essential connection to the determinate purposes of human activity is both the condition of and the primary hindrance to the possibility that the artwork, or artistic production, might serve as a fulfillment of our interest in the beautiful. For just as it seems to violate the demand that beauty be free, rather than dependent on charms, this deliberate striving towards the beautiful of the artwork also seems to open onto the communal dimension of aesthetic experience, lifting it out of the realm of private feeling and into the sphere of universality. Insofar as artistic beauty is brought forth by someone who I presume to have the same interest in the beautiful as I do, it answers to the desire to make aesthetic experience communicable, presenting the most immediate and concrete possibility for the communication of aesthetic ideas. Of course at the same time, insofar as the artwork *appears* as deliberately calculated in order to make such communicability possible, it threatens to disrupt—by assigning it to a specific purpose—the freedom in its purposiveness, and thus to undermine its claim to beauty. But according to the definition of art by which it is distinguished from nature, the beautiful artwork contains such an appearance of deliberation precisely insofar as it appears to be a product of the human activity that we call art. This paradoxical relation of the artwork to its own purposiveness will guide Kant’s entire discussion of the fine arts, and will require the artwork to develop strategies of subterfuge and dissimulation in order to develop its unique aesthetic potential. The genius will turn out to be the artist who, whether the most skilled at

¹⁴⁵ CJ 303

imposing beautiful forms on objects or not,¹⁴⁶ demonstrates the greatest capacity for disguising the artwork as an effect of nature, while simultaneously calling attention precisely to this artifice.

In the two sections that precede the discussion of fine art proper (§§42-43), Kant discusses the interest that is connected with our liking for the beautiful, in its empirical and intellectual varieties, respectively. Here Kant finally states what the attentive reader has long since begun to suspect: “That a judgment of taste by which we declare something to be beautiful must not have an interest *as its determinative basis* has been established sufficiently above. But it does not follow from this that, after the judgment has been made as a pure aesthetic one, an interest cannot be connected with it.”¹⁴⁷

Though he expresses this relationship between disinterest and interest in temporal terms, the relevant distinction at work here is an epistemological one, related to the status as objects that various kinds of presentations have for the subject apprehending them. That is to say, although the feeling associated with a beautiful appearance requires a freedom from concern regarding the sensation through which it pleases, this does not require that the same subject might not simultaneously take a strong interest in its existence as a product of the causation understood as nature. This is precisely what Kant means when he requires that this interest be “indirect;” it must not connect to the appearance in the same respect that it is the source of pleasure in the subject, but may attach to it by virtue of its capacity to be objectively synthesized as an object for cognition. That such a secondary, interested liking may be of either empirical or intellectual character is less

¹⁴⁶ Though such a skill, which is merely an analogue to taste, would seem to be necessary to any artist whose works would appeal to the taste of others, it should not be regarded as a principle characteristic of the talent that distinguishes genius as such from taste—a distinction that Kant makes a great effort to uphold.

¹⁴⁷ CJ 296

important than the basic observation that comes into play here, where Kant is trying to follow the transition from nature to art: “[that] we must think of taste as first of all connected with something else.” Despite the fact that taste has been the singular preoccupation of the argument up to this point, Kant now indicates that it is not in itself the solution to the question of the transition between the principles of theoretical and practical knowledge. But no more is the solution to be expected from the interest, whatever it turns out to be, that is connected with taste. Rather, the weight of the task of the third *Critique*, the highest order synthesis of synthetic human knowledge, falls on the connection itself that joins interest together with disinterest, binding them together while leaving each intact in itself.

The concern that we take in surrounding ourselves with beauty, particularly insofar as this contributes to our efforts to develop a civilized society,¹⁴⁸ is what Kant means to indicate by the empirical interest in the beautiful. Such an interest, of course, being empirical, can itself have no place within a strictly transcendental inquiry, and thus Kant declares the matter “of no importance for us here.” Nevertheless, the brief consideration that Kant grants the topic, and its placement directly following the discussion of *sensus communis* give us a concrete model for thinking the implications of the rather more abstract intellectual interest in the beautiful. For if the interest in the empirical existence of artworks contributes to the development of particular goals and interests within an existing culture, then the intellectual interest plays an analogous part

¹⁴⁸ Kant in fact argues that *only* in society do we take any empirical interest in the presence of beauty, showing that were it not for the company of other people we would not take the care to develop or even preserve aesthetic objects. “Someone abandoned on a desolate island would not, just for himself, adorn either his hut or himself; nor would he look for flowers, let alone grow them, to adorn himself with them. Only in society does it occur to him to be, not merely a human being, but one who is also refined in his own way (this is the beginning of civilization).” CJ 297

in developing and preserving not so much any particular moral aim, as “a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling” in general.¹⁴⁹ To state the matter differently, an interest is always toward the possibility of a movement out of and beyond the beauty that it is interested in. In the case of the empirical interest, it is clear what it leads toward. This social response to the beautiful indicates itself through “the inclination and the skill to communicate [one’s] pleasure to others.”¹⁵⁰ But with respect to the intellectual interest in the presence of beauty within nature, it is far less clear how it manifests itself, or indeed how it even can manifest itself, without sacrificing the a priori character that makes it suited to “provide a transition from sense enjoyment to moral feeling.” Though Kant does not answer this question as explicitly as we might hope, there is strong evidence to suggest that the sections following §42 are meant as a kind of response to the problem it poses. The organization of the text, as well as the indication Kant does give about the intellectual interest in beauty, suggest that it is through art that we turn the corner from the merely passive reflection on natural beauty to the kind of active and engaged response that this reflection demands of us.

In this brief but crucial section of the text, Kant introduces a number of thought experiments designed to illustrate the peculiar connection between interest and disinterest. In particular, he demonstrates a considerable concern for showing that not only is the intellectual interest we take in beauty not antithetical to the disinterested pleasure of reflection, but in fact its existence is entirely dependent upon the preservation of such disinterest.

¹⁴⁹ CJ 299

¹⁵⁰ CJ 297

Whoever “contemplates the beautiful shape of a wild flower, a bird, an insect, etc., out of admiration and love for them,” even in the absence of a single other person,¹⁵¹ takes an intellectual, rather than empirical interest in such beauty. The actual presence of a community of judging subjects is the litmus test for differentiating the intellectual and the empirical forms of this interest, and only the former, which does not depend on such an audience, can have any *a priori* connection with a pure judgment of taste. Such an interest, though deemed intellectual insofar as it concerns the existence of the object and not merely the formal qualities of its presentation, should not be confused with the spontaneous effort to bring the object under the conditions of cognition. For an interest is understood as a *liking* that has its basis in the existence of the object with which it is connected. In other words, this intellectual interest is nothing like curiosity, or an inherent will to knowledge. Following from out of the disinterested pleasure that beauty brings forth, it is an interest in the reason that such objects should exist as are capable of conjuring such feeling within us. Such an interest recognizes that there is no natural explanation for the existence of such objects, and marvels at the apparent coincidence of events required to create this purposive harmony between the human intellect and the foreignness of nature. In other words, it asks the question: “Why is nature not indifferent to our capacity to derive enjoyment from purposive arrangements of the sensible world? Why is there beauty in the world, rather than not?”

The purpose in raising these questions, of course, is not to furnish them with definitive answers, but rather merely to indicate something about the mental state of the subject who not only forms aesthetic judgments, but must also attempt to comprehend their consequences and connect them with the rest of his cognitive representations. What

¹⁵¹ CJ 299

Kant intends to demonstrate is that although the intellectual interest in the beautiful appears to violate the most fundamental conditions of a merely reflective judgment insofar as it inquires after the cause of the real existence of the object, in fact this interest would never arise as such were it not for the disinterested pleasure that precedes, motivates and sustains it. In order to illustrate this point Kant, introduces one of the more famous images of the third *Critique*:

Suppose we had secretly played a trick on this lover of the beautiful, sticking in the ground artificial flowers (which can be manufactured to look very much like natural ones) or perching artfully carved birds on the branches of trees, and suppose he then discovered the deceit. The direct interest he previously took in these things would promptly vanish, though perhaps it would be replaced by a different interest, an interest in vanity.¹⁵²

Kant in fact employs several examples throughout the text intended to expose the fragility of the conditions that support aesthetic judgment. In other words, one and the same appearance, beheld by the same subject with the same interest in beauty, is transformed from an object worthy of aesthetic approbation into a deceptive enticement to mere charm, not by any change the appearance itself undergoes, but merely through the revelation that its source lies in human artifice rather than in nature. But what needs to be noted here is that the disruption of the interest in the beautiful is a direct consequence of the unsettling of the conditions for a pure aesthetic judgment; and conversely, in order to be restored, the interest would only require that the possibility of judging the object to be purposive *without a purpose* be restored. Though the interest is directed *toward* the existence of the object, it arises *out of* the disinterested reflection on its mere appearance, which description perfectly encapsulated the trajectory of aesthetic experience. Beauty points beyond itself, at least so long as this signaling is not disrupted

¹⁵² CJ 299

by the intrusion of an infelicitous influence, such as a too direct interest in the pleasure connected with the object.

Lest there be any ambiguity about it, Kant makes it abundantly clear that this surrogate interest, in vanity, would be a serious degradation of the intellectual (a priori) interest in the beautiful, which he has just connected with a the mental attunement necessary to moral feeling. He regards the results of this thought experiment as evidence of the “superiority of natural beauty,” even in such cases where art might surpass nature in the purposiveness of its form. The difficulty seems just to be that though human skill might imbue objects with a greater appearance of purposiveness, it suffers from an inability to do so with the requisite absence of an apparent purpose in its design. While the degree of purposiveness in the appearance only strengthens or weakens the intensity of aesthetic pleasure, any betrayal of a determinable purpose disrupts it altogether, and with it any interest that depends on the curiosity at such a marvel of nature. There is, in short, nothing puzzling about the fact that artworks produced by the skill of human subjects—who share our subjective basis for aesthetic pleasure—should appeal to our capacity for disinterested liking, nothing to match the wonder that we discover in nature, “a voluptuousness for the mind in a train of thought that [one] can never fully unravel.”¹⁵³

And yet, one would little suspect, unless having written off such coincidence by appealing to the disordered structure of the third *Critique*, that such claims about nature’s priority in matters of beauty would fall in the section immediately preceding the one called “On Art in General,” the opening of the discussion of the beauty of artwork and the talent of the artist who produces it. Before we can delve into this question, let us back up and briefly rehearse what we have learned about the path that has brought us here.

¹⁵³ CJ 300

Though he does not initially distinguish between them, often qualifying claims about aesthetic judgments with phrases like “whether in nature or in art,” Kant gives clear indication through his choice of examples that he does not regard natural and artistic beauty as simply interchangeable. When he does finally indicate his justification for placing nature above beauty as a source of beautiful appearances, he does so within a discussion directed towards demonstrating the impulse of reflective judgment to carry over into the pursuit of other interests that only it is capable of engendering. Now if we are at all justified in presupposing, at least hypothetically, that the placement of these considerations is not merely careless, then it stands to reason that Kant sees within the activity of artistic production genuine possibilities for the pursuit of the interest in the beautiful, but that he means to caution us in our understanding of art against the belief that art can become a superior source of aesthetic feeling by abandoning the limitations that might befall nature. And yet, at the same time, he seems equally concerned to highlight the pitfalls that present themselves whenever the artwork is pressed in what might be regarded as precisely the opposite direction, namely, the slavish and mechanical imitation of natural appearances.

It therefore comes as little surprise that the discussion of the fine arts should place its predominant focus on the relationship of nature to the artwork, and, perhaps more importantly, to the productive activity of the artist. Thus the first words of the discussion of art are directed towards distinguishing it from nature, insofar as the former is a deliberate result of rational freedom, but these are immediately followed by two further distinctions. Art is also to be distinguished from science, as practical ability differs from

theoretical knowledge,¹⁵⁴ and from craft, insofar as the latter is directed towards the laborious production of artifacts whose reward is the utility of the object they produce, rather than the free play of the production itself.¹⁵⁵ Art is thus understood as a freely purposive activity, guided by a requisite skill that, although it resembles nature in its capacity to generate objects that inspire aesthetic reflection, nonetheless is inseparable from a kind of intentionality whose presence in the mechanism of natural causation would be unthinkable. But these restrictions and distinctions aimed at clarifying art and distinguishing it from related forms of activity will come as little surprise to anyone familiar with the analogous restrictions delimiting the conditions within which aesthetic judgments can attain to the maximum purity of their principle. They express little more than the obverse of the maxims generated by the earlier discussion of taste, requiring only that the artist heed the conditions of aesthetic judgment in preparing appearances capable of calling upon its consideration. And yet we will recall that one such condition discovered in the course of examining aesthetic judgment from the perspective of its attending interest in the existence of its object required that the artist not be revealed as the origin underlying the presentation of the beautiful appearance, lest it be perceived as deliberately aiming at the pleasure of its viewer, and therefore reduced to mere charm. While it is easy to envision that the activity of the artist should be a practical activity whose enjoyment lies directly in its product rather than in some expected benefit thereof, it is difficult to conceive how the artist should thoroughly disappear behind the artwork without resorting to the production of counterfeit nature.

¹⁵⁴ CJ 303

¹⁵⁵ CJ 304

As Kant begins to venture an answer to this question, whose urgency he has been slowly developing throughout the *Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment*, he reverts once more to the perspective of taste, from which side the matter is more easily described, though not without a certain complexity of principle. “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.”¹⁵⁶ Though these are the opening words of §45, the formula introduced here seems to be a truncated version of what must surely be, to borrow the Kantian language, a merely hypothetical imperative. What would seem to be missing is the conditional that qualifies this need, restricting it to cases where pure aesthetic judgment is possible with respect to the artwork. But what the viewer must discover in the presentation of the object, the artist must place there, all of which presupposes that the artist is at least implicitly aware of the conditions that support taste. The artist requires a certain knowledge of the potential audience (although given the universality of taste, this is not an empirical knowledge, but an a priori one), and must activate this knowledge in contriving the appearance of the artwork, and yet a crucial consideration in what this knowledge dictates is that the artist not appeal directly to the capacity for pleasure in his audience. “Therefore, even though the purposiveness in a product of fine art is intentional, it must still not seem intentional; i. e., fine art must have the *look* of nature (*schöne Kunst muss als Natur anzusehen sein*), even though we are conscious of it as art.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ CJ 306

¹⁵⁷ CJ 307

But what this passage makes clear is that though the artist requires a certain knowledge of the conditions supporting taste, she must put this knowledge to work not in order to produce such an appearance, but rather in order to simulate it. The artist knows precisely how the image that is seen, as well as what is not seen, will lead the viewer to an aesthetic apprehension of the object, and exploits this knowledge in order to disguise her activity as something other than what it is. The artistic image, insofar as it lays claim to beauty, therefore depends to a great degree on a form of duplicity that exploits the difference between sensible appearance and its supersensible cause. Kant captures the complexity of this appearance and its potential to lead the viewer toward certain misleading suppositions regarding its provenance through his frequent use in this section of forms of the verb *scheinen*. The artwork must take on the *look* of nature in order merely to *seem*, rather than to become, a product of natural causation. In fact, after seeming to grant unqualified priority to natural beauty, Kant now remarks that fine art must seem at the same time to belong to nature and to art. Given the earlier distinction between nature and art, however, this would seem to be a blatant contradiction; art and nature are as divided as rational purposiveness and its absence, teleology and mechanism. But the embodiment of such a paradox, it turns out, the manifestation of the radical undecideability between nature and freedom is precisely what is meant by a beautiful artwork. Kant offers the following explanation: “A product of art appears like nature if, though we find it to agree quite punctiliously with the rules that have to be followed for the product to become what it is intended to be...the academic form [does] not show; there must be no hint that the rule was hovering before the artist’s eyes and putting fetters on his mental powers.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ CJ 307

In other words, the product of the artist must appear as if it were bound by determinable rules, in order to disguise the fact that it owes its production to the intentional activity of the artist. And yet, if this concealment of the freedom in its causation were too perfect, too complete, then the resulting appearance would bear all the marks of brute mechanism, but none of the signs of beauty. That is, it would be entirely lacking in that apparent unresolved striving in its formal arrangement that Kant has called purposivity without purpose. In other words, as it now becomes clear, the requirements for an artistic object to be judged aesthetically are precisely the same as those demanded of a natural object. The difference lies simply in the elaborate artifice that the artist must conjure in order to meet these conditions, in comparison to nature. Both natural and artistic objects are beautiful precisely insofar as they appear to be bound by a set of rules that is nonetheless incapable of explaining their appearance in its entirety. But while this excess in the appearance of a natural object gestures immediately beyond the rules of nature, which are known to us in advance, this same overflowing in the appearance of the artwork suggests only the intervention of a deliberate intention. The artist, therefore, must submit her freedom to the rules of natural beauty, but only so far as is necessary to disguise or to interrupt whatever purpose might be interpreted as the cause of the object.

The upshot of this rather complicated account is, fortunately for the artist as well as for the reader, elegantly simple. The supposed superiority of natural beauty has nothing to do with an assertion that nature contains a greater quantity or degree of beauty than does art. Given Kant's account of beauty as radically irreducible to determinate concepts, such a claim would be inherently unjustifiable. The beauty of nature is superior to that of the artwork only inasmuch as it requires no elaborate disguise in order to

produce its effect. But the natural beauty appears to be as mixed with something supernatural just as much as the artwork must supplement the freedom of its purposiveness with the discipline of a rule. And because this rule must not be determinable according to any concept, it must come from nature, rather than from human purposiveness. Everything in this painstaking back and forth between natural and artistic beauty is slowly moving towards the merger of this natural rule with the freedom of human reason, which Kant finally introduces in the figure of the genius.

VI. Cultivating Genius

It is widely acknowledged that Kant's account of genius offers a highly restricted interpretation of the concept, one governed by definite limits that are as important to the meaning of genius as the powers contained within these limits. What is often neglected, however, is the more important point that these restrictions are enacted not out of an interest in arbitrating the range of the concept of genius, but rather for the sake of giving precise determination to the transcendental task of identifying the principle underlying our capacity for reflective judgment. When Kant talks about the genius, therefore, he does not mean to refer to the broad range of talents that are sometimes indicated under this category. Kant will explicitly deny, for example, the applicability of the concept to the talent for originality in the sciences, as such a skill proceeds according to the guidance of definite rules and concepts. "Newton could show how he took every one of the steps he had to take in order to get from the first elements of geometry to his great and profound discoveries."¹⁵⁹ This observation concerning the basic difference between extraordinary talent in artistic minds from their counterparts in the sciences leads Kant to remark that the former talent includes some element that can never be taught or learned

¹⁵⁹ CJ 308

by instruction, while the latter is, in principle, always capable of being so transmitted between individuals.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the insistence on the non-educability of artistic genius is merely a kind of shorthand for the non-demonstrability of the thought process underlying its presentations. It should not be understood as an assertion that genius is an entirely innate power, incapable of being groomed and developed by instruction, or by its interaction with other human talents, like taste, for example. In fact, Kant will repeatedly assert that in order to avoid deteriorating into pure unintelligibility, genius must be cultivated, and the manner of its expression must be guided by the acquisition of a certain amount of technical skill. Taste, Kant remarks, must clip the wings of genius¹⁶⁰ in order to civilize the unruliness of its talent and ensure that its products appeal to the sense of purposiveness that lies at the basis of all aesthetic judgment. That the genius requires such discipline is indicative of the peculiar cognitive status that pertains to artworks; as subject to aesthetic judgments, they lay claim to a subjective universality that demands the agreement of others without providing the basis for the demonstrability of this aesthetic form of truth. Taste is thus required in the works of the artistic genius in order to guarantee that the impossibility of directly communicating such an appearance nevertheless does not reduce it into the pure unintelligibility of an unordered manifold of sensations. As Kant describes the work of taste on the raw talent of genius, “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.”¹⁶¹ In other

¹⁶⁰ CJ 319

¹⁶¹ CJ 319

words, it is taste that is here given credit with molding the creativity of artistic production into the form that is required to guarantee the exemplarity that is required of its products, and without which their genius would remain unrecognizable. Only with an eye to what appeals to taste can the uncultivated creativity of the genius furnish models for the beautiful that rival, and in some respects even exceed, those discovered in nature.¹⁶²

If the exclusivity of the concept of genius to artistic activity is closely related to the exemplarity of its works, then this is because both in turn are consequences of the peculiarly incommunicable quality of the form of experience they engender. Both genius and the example are required where the experience of aesthetic objects resists comprehension according to the objective criteria that govern ordinary experience. Though genius is a talent whose implications are broader than the artworks through which it manifests itself, it nonetheless requires these products as the only outwardly visible demonstration of its exemplary capacity for transforming an understanding of natural productivity into a guideline for purposive human action. Exemplarity, then, is the unique form of communicability that takes hold in objects of aesthetic comprehension, when the failure to grasp an object according to the rules of objective cognition leaves its experience incapable of being described or transmitted according to the concepts of the understanding that ensure universal intelligibility. The originality of what is produced through genius is such that its causal basis cannot admit of determination according to a set of rules or precepts that might precede it. And yet, this does not mean that such products cannot display, in the organization of their form, a principle of their own production to which they adhere (formal purposiveness), which while not permitting their

¹⁶² Despite preserving the priority of natural beauty in terms of its greater tendency to remain free of the appearance of any determinate, objective purposiveness in its causal mechanism, Kant will identify several advantages that artistic beauty gains over nature, which will be discussed below.

objective cognition through the categories nonetheless supplies in a mere intuition sufficient evidence of their irreducibility to mere accident. To say that genius is a talent for combining creative originality with exemplarity is to indicate its capacity to visibly demonstrate its purposive activity without betraying a determinate purpose, and yet while also avoiding the appearance of capricious lawlessness. “Since nonsense too can be original, the products of genius must also be models, i.e., they must be exemplary; hence, though they do not themselves arise through imitation, still they must serve others for this.”¹⁶³

But what exactly are the artworks of genius meant to serve as examples of, and for whom? And how can a talent which “must be considered the very opposite of a spirit of imitation” nonetheless have its purpose in creating models for others to imitate? These tensions in Kant’s account of genius are, to be sure, exacerbated by the rather rough and incomplete treatment of the topic, and yet satisfactory answers can be discovered by insisting on and attending to the consistency of this account and its foundational concepts with the argument of the rest of the *Critique* and its overall project. In other words, only insofar as we continue to look toward the task of determining the supersensible substrate uniting the laws of freedom and the laws of nature, as well as the indication of such a substrate through the experience of taste, will we be able to adequately work out the apparent inconsistencies in Kant’s account of genius. But we should not expect that such inconsistencies will be entirely removed, recalling that the task of genius is precisely to give a coherent presentation of the necessary conjunction of incommensurable elements of experience.

¹⁶³ CJ 308

Genius is a talent of the mind that finds its only direct application in the production of aesthetic objects. Nevertheless, in keeping with the transcendental tenor of the investigation, it is the talent itself, rather than its potential for application that is of interest. In other words, Kant is after a determination of the talents that constitute genius, rather than an understanding of the products to which these talents give rise. As the sections preceding the account of genius demonstrated, no special concepts are required for the aesthetic understanding of artworks over and beyond what has already been explored in the analytic of taste. The account of genius is therefore the response to a question concerning an ability that manifests itself in the artwork that appeals to our aesthetic sense. The path from taste to genius is established by the continuity of an experience, rather than imposed by the arbitrary reversal of a detached investigation.

It is also crucial to recognize, therefore, that the account of genius is as radically anti-psychologicistic in its interest and its orientation as an investigation of a mental capacity could be. Its task is not to prove the possibility of a unique talent belonging to the artist, but rather, beginning from the assumption that such a talent exists, to explain the conditions of its possibility, and thereby to discover within it something containing far more widespread implications for experience in general, with consequences that far outstrip the realm of genius, of the artwork, and even of the beautiful. Genius is therefore regarded as a highly specific talent, rather than as a type of personality to which this talent belongs. Insofar as this talent belongs to certain people and not to others, this difference cannot be traced back to differences in their intellect, nor even to the accumulated experiences which individuate personalities. The talent of the genius is both irreducible to other capacities and entirely innate, both of which Kant infers from the fact

that, although every form of art depends upon some formal rules, each nonetheless contains a necessary element that exceeds these rules and which cannot be taught or borrowed from observation. “No [genius] can show how his ideas, rich in fancy and yet also in thought, arise and meet in his mind.” And yet this is not simply because others would be incapable of comprehending what is clearly grasped by the genius; rather “the reason is that he himself does not know.”¹⁶⁴

In fact, it is perhaps the first principle of genius that it finds the model for its activity not merely in himself, nor in the work of other artists, but rather in the beauty of nature. This interpretation, on which Kant’s entire account of genius is staked with regard to its very tenability as a solution to the problem of how reflective judgment provides a transition between nature and freedom, asserts both that this capacity does not owe itself to the autonomy of the subject and that it is derived from a relation between the subject and nature, namely, an openness to its products as indicative of something essential regarding beauty. In perhaps his most succinct statement on the topic, Kant asserts: “Genius is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.”¹⁶⁵ Strictly speaking, then, genius is not merely the site of the transition between theoretical and practical ideas, and even less the production of such a site; Kant’s account of genius is comprehended fully only when we see that genius itself is the medium through which nature and freedom are connected. The beautiful artwork that this activity generates is merely the visible effect of this transition, and the manner of its presentation before the capacity for judgment that we call taste.

¹⁶⁴ CJ 309

¹⁶⁵ CJ 307

But so far we have merely stated the task of genius negatively, by indicating the pitfalls it must avoid, or indirectly, through the products to which its talent gives rise. This much has been made clear, at least: the work of genius cannot be thought apart from its relation to nature. And yet in order to give both a positive and a direct account of the work of genius, we will need to again appeal to the two senses of phenomenal nature at work in the critical philosophy. If, as we have argued, the highest function of the genius is to serve as a model for the exercise of freedom within the world of sense, then the primary meaning of this talent must be its unique access to the supersensible laws of sensible nature. The genius must read and interpret nature in the sense of a system of causal laws, and adapt these laws to the principle of human freedom, in order to gain access through the effects of his purposive activity to nature in the sense of the sum total of phenomenal objects.

It is the subtlety of its relation to and understanding of nature that stands out as perhaps the single most distinctive character of the genius. For while Kant insists that in order to appeal to the standards of aesthetic sense the genius must follow nature, it is nonetheless just as clear that such following is anything but a form of straightforward copying. “On this point everyone agrees: that genius must be considered the very opposite of a spirit of imitation.”¹⁶⁶ The genius must look to nature and indeed borrow something from it in order to produce the works through which its own activity becomes manifest. And yet the definitive moment of this adaptation of nature for the purposes of art cannot take place on the level of the sensible appearance with which it begins and in which it ends; rather it is what takes place between the recognition of natural beauty and the production of the artwork that constitutes the irreducible activity of genius.

¹⁶⁶ CJ 308

Furthermore, the non-imitative dimension of this activity is attested by the fact that the genius contributes something entirely novel to our understanding of aesthetic experience, over and beyond the limits of natural beauty. Only by insisting on this can we understand Kant's curious, self-opposing formulation that the artwork of genius must look like nature while still appearing to be a product of artistic activity.

If natural beauty enjoys a superiority insofar as it, above all, can display formal purposiveness in its organization while nonetheless maintaining the absence of a determinate purpose in its causation, the superiority of the genius rests in its capacity to offer us a concrete model of how such a peculiar combination can be embodied in an activity. Genius joins the purposelessness of natural generation to the purposivity of human freedom, and in so doing displays a talent that, beyond producing objects of beauty, stands as an example for the chief problem dominating human subjectivity: how to bring its practical freedom to bear in the world of objects that it inhabits. This it accomplishes by meeting the bare minimum standard for exemplarity, conformity to a discernible rule, yet without betraying the source of its exemplary activity in a formula that could be extracted from its products. "Since...a product can never be called art unless it is preceded by a rule, it must be nature in the subject that gives the rule to art; in other words, fine art is possible only as the product of genius."¹⁶⁷ It is on this point that we can see Kant's adoption of a particular element of the classical conception of genius (*ingenium*), though with his own twist added to it.

That the genius does not discover the inspiration for her creative act within the power of her own intellect does not mean that it surges out of the depths of her mind recklessly, or at random. It must follow a rule, without whose guidance it would fail to be

¹⁶⁷ CJ 307

worthy of the title art. Its only other possible source is thus in nature, which is why Kant insists that nature must lend this rule to the artist. To this extent, Kant borrows the conception of *ingenium* in the sense of *gignere*, that is something implanted with in the subject by nature, which determines and shapes the exercise of its freedom without falling under its influence. And while this talent must be innately implanted, rather than developed from “a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other,” Kant nonetheless insists on demystifying this inborn talent for non-conceptual apprehension of nature’s productivity as thoroughly as possible. This talent is not implanted by divine providence, but is read out of the sensible world of nature that surrounds us all, even if it is only understood as the source of beauty by a select few. In other words, genius represents a kind of heightened sensitivity to a manner of comprehending nature that is, in principle, available to whoever becomes receptive to it. There are no special mental powers required to produce the effects of genius, though as we will shortly see, its exercise does require a particular arrangement of the powers that be expected to be present in any judging subject whatsoever. Among the many implications of this fact, the most significant is that the lesson of genius holds even for those who have neither talent for nor interest in the fine arts. The much vaunted exemplarity of the genius is a model not only for those would also produce aesthetic objects, but for whoever might be affected by them.

Since the rule that gives rise to art cannot come out of human subjectivity, or the rules of freedom, it must therefore have its source in a rule of nature, which is perfectly consistent as well with the insight into the exemplary status of nature as a source of the beautiful. But if nature is capable of generating and supplying the rule for art (and more

broadly, therefore, for the exercise of freedom in the realm of phenomena) only the activity of the genius is capable of interpreting this rule from out of the purposive arrangement of natural products and transforming it into an exemplary figure of its own activity in the beautiful artwork. Thus while Kant stresses the importance of originality in the work of genius in order to highlight the indeterminacy of the rule that governs its activity, he just as quickly counters this by pointing to the need to restrain the ingenuity of its products, which does not serve any purpose as an end in itself. “The foremost property of genius must be originality. [But] since nonsense too can be original, the products of genius must also be models.”¹⁶⁸ The works of genius serve as models for others to follow—and here we must understand that this includes non-artists as well—in just the sense that they indicate the possibility of a form of productive activity capable of manifesting the spontaneity of the will in products of objective nature. In other words, what the genius produces is a model in the sense that it, like any other aesthetic object, attests to the possibility, if not to the actuality, of a mode of causation that combines elements of natural mechanism with the causality of freedom. This is why Kant insists that the works of genius are meant “not to be copied (*Nachmachung*) but to be imitated (*Nachahmung*).”¹⁶⁹ The point, however inadequately formulated, is to indicate a difference between the activity of genius and the products that this activity produces. Replicating the works of genius is as little useful to the development of taste as the straightforward copying of natural beauty is to the development of genius. Kant in fact struggles visibly to develop a terminology adequate to the subtlety of this distinction and capable of indicating the complexity of the relation of genius to the productivity of nature

¹⁶⁸ CJ 308

¹⁶⁹ CJ 177

without which it could not operate or even define its own task. But the underlying point seems to be just this: in all cases, the mechanical activity of slavish, mimetic reproduction undermines the free purposivity that must manifest itself in the appearance of an object in order for it to appeal to taste.

These considerations are complicated considerably, however, by the fact that Kant sets about explicitly distinguishing the capacity for taste from the talent of genius, even arguing that these two complementary abilities do not necessarily coincide in one and the same individual. This argument involves both the rather uncontroversial and empirically corroborated claim that the person of highly developed taste need not display any especially high degree of talent for artistic production, as well as the more surprising and seemingly implausible claim that even the most highly talented artistic genius (as distinct from the skilled artisan, whose talent has far more to do with the formulas and precepts that govern activities directed to determinate purposes) might altogether lack the judgment necessary for evaluating the beauty of her own works. While Kant does indeed seem to believe, for reasons that we will try to demonstrate, that the talent of genius can thrive in an individual altogether lacking in taste, this does not seem to be the primary point of introducing this distinction between the two capacities. The interpretation of genius that I will offer presupposes that Kant had two other major reasons for introducing this conceptual distinction. The first is that it prepares us for an understanding of genius that does not reduce it to a capacity that is merely, or even primarily, the reverse of taste—that is, the ability to produce appearances according to the criteria of aesthetic taste and in order to appeal to this common sense. And second, the very notion of a genius without taste, insofar as it strains against our expectation and therefore exposes it

to us, helps in introducing a pivotal distinction between what we might call the unrefined and the refined genius. Though he begins simply by discussing the former, in order to discern whatever is essential to genius as such, Kant's ultimate interest is directed entirely toward the latter, who alone is capable of fulfilling the total potential of the talent for art.

Although the account of genius must be developed from out of the account of taste, insofar as the artwork's relation to taste is distinct from that of natural products, Kant nevertheless maintains that the mental powers constituting the talent of genius are different from those that contribute to the formation of judgments of taste. This claim says more than that the characteristic activity of the genius and that of the person of taste are conceptually distinct; it analyzes the distinction between these activities into a difference in the arrangement of representational powers required to guide and sustain these activities. This further distinction allows us to explain why the capacity to judge artworks aesthetically does not indicate any special inclination toward the talent of genius, nor the ability to produce beautiful artworks a proficiency in matters of taste. Taste and genius are distinct in their implications, as well as in their works. The immediate implication of this analysis of taste and genius into distinct constitutive powers is that it prepares us to avoid the expectation that the complementary relation between these talents should coincide in one and the same subject. The creative skill of the artist presupposes an audience capable of appreciating the fruit of its efforts, just as the appreciation developed by the connoisseur of art withers in the absence of the artworks that sustain it. But neither requires, nor even offers any compelling reason to prefer, that its counterpart be supplied from within the same consciousness. If anything

can be expected, in fact, it would rather be that the purposivity of an appearance is best sustained for the viewer who does not have direct access to the source of its production.

This account that proceeds according to an examination of the constitutive powers of genius both confirms and strains against our common sense expectations, based perhaps on some amount of empirical evidence of persons exhibiting these talents. While it is not at all difficult to assent to the distinction insofar as it recognizes that the capacity to judge appearances aesthetically, even if it is supplemented by a large measure of technical skill, does not suffice to make one capable of producing such appearances oneself, the converse does not initially sound plausible. It is somewhat more difficult, however, to imagine an artistic genius entirely lacking the ability to judge artworks, whether her own or those of others, according to a pure, aesthetic standard. Such judgment would seem to be a part of the requisite skill involved in the production of the artwork, without which genius would be incapable of its characteristic activity.

What kind of rule is it that is given to the activity of the artist through genius? “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.”¹⁷⁰ In other words, the rule of the genius must stand in precisely the same relation to the product as the formal purposiveness in relation to the object of taste. It cannot precede the appearance, lest it become determinative with respect to it, and yet neither can it be measured directly on the surface of the product. Rather, it must be read from out of the appearance, from whatever in the appearance is, but is not merely, part of its sensible presentation. Now as we have already seen in our discussion of taste, the ability to read such a quality out of the

¹⁷⁰ CJ 309

appearance of an object requires above all the capacity to reflectively sustain the formal character of its presentation in the free play of the imagination, in relation to the understanding's activity, and yet without bringing this appearance to stand conclusively under a determinate concept of the understanding.

The chief distinction that we discovered between the powers of reflective and determinative judgment (*Urteilkraft*) is that only the latter has its definitive result in a representation that might be considered the product of its activity, a judgment (*Urteil*). By comparison, the object of a reflective judgment is not the conclusion of the mental activity that supports it, but rather the moment of its initiation, and the signal that the appearance demands further investigation beyond the immediacy of its appearance. Beauty is a marker of something unsettled in an appearance, the insufficient givenness of an object, and an invitation to respond to it. The question of genius must therefore be thought as the ability to generate appearances that appeal to taste, insofar as they seem to indicate the presence of a lawfulness whose source remains indeterminable in the sensible givenness of the artwork. But because such a rule must come from nature rather than from the human intellect, the genius as such may remain quite unaware of the significance and the possibility of its own activity. This explains why Kant maintains that “if an author owes a product to his genius, he himself does not know how he came by the ideas for it; nor is it in his power to devise such products at his pleasure, or by following a plan.”¹⁷¹ While taste is directed from the mere appearance of the object toward the question of its origin, and may in fact involve a rapid forgetting of the former, genius moves in the opposite direction, searching for an appearance capable of manifesting the causal rule it discovers in nature. It is thus possible to understand how these

¹⁷¹ CJ 308

complementary powers need not necessarily coincide in an individual, and how in fact the presence of either one might even inhibit or disrupt the activity of the other.

The ultimate significance of Kant's efforts to distance genius from taste, however, can be traced back as far as the Preface to the *Critique*, in which Kant struggles to distinguish the transcendental aim of the critical inquiry from the particularity of the content through which it must be pursued. For it must be recalled that while taste dominates the investigation of reflective judgment, it is meant only to serve as a point of entry into the investigation of the transcendental faculty whose activity it demonstrates. As Kant writes, "Since this inquiry into our power of taste, which is the aesthetic power of judgment, has a transcendental aim, rather than the aim to form and cultivate taste, I would like to think that it will be judged leniently as regards its deficiency for the latter purpose."¹⁷² To confront Kant's account of aesthetic judgment on the ground of its failure to produce clear and adequate guidelines for the evaluation of artworks is to miss the argument of the *Critique*, in an even more profound manner than might first appear. As we will demonstrate in the final section of this chapter, the failure of artworks to perfectly illustrate the concepts set forth in Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment actually confirms, rather than undermines his account.

VII. Genius and the Perfection of Judgment

Only when we look through the artwork to the talent of the genius responsible for its production will we grasp the full meaning of the power of judgment, and the most straightforward explanation of its capacity to serve as the transcendental basis uniting theoretical and practical consciousness. Just as the critique of taste is not meant as a guide for the appreciation of beautiful artworks, no more is it intended to limit itself to the

¹⁷² CJ 170

receptivity of aesthetic pleasure. For although the activity of the artistic genius is, in respect of its relation to the artwork, opposed to taste, we must ask whether it too might not represent a privileged point of insight into the transcendental interest of the critique, namely, the “aesthetic power of judgment.” At first glance, genius could not appear to be further from an exemplar of the capacity for judgment. Its characteristic capacity seems to be an activity of production rather than a reflective mode of thought, and its talent need not include the ability to judge the aesthetic value of its own works. To bring the figure of genius squarely within the realm of judgment, therefore, will require us to sever its connection to the phenomenon through which it is primarily identified, namely, the work of art. The difficulty of this conceptual differentiation would seem to be insurmountable insofar as artistic production is presented as the essential characteristic of the genius: “Judging beautiful objects to be such requires taste; but fine art itself, i.e., production of such objects, requires genius.”¹⁷³ But we should attend carefully to the distinction Kant is drawing here, and consider the strategic motivation behind this apparent opposition between judging and producing. For Kant does not simply equate genius with the power of generating beautiful appearances, but rather presents the former as a necessary condition for the latter.

Such an understanding of genius is far more compatible with the other striking formulation that Kant provides for this talent: “Genius is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.”¹⁷⁴ Our concluding analysis of Kant’s account of the artistic genius will focus on the implications of this concise but conceptually rich statement as the clearest indication of the argument we have been

¹⁷³ CJ 311

¹⁷⁴ CJ 307

building all along—namely, that this peculiar talent represents the highest possible accomplishment of the reflective dimension of experience as the ground for the unity of our theoretical and practical ideas. First and foremost, we must recognize in this formulation the separation of the talent of genius from the activity through which it makes itself recognizable. Some part of this distinction can be understood in terms of the difference between potency and act, but it cannot simply be reduced to those terms, as the talent that constitutes genius exceeds its application to the production of artworks, even if it has no other direct outlet. For we might just as readily say, to alter the formula provided by Kant, that art is the activity in which genius takes upon itself, as a matter of its own responsibility, the rule that it discovers in nature.

The first step in developing such an interpretation of genius is to recall the sense in which Kant stresses the importance of cultivating and giving discipline to the inherently boundless talent that belongs to the creative mind. The limitlessness of the genius is analogous to that of the faculty of imagination from which it draws the chief source of its powers; though neither is self-sufficiently capable of producing its wealth of images *ex nihilo*—the imagination depends on the sensible faculty as the genius depends on the beauty of nature—both are capable of a practically infinite extension and reduplication of whatever material they draw from their respective sources. Drawing inspiration from the purposive organization of natural products, the genius refashions what it has observed, outdoing nature in the elegantly extravagant needlessness of its intricate forms. Reining in this ceaseless abundance of the imaginative process by bringing its activity under the supervision of a rule is essential to ensuring that the works of genius become recognizable as such, and that they gain an appearance of

purposiveness to match the freedom through which they are generated. Thus, when Kant writes that taste must “clip the wings” of genius, this can only mean that its creative boundlessness must be made to willingly submit to considerations about what will appeal to the aesthetic pleasure that may be expected of an audience. In other words, the genius must *become* an artist, and art must remain for the genius a form of discipline to which it gives itself over as the necessary price for communicating its activity to others.

Distinguishing between the raw and the cultivated forms of genius on the basis of the suitability of their products to the standards of taste, however, carries the implication that the artwork itself is merely a sign, rather than the essence, of the power in question. The artwork is marked throughout Kant’s account of the fine arts as a site of compromise, where the inspiration of the creative imagination must cooperate with acquisition of the technical skills required to give it intelligible form. Thus despite his distinction of the mechanical from the fine arts on the basis that the former can be acquired merely through the memorization of a set of rules, Kant concedes that “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.”¹⁷⁵ This implies, on the one hand, that the genius does not have complete dominion over the artwork, yet conversely, also suggests that the fine arts fail to contain everything that belongs to genius. The marriage between genius and art is forged of convenience; each requires the other in order to attain its own fulfillment, and yet refuses to give itself entirely over to their union for fear of compromising the same.

This compromise that is required of genius with respect to the discipline of artistic forms goes a great distance in helping to explain the importance of the exemplary status

¹⁷⁵ CJ 310

of artworks. Since the aesthetic object is merely an indirect expression, at best, of the creative talent, it is misapprehended if taken as itself a direct manifestation of the creative power behind its generation. The act of creation is itself so heavily refracted through the appearance of its product that one must look through it in order to glimpse the genius, just as one must penetrate the mere surface of nature in order to recognize the free purposivity in its intricate forms. Thus when Kant writes that genius must draw its inspiration out of nature and carry it over into art as a rule, it must be understood that this is not the same as the technical rule referred to above, that constitutes artistic skill. “Rather, the rule must be abstracted from what the artist has done...which others may use to test their own talent, letting it serve them as their model.”¹⁷⁶ The rule that the genius gives to art is not a mechanical rule, not a formula that can be transmitted in the language of the concept, but the signal of a force that can only be crystallized in a mere appearance: “that is why the models of fine art are the only means of transmitting these ideas to posterity.”¹⁷⁷ The peculiar cognitive status of the example serves to perfectly illustrate the complex dynamic that surrounds the work of the genius and makes any simple statement of its essence impossible. When Kant says that the works of genius aspire to exemplary status, this means not only that individual artworks must serve as models for others to follow, but further that the arts in general are merely exemplary of the power of the genius, and not a direct manifestation of it.

The example is a singular representation of a general or universal concept. As such, it may serve to stimulate the imaginative presentation of such an idea—in the first *Critique* Kant calls examples the “go-cart of judgment”—and yet it must also, as a

¹⁷⁶ CJ 309

¹⁷⁷ CJ 310

delimitation of what it stands for, necessarily fall short of the idea's full complexity and scope. The function of an example is thus to make intelligible what could not otherwise be thought, redressing a failure either in the faculty of knowledge or in an idea that is in itself indemonstrable. An exemplary image thus appeals to the empirical imagination by placing an image before it, and yet awakens its transcendental function as the point of mediation between the sensible and the intelligible. What must be recognized, therefore, is that this power to stimulate the transcendental imagination that belongs to the example is staked entirely on the singularity of what is presented in it. Any general concept can, with sufficient imagination, be illustrated by means of an example, and yet the example itself, inasmuch as it gives sensible form to a concept, cannot itself be represented by a further example. All of these qualities of the example are entirely relevant to the sense in which the artworks of genius must, in order to be recognizable as such, exemplify the creative talent that underlies and makes possible their creation as aesthetic objects.

Insofar as genius can be said to have a proper task, it is to produce artworks according to a rule that it borrows from nature, and to draw attention to this activity by means of the aesthetic appeal of its product. Without this final reference back to the generative question, the search for the source and the possibility of an activity embodying free purposiveness, the talent and the labor of genius remain tethered to the singularity of a merely pleasant sensation. The intrinsic movement from the pleasure of an appearance to the question of its causal origin that we followed earlier, is both what separates the beautiful from the agreeable, and the fine art of the genius from the instrumental pleasure of mere decorative adornment.

What the emphasis on exemplarity ultimately helps to clarify, therefore, is the sense of genius as a medium, as that “*through which* nature gives the rule to art.” The talent belonging to the genius is roughly akin to that of a translator or an interpreter, although even this suggests too strong a parallel between the two sides to which the genius simultaneously belongs. For to discover a common language in which to give voice to the causal mechanism of nature and the free lawfulness of human purposivity requires a talent capable of uniting concepts that have no direct point of contact save within the human subject, in whom they collide with the force of an ambiguous but unrelenting imperative. Genius is, above all, the capacity to respond to such an imperative, and in so doing, to constitute the tenuous unity that belongs to human experience in the broadest possible sense. In fact it is only through this capacity to bring the supersensible law of nature into human activity and return it, transformed, into nature, that art has any claim on the beautiful whatsoever. For despite Kant’s repeated assertions of the greater affinity between the purposelessness of beauty and the indifferent mechanism of nature, genius manages to disguise the intentionality of its production, granting it “the look of nature even though we are conscious of it as art.”¹⁷⁸

The task that is required of the genius is clear, as are the stakes involved. And yet it remains extremely difficult to determine exactly how the artwork is meant to capture the appearance of nature for itself, and to do so through the insight of genius, when it is nevertheless clear “that genius must be considered the very opposite of a spirit of imitation.”¹⁷⁹ Kant’s introduction of the concept of spirit (*Geist*) into the discussion at this point is not merely incidental, as the word appears over twenty times in the

¹⁷⁸ CJ 307

¹⁷⁹ CJ 308

discussion of the fine arts, and nowhere else within the entirety of the *Critique*. Kant defines *Geist* as the “animating principle in the mind (*das belebende Prinzip im Gemüte*),” and associates it with the creative originality that counterposes the technical discipline to which the artistic impulse must submit. Thus while *Geist* appears only in this section of the text, it is defined in terms that place it directly within a conceptual dynamic that pervades the entire *Critique*, namely that of the “quickenings” (*Belebungen*) of the imagination in its free interplay with the lawfulness of the understanding. Seen in this light, the opposition between the powers constituting genius and taste is greatly minimized, even though the contrast in their activities remains.

But the precise nature of the connection between artistic creativity and the animating principle of spirit still needs to be elaborated, if the account of genius is to advance substantively upon the gains of the analysis of taste, and claim its place at the pinnacle of the power of reflective judgment. More precisely, we must determine for what new tasks the enlivening of the imagination prepares it, such that the creative mental activity of the genius can rightly be regarded as itself actualizing the fully realized powers of the mind, rather than merely preparing for the provocation of this experience through the aesthetic object. In the *Anthropology*, Kant reflects on the use of the Latin *ingenium* and the French *génie* in German, offering instead the phrase “*eigenthümlicher Geist*” as a possible translation.¹⁸⁰ His point is to suggest that genius is nothing more than an inborn wealth of spirit, and that the prevalent use of the Latinate in spite of the perfect adequacy of the German expression is merely an unconscious indication of the “mystical” quality of this inexplicable talent. But the task of a critique of judgment rests on the possibility of the demystification of the creative spirit. Again the clear conceptual

¹⁸⁰ *Anthropology* 225

separation of genius from the artwork is instrumental for this purpose, as it allows us to maintain the shroud of secrecy that surrounds the latter while laying the former bare before the analytic gaze of criticism. The artwork must retain its indeterminacy in order to harmonize with the freedom of the imagination; the activity of the artist, on the other hand, must conform to determinable a priori principles or else sacrifice its transcendental significance. If we attend to what those works that are explicable only as products of genius have in common, we will see that “they must arouse our interest by means of ideas; spirit sets the imagination into motion and it provides the faculties with a large field of operation.”¹⁸¹ This is the most direct and concrete sense Kant gives as to what is meant by the quickening of the mental powers that spirit instills. The mind as a whole is given an expanded territory by means of ideas, but these are ideas that can only be sustained and reflected in the imagination. In other words, they are ideas whose presentation is intrinsically connected with the singularity of a sensible appearance, or, to explicitly contradict what was said earlier regarding the possibility of furnishing concepts with examples, ideas that admit only of a single and irreducible example.

We are now at the core of the transcendental analysis of judgment, which is to say, that we have arrived at those ideas whose operation is chiefly responsible not only for aesthetic taste, but for the harmonious cooperation of the various sources of representation residing within the whole of our mental powers. “Now I maintain that [spirit] is nothing but the ability to exhibit aesthetic ideas; and 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.”¹⁸² These

¹⁸¹ Anthropology 225

¹⁸² CJ 314

presentations of the imagination are rightly called “ideas” in the technical Kantian sense, insofar as they gesture towards something that lies beyond the bounds of phenomenal experience, even though they do so while masquerading in the guise of mere phenomena. In this sense, aesthetic ideas invert the logic of rational ideas—a term which previously could only have been considered redundant—as concepts to which no adequate intuition can possibly be supplied. Thus while the first *Critique* reserves the use of the term “idea” (*Idee*) for “a concept formed from notions (*ein Begriff aus Notionen*) and transcending the possibility of experience...or a concept of reason,” here it takes on a wholly different meaning in order to account for a species of representation that critical philosophy had not previously anticipated.¹⁸³ This expansion of the technical meaning of ideas marks a watershed moment in the development of the critical philosophy, challenging both the definition of what constitutes experience and the merely regulative status of ideas. For aesthetic ideas are, by their nature, only available to us through the appearance of sensible nature (or art), and thus they present the possibility of an experience that is not synthesized according to a determinate concept; and on the other, as ideas that are embodied in phenomenal objects, they demonstrate the possibility of an empirically verifiable connection between uncognizable ideas and cognized things, or between thinking and knowing.

But to credit the aesthetic ideas of genius with connecting thinking and knowing, nature and freedom, the theoretical and the practical modes of thought is notably different from the claim that these distinctions are undone by the transformative power of the creative imagination. If the imagination is, as Kant suggests, “very mighty when it

¹⁸³ Toward the beginning of the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*, Kant exhaustively enumerates the various species that belong to the genus of “representations.” (CPR A320/B377) Though the list is meant to be exhaustive, it of course leaves no room for the possibility of aesthetic ideas.

creates...another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it,"¹⁸⁴ it is nonetheless manifest that this power is granted to it only by virtue of its dependence on nature as the source of its material. Though both the experience of aesthetic taste, and by extension the creativity of genius insofar as its cultivation depends upon it, are exercises of a transcendental function of the imagination, obeying the a priori principle of "free purposiveness," it is nonetheless the case that both require an empirical encounter with phenomenal nature in order to be set into motion. Another way of describing the discipline that taste brings to genius is precisely as the capacity to give the productive imagination reference to the conceptually organized order of nature without allowing it to be determined by any particular concept.

This insight also allows us to now determine with greater clarity the meaning of Kant's insistence that aesthetic consciousness is concerned exclusively with the formal aspect of the appearance. As we noted earlier, Kant does not intend primarily to invoke a conventional distinction between form and matter, but to point toward the difference between that aspect of intuition that is inextricably bound to the particularity of a direct and immediate sensation, and a further element that is, because it can be separated out and sustained in the imagination, capable of transcending every determination of time and place. That same sense of form is sustained here, but given further elaboration, as Kant credits the imagination of the genius not with the ability to generate its own sensible content, but rather to creatively transform, whether by alteration, repetition, or recombination, what is given to from out of nature. In other words, the aesthetic consciousness of artistic production and reception alike is significant or its ability to take up the objectivity of the world and, while heeding it for what it is, rework it into the sign

¹⁸⁴ CJ 314

of something that reaches beyond itself. Genius is the talent for making nature into a symbol.

It is with the account of symbolic presentation that Kant finally completes his presentation of the genius, as it alone can finally clarify the difference between the original presentation of nature and its aesthetic reformulation. The symbol is to the aesthetic ideas of genius what the schema is to the objects of ordinary cognition; it provides the logic according to which its sensible content is drawn into a connection with the intelligibility of a concept, in such a way that this relation renders their unity meaningful. But the symbol is also more than this. For while Kant is careful to point out that schemata themselves are, as transcendental conditions of knowledge, not themselves objects of experience, the symbol is a tangible image in which nature and freedom are brought into direct and productive contact with one another. A symbol is a duplicitous appearance, one that stands out and points beyond itself. The symbolic image does not, therefore, simply facilitate the combination of heterogeneous faculties, but rather enacts and preserves it in the exemplarity of the beautiful artwork. The symbol is able to produce and sustain such unity in our representations because, unlike the schema, it is not based on the community of the representations it synthesizes, but rather discovers a means of bringing them together despite their insurmountable difference. Consider, for example, the following explanation of the distinction between the function of the schema and that of the symbol:

Schematic exhibition is demonstrative. Symbolic exhibition uses an analogy (for which we use empirical intuitions as well), in which judgment performs a double function: it applies the concept to the object of a sensible intuition; and then it applies the mere rule by which it reflects on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the former object is only the symbol.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ CJ 352

It is this doubled, analogical relation embodied by the symbol that allows it to hold together, however tentatively, representations that are in themselves wholly incompatible. But it also gives us an account of how the genius operates, by clarifying how an aesthetic idea can resonate with conceptually generally, while avoiding being subsumed and fixed under the definite boundaries of any given concept. For as Kant writes, “an aesthetic idea is a presentation of the imagination which is conjoined with a given concept and is connected...with such a multiplicity of partial presentations that no expression that stands for a determinate concept can be found for it.”¹⁸⁶ But this refusal of the aesthetic presentation to be conscripted for the purpose of illustrating any particular concept is also the condition of its suitability to symbolize an infinite variety of possible ideas. In order to do so, it depends on discovering the supersensible law that reveals itself in a sensible appearance. This talent, belonging to the artistic genius above all others, serves as the highest example for the possibility of human freedom to take hold within the soil of nature.

In the following chapters, we will examine the crucial ways in which the discovery of such a power in genius, and of the means of perpetuating in taste, disrupt and transform the accounts of nature and of freedom presented in the first two *Critiques*, even while it prepares them for their greatest possible unity. For while the discovery of a rich and varied aesthetic mode of consciousness indeed makes it possible to think between the ideas of theoretical and practical philosophy without the artificial presupposition of a separation of principles and of corresponding modes of experience, it nonetheless also presents several troubling challenges to the basic concepts according to

¹⁸⁶ CJ 316

which each of these realms of thought is constituted in itself. The third and fourth chapters, therefore, will examine the effects of the aesthetic genius on the landscape of our objective knowledge of nature and the fulfillment of our moral calling, respectively.

Chapter Three

Knowledge Without Objects: The Work of Genius as Second Nature

“Human reason has this peculiar fate that *in one species of its knowledge...*”¹⁸⁷

To assert the possibility of metaphysics as Kant does in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to claim for philosophy a totalizing dominion over the world of nature, a thoroughly penetrating gaze which nothing, not even a single blade of grass, can elude. The hope that philosophy might achieve such a comprehensive vision is staked on the critical purification of the cognitive faculties. Only thus can the queen of sciences reclaim its rightful throne and abandon the “random groping among mere concepts” in which it otherwise remains mired. In the Introduction to his *Logic*, Kant provides a brief thumbnail sketch of “a history of philosophy,” in which he expresses an interesting ambivalence towards his own philosophical present. “In our age the philosophy of nature flourishes, and among natural scientists there are great names, such as Newton. More recent philosophers of distinguished and lasting name cannot be cited at present, because here everything is, as it were, in flux. What one builds, another tears down.”¹⁸⁸ For all its attention to the effusiveness of natural productivity, such philosophy misses the utter simplicity with which reason is capable of containing nature within a single glance.

Either metaphysics is capable of circumscribing the entire domain of objects that are possible through the mechanism of natural causes, or it is nothing at all.

Metaphysics, on the view which we are adopting, is the only one of all the sciences which dare promise that through a small but concentrated effort it will attain, and this in a short time, such contemplation as will leave no task to our successors save that of adapting it in a didactic manner according to their own

¹⁸⁷ CPR Aviii

¹⁸⁸ Kant, *Logic*, trans. R. Hartman and W. Schwarz (New York: Dover, 1988), p. 37.

preferences, without their being able to add anything whatsoever to its content...In this field nothing can escape us.¹⁸⁹

Such an understanding of the physical world, and of the power of metaphysics to exhaustively articulate its boundaries, rests entirely on the foundation of transcendental idealism, with its assurance that reason “knows a priori of things only what we ourselves put into them.”¹⁹⁰ Adopting such a mechanistic conception of nature grounded in the transcendental conditions of objective cognition offers the signal advantage of rendering nature thoroughly regular and predictable, while simultaneously demonstrating the foundation of the possibility of its transparency to a sensible intellect. But at the same time, it places definite limits on the reach of such an intellect into nature, leaving it unequipped to discover answers to a whole realm of questions that may nevertheless naturally arise for it. Kant indicates his awareness of these limits in his remark that the critique of pure reason is capable only of determining what knowledge can accomplish a priori, but not how the faculty of thought itself is possible.¹⁹¹ The same transcendental ground that helps to clarify and support the objective knowledge of nature also has the effect of obscuring whatever questions lie beneath it.

Just as, on the side of the faculty of knowledge, transcendental philosophy must acknowledge its inability to penetrate into the origins of the possibility of the representational powers whose legitimate employment it delimits, so on the side of the system of nature that such knowledge reveals there must equally be a persistent blind spot, preventing any investigation into the foundation on which the natural laws that support phenomena themselves rest. Though the system of mechanical laws proves

¹⁸⁹ CPR Axx

¹⁹⁰ CPR Bxviii

¹⁹¹ CPR Axvii

perfectly adequate in terms of capturing every object within the order of nature, this order itself, the principle of its organization, exceeds its grasp. The understanding can account for the parts of nature only as objects, that is, as the recipients of a chain of causation that originates outside these objects, and yet it finds no ground on which to explain the apparently organized and purposive development of individual beings within this system.

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 it that we may boldly state that it is absurd for human beings even to attempt it, or to hope that perhaps 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.¹⁹²

With this challenge to the autonomy of the understanding's dominion over the system of nature, Kant introduces his argument for the introduction of teleological principles into the investigation of nature. Even a natural product so simple as a single blade of grass displays, through the processes of growth and development that are manifest in it, something that apparently exceeds an explanatory model based only on blind mechanism. Only with the added assumption that such objects are purposes of nature, that is products of the deliberate intentionality of an intelligent being capable of acting for the sake of final purposes, can their existence be adequately comprehended by the human intellect.

Of course nothing we encounter in our experience of nature validates the inference that such an intelligent cause actually exists behind the phenomenal realm. The supersensible idea of purposivity driving the organic life of the system of nature is not an objectively determinable fact, but only a subjectively necessary supposition for a finite intellect, and therefore the status of such a teleological principle for thinking the organization of nature is merely regulative. It assists our cognitive faculty in its

¹⁹² CJ 400

interrogation of the natural world by orienting its resources toward the objects of knowledge, and by permitting the greatest possible synthesis of the empirical knowledge gathered under the rules of understanding. But that usefulness does not entitle us to claim any knowledge whatsoever of something which, even if it were present in nature, could never reveal itself to our cognitive faculty within the boundaries of its lawful employment. The concept of a purpose, like any other supersensible idea, does not admit of any presentation to our power of sensible intuition; we do not receive this idea from nature, but rather, borrowing it from our own self-understanding as free, moral beings capable of purposive activity, project it upon nature to suit the demands of our own experience.

The concept of a causality through purposes (i.e., the concept of art) does indeed have objective reality, as does the concept of a causality in terms of the mechanism of nature. But the concept of a natural causality in terms of the rule of purposes—and even more so the concept of a being which is the original basis of nature, viz., a being such as cannot at all be given us in experience—while thinkable without contradiction, is nevertheless inadequate for making dogmatic determinations. For we cannot derive such a concept from experience, nor is it required to make experience possible.¹⁹³

Teleological judgments of nature thus, on the one hand, simply offer an indispensable service in supplementing our empirical knowledge of nature. This is the primary aspect of their operation to which Kant attends, and on which the majority of commentators focus.¹⁹⁴ And on the other hand, as this passage indicates, they accomplish this function only by virtue of introducing into our understanding of nature a principle whose very presence seems to undermine precisely what is meant by natural causation. The principle of purposiveness without purpose that animates every teleological judgment is neither a

¹⁹³ CJ 397

¹⁹⁴ “We are not concerned here with this part of Kant’s philosophy; it does not deal with judgment of the particular strictly speaking, and its topic is not nature.” (Arendt, p. 14)

concept of nature, nor of freedom, but an improbable hybrid of the two. It is toward the reexamination of the meaning of nature that this concatenation of principles demands that we will turn our attention in the present chapter.

The transcendental principles of theoretical and practical cognition that Kant specifies by means of the method of critical philosophy are thereby determined in such a way that they avoid any specific reference to the particularities of human psychology or the plight of human existence. Rather the very notion behind a transcendental inquiry is to derive the specifically human essence of knowledge from the conditions of knowledge as such, rather than the reverse. Only by such means is it possible to guarantee that the principles uncovered are universal and necessary, and not merely contingently binding. Thus Kant maintains of the rules governing the a priori cognition of nature that they would be applicable to any intellect whatsoever possessing a sensible faculty of intuition, just as he regards the moral law of pure reason as binding for any rational being. Neither of these forms of cognition is unique to human existence, and from that fact they gain their dignity. With the peculiar synthesis of these principles in reflective judgment, however, Kant introduces into the critical philosophy for the first time what might be regarded as a *human a priori*, that is a subjectively valid species of knowledge that is universal for the human subject, torn as it is between an abstract moral law and the alien indifference of the mechanistic rules of nature.

This distinctively human disposition, however, should not be expected to merely take its place alongside the other forms of a priori thought, as if it were merely one further possibility for generating universal representations. Rather, teleological reflection disrupts the entire terrain of transcendental philosophy, reverberating through the entire

territory through which the boundary between the theoretical and the practical has so painstakingly been drawn. The grip of mechanism on objective nature is forever loosened once that same nature first shows itself to us in the light of the purposive harmony of beauty. For “once I have determinately stated that certain things are products of divine art, how can I still include them among products of nature, when it was precisely because nature cannot produce such things in terms of its own laws that I had to appeal to a cause distinct from it?”¹⁹⁵ The present chapter will provide an account of how such teleological concepts merge with the mechanistic causation of nature, and how this contributes to the integration of objective nature into the uniquely form of human experience that is revealed in the experience of beauty and exemplified in the model of the artistic genius.

I. The Unified Standpoint of Diverging Knowledge

The impact of the *Critique of Pure Reason* upon the very possibility of metaphysical knowledge is all too succinctly captured in the image of the “Copernican revolution,” not because the basic shift in perspective that it initiates is anything short of revolutionary in its effects, but rather because it simultaneously sets in motion more than one revolutionary chain of events. If, for example, the transcendental turn provides the key to the resolution of the impasse in metaphysics between dogmatism and empiricism, it equally prepares for the reconciliation of a conflict that is just as deeply entrenched and perhaps with even more troubling and disruptive consequences for the possibility of science, as well as for the tranquility of the most ordinary human experience. This other conflict is both more disturbing and more persistent because it takes place not between two philosophical schools, but rather between necessary and conflicting principles that

¹⁹⁵ CJ 397

belong to one and the same subjectivity, and each with a legitimate claim to the validity of its employment.

The very reason that the principles on which our knowledge is grounded must be submitted to the discipline of critique has as much to do with their inevitable conflict with the principles governing our practical freedom as it does with protecting against the forms of logical subreption by which cognition claims insight into matters to which it can have no access. The task of this tribunal of reason is to show how knowledge is possible by demonstrating that its possibility does not eclipse the claims of our moral freedom. Hence Kant writes in the B Preface to the first *Critique* that, without completing its task, he “could not...without palpable contradiction, say of one and the same being, for instance the human soul, that its will is free and yet subject to natural necessity.”¹⁹⁶ The critique of the faculty of knowledge is thus equally a defense of the possibility of morality.

But recognizing the many arenas in which this tribunal is simultaneously staged does not require us to step back from the matter and judge which among these questions is the most pressing, which most central to Kant’s concerns. In fact, the truly revolutionary impulse underlying the critical project as a whole is to trace these conceptually distinguishable revolutions in thought to a common source, locating the various conflicts in the doctrine of reason to a conflict within the constitution of pure reason itself. In his discussion of the interest that reason takes in the Antinomies, for example, where this conflict between the principles of nature and freedom is distilled into its purest essence, Kant draws a direct link between the theses supporting the practical interest of reason with dogmatism, and the antitheses supporting the speculative interest

¹⁹⁶ CPR Bxxvii

of reason with skepticism.¹⁹⁷ In the true sense of an antinomy, this is “an entirely natural antithetic, in which there is no need of making subtle enquiries or of laying snares for the unwary, and into which reason of itself quite unavoidably falls.”¹⁹⁸ Both thesis and antithesis are views native to the essence of reason, and to reject either one is to welcome “the death of sound philosophy.” It is crucial to recognize, however, that supporting a view that legitimates both the theses and the antitheses of the antinomies of reason does not amount to endorsing, however tacitly, a form of dualism, however weak. For it is precisely the fact that these two principles of thought converge, not only in the subject but also in the objects over which they legislate, that necessitates a critical intervention to distinguish and delimit their respective domains. From the point of this grand conceptual division forward, one of the chief tasks of the critical philosophy will be to determine how to balance these competing interests of reason and to arbitrate any disputes that might arise between them.

All of this must be kept in mind whenever we, stepping back from the individual tasks of any of the critiques, attempt to think the unity of Kant’s critical philosophy. The various shifts in perspective that are implied, if not explicitly acknowledged, by the movement between the standpoints of the individual *Critiques* and the more general position assumed by their introductions can create confusion when something that is asserted from one standpoint appears to be retracted from another, without this change of perspective being brought directly to our attention. Such a tension arises, for example, in

¹⁹⁷ “in the determination of the cosmological ideas, we find on the side of empiricism, that is, of the antithesis: first, no such practical interest as is provided for the thesis by morals and religion. . . . But secondly, in compensation, empiricism yields advantages to the speculative interest of reason, which are very attractive and far surpass those which dogmatic teaching bearing on the ideas of reason can offer.” (CPR A468/B496)

¹⁹⁸ A407/B433

Kant's use of "knowledge" (*Erkenntnis*) to designate sometimes the objective cognition of sensible nature, and at other times, more broadly, any universally valid representation produced according to rules. If we attend to the strict definition of *Erkenntnis* presented in the course of the first *Critique*, then it becomes clear that "the thought of an object in general can become knowledge for us only insofar as the concept is related to objects of the senses."¹⁹⁹ What we wish to call attention to here is nothing more than the so-called "discursivity thesis," the meaning and the origin of which is widely discussed in the literature on Kant's theory of knowledge.²⁰⁰ Without yet broaching the issue of how Kant arrives at this position, it is clear that he regards objective knowledge as a "product" of two heterogeneous elements, each of which plays an essential role in the constitution of our finite, rational experience of the world.

In the first *Critique*, where Kant's chief concern is to distinguish the principles of theoretical cognition from those underlying our practical concepts, the emphasis is placed on the demand for sensible intuition as an indispensable condition of knowledge. It is within the framework of such a technically delimited conception of *Erkenntnis* that Kant is able to enact his famous distinction between thinking and knowing, and thereby to "suspend knowledge in order to make room for faith."²⁰¹ But when we compare such statements that point to a conflict between knowledge and other forms of thought, with the opening claim of the *Critique*—that reason enters into conflict with itself through the various "species of its knowledge"—then it becomes clear that *Erkenntnis* is being called upon to designate any number of distinct and overlapping powers of representation.

¹⁹⁹ CPR B146

²⁰⁰ Cf. P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen, 1966), Allison *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, and Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*.

²⁰¹ CPR Bxxx

Though it is invaluable in helping to initially distinguish theoretical from practical concepts, the distinction between thinking and knowing is not exclusively or even primarily a technical, terminological one, since Kant clearly has in mind, from the outset of the critical system, that knowledge is not reducible to objective cognition.

What follows, therefore, is a whole series of related concepts—knowledge, nature, experience—whose very meaning is contested by the fact that these objects are themselves subject to various modes of constitution as presentations according to distinct principles of the mind. What objective reason calls knowledge will take on both a unique form and a particular content as compared to the judgment of practical reason, and both in turn in comparison with the reflective attitude of aesthetic judgment. All three contain a claim to *Erkenntnis* in the manner indicated by the opening line of the critical philosophy—that is, as rulebound forms of thought capable of giving rise to coherent representations whose validity holds not only for the subject who performs them, but for any other similarly constituted subject.

It is therefore plain to see the enormous difficulty that confronts us when, taking the whole of Kant's critical philosophy into consideration, we ask a question such as the following: What does nature, in its most comprehensive sense, mean in the Kantian system, once we have taken account of the contributions of reflective judgment? It is clear that the answer arrived at in the first *Critique*—nature as the sum total of all objects of experience—will no longer suffice, as nature provides the basis for reflective judgments, but not insofar as it plays the role of a fully constituted object (*Gegenstand*). The aesthetic object is a natural one insofar as it belongs to the realm of sensible objects, and yet not at all insofar as it fails to appeal to the minimal criteria for cognitive

apprehension that would permit us to subject its appearance to such categorization and causal determination. Furthermore, as we have already seen at great length in our discussion of genius, the beautiful appearance must walk a fine line between nature and art in order to maintain the quality of free purposiveness that sustains our aesthetic contemplation of it. The subservience of the art of genius to natural beauty is about imitating the manner of nature's productivity, not about merely copying its products. The same can be said of the manner in which the reflective imagination abstracts from the bare sensibility of the appearance in order to judge it aesthetically. In each case, aesthetic experience treats the object as something other than a mere object of sensible experience, thus pressing us to expand our understanding of nature in order to accommodate this broadening of our experience.

We might be tempted, therefore, in order to generate a conception of nature broad enough to encompass both the first and third *Critiques*, to rethink nature in terms of the form of causation that underlies or generates both the appearances that are reflected upon in aesthetic judgments and the objects that are constituted in determinative judgments yielding objective cognition. In other words, instead of thinking nature as the sum total of appearances, we could instead consider the origin of their appearing before us as objects of both determinative and reflective judgments. This strategy turns out to be equally fruitless, however, insofar as the causal power does not remain consistent between the two cases. In fact, it is precisely the appearance in the mere form of an object of a causal power that cannot be contained within mere mechanism that forces the imagination out of its ordinary synthetic function and into the reflective freedom that grounds aesthetic experience. While only a strictly mechanistic causation can account for the relations

between the parts of the conditioned series of appearances of objective nature, aesthetic reflection and the re-examination of nature it provokes consist in the attempt to discern a quasi-teleological causation that, though compatible with human purposivity, appears nonetheless to remain entirely independent of it.²⁰² If we try to capture the whole of nature within a single, unified causal principle, then we must either reduce teleology to a veiled form of mechanism, or the reverse, which, in either case, is ultimately to regard one of the two critiques as the retraction of the claims of the other. Short of this, we must seek another understanding of nature, such that it can incorporate all of the above-mentioned senses of nature—as object, appearance, mechanism and teleology—without resolving the obvious conflict between them. But we must insist, as difficult as it will become to do so, that nature takes on the status of a placeholder where these various meanings converge, rather than maintaining that there are two natures in Kant. In fact, the specific meaning attached to reflective judgment depends entirely on the fact that the nature it refers to is in some sense the same nature referred to in objective cognition. Reflection and cognition converge in one and the same “object,” and only because they do can reflection begin the transition from freedom to the phenomenal realm. Aesthetic judgments are not cognitive; Kant is abundantly clear about this. But neither are they simply non-cognitive, or without relation to the objects of cognition.²⁰³ Every appearance

²⁰² In the account of teleological judgments of nature, Kant warns against confusing this regulative principle with an objective one. “Whoever regards it as schematic —while including in it the properties of understanding, will, etc., whose objective reality is proved only in worldly beings—falls into anthropomorphism.” (CJ 353) The failure to recognize the true status of this teleological principle of nature therefore results in the degradation of our knowledge of nature, rather than the completion of it for which it is intended.

²⁰³ Gasché describes the cognitive status of aesthetic judgments as “para-epistemic,” in order to indicate their close relationship with objective cognition, to which they nonetheless fail to contribute anything. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant’s Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 81.

that is judged aesthetically is also a possible object, or not-yet an object to be judged determinatively. Nature, then, is the site of the convergence of these judgments.

II. The Depths of Experience

Whatever impact the *Critique of Pure Reason* produced in its wake, Kant's aim in undertaking it, and the question that preoccupied him during the long silence in which he struggled to move from the clarification of the question to its satisfactory answer, was startlingly simple: "What is the ground of that in us which we call 'representation' to the object?"²⁰⁴ Kant had already addressed precisely this same problem years earlier,²⁰⁵ and though the basis of his answer would remain unchanged, he had not achieved satisfaction with the solution he arrived at.

Already in the Inaugural Dissertation Kant has developed the basic components of the position he will later identify as transcendental idealism. By displacing the problem of the agreement between objects (thought as things in themselves) and their representations into the problem of the coordination between the heterogeneous, subjective conditions of our thought, sensibility and intellect, Kant establishes the foundation for his claim that our knowledge of nature is limited to phenomena. The effect of this discovery is not primarily negative, however, as it likewise secures our claims to a priori certainty by removing the obstacle presented by the seeming impossibility of a *pure* knowledge of something that can only be given in experience. For as much as Kant's theory of knowledge is directed towards the a priori element of the *Erkenntnisvermögen*, it must be recalled that the primary concern is with the contribution this element makes to the knowledge of experience (*Erfahrungserkenntnis*). In other words, the transcendental level

²⁰⁴ Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence* 71

²⁰⁵ Kant, "On the form and principles of the sensible world"

of philosophical analysis has its final purpose in clarifying and securing the foundation of our empirical consciousness, that is, the lived mode of knowledge from which the search for its conditions of possibility departs and to which it must ultimately return. Synthetic a priori judgments are not themselves the focus of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but rather their contribution to the experience of empirical nature.²⁰⁶

In that respect, the Copernican revolution effected by the transcendental turn was announced long after its discovery, while Kant continued to seek an explanatory legitimation for the insight that had arrived some ten years prior to the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In order to assert that knowledge of what is universal and necessary in nature is possible, Kant had rightly recognized the need to abandon the assumption that our representations have their causal basis in the objects to which they are related. But this insight, far from solving the problem, had merely opened up “the further question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected by it can be possible.”²⁰⁷ This is essentially the same question to which the Transcendental Deduction—which Kant identifies as the central and pivotal argument of the entire text²⁰⁸—will likewise devote its attention, almost without alteration. But whereas the dissertation had considered the forms of intuition alone as a priori conditions of cognition belonging to the nature of the mind, the Transcendental Deduction attempts to solve the problem of the relation between representation and object by asking “whether

²⁰⁶ “The transcendental deduction of all a priori concepts has thus a principle according to which the whole enquiry must be directed, namely, that they must be recognized as a priori conditions *of the possibility of experience*.” CPR A94/B126 (emphasis mine)

²⁰⁷ Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence* 71

²⁰⁸ “I know of no enquiries which are more important for exploring the faculty which we entitle understanding, and for determining the rules and limits of its employment, than those which I have instituted in the second chapter of the Transcendental Analytic under the title *Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding*. They are also those which have cost me the greatest labor.” CPR Axvi

a priori *concepts* do not also serve as antecedent conditions under which alone anything can be, if not intuited, yet thought as object in general.”²⁰⁹

The division of the faculty of knowledge outlined in the dissertation into heterogeneously derived elements had allowed for the assertion of a merely phenomenal genesis of our representations, according to the limits imposed by the a priori spatio-temporal form of intuition, without giving a priori knowledge entirely over to the subjective faculties of human cognition. This division of our concepts into noumenal-intelligible and phenomenal-sensible formed the basis of Kant’s assertion that, despite partially providing the ground of the possibility of our representation of the object, human intuition is not causally responsible for the existence of its object. Such a solution provides the advantage of maintaining the distinction between our sensible intuition and the faculty of intelligible concepts, showing how our knowledge can be at once of universals and of particulars, though it leaves unsettled the problem of how the two should be coordinated so as to give rise to synthetic cognition. Indeed, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that such incompatible representations are not only be capable of, but in fact necessarily subject to combination wherever knowledge is present, then the effort to prove that objects are not simply created by our representations of them falls flat. The introduction of the categories, as a priori concepts of the understanding, therefore reintroduces the specter of intellectual intuition into transcendental idealism; and the independence and passivity of our faculty of intuition is the only safeguard against such a retreat into dogmatism.

In taking up such an interpretive position, we enter into the midst of a lively debate in the literature concerned with the systematic unity of Kant’s critical philosophy

²⁰⁹ CPR A93/B125 (emphasis mine)

concerning the extent to which the forms of experience discovered in the third *Critique* displace or transform those that had already been presented in the first. It is generally acknowledged that Kant had not yet come fully to terms with our powers of reflective comprehension when, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he endeavored to lay bare the powers and the cognitive activities by which the transcendental activity of the mind first determines objects for thought. There is widespread disagreement, however, concerning the nature and the extent of the impact that the broadened sense of experience facilitated by the *Critique of Judgment* has on the more narrow conception that precedes it. Some interpreters regard the discovery of reflective judgment as fitting neatly alongside the account of objective cognition, while leaving the basic claims of the latter unchanged.²¹⁰ On such a view, the appreciation of a natural object's beauty and the effort to comprehend it according to the criteria of objective knowledge are two conceptually distinct processes, whose principles remain entirely incompatible and self-contained. Though these two activities may overlap or converge in one and the same object, they remain entirely conceptually separable; and though we can alternate between them, it would be implausible on such a view to regard any experience as formed from a combination of elements of reflective and determinative consciousness.²¹¹

²¹⁰ See Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, p. 73. Guyer interprets Kant as arguing that the pleasure associated with aesthetic judgment is directly connected with the natural satisfaction that the human mind finds in the completion of any aim, and thus can be explained by reference to its service to objective cognition.

²¹¹ One of the primary disadvantages of such a position would seem to be that it undermines our capacity to explain how aesthetic judgments can be "false," a problem whose solution cannot appeal to any standard of objectivity, since the truth of an aesthetic judgment reveals nothing to us about the object. Hence Kant can appeal only to the notion of purity as the standard for the (subjective) universal validity of aesthetic judgments, making the intrusion of what are non-aesthetic principles into such a judgment the only possible source of a failure to judge aesthetically in such a way as is binding for all other subjects. And yet, when Kant considers the source of such principles, he regards only the pleasure we take in the agreeable and in the beautiful to be potential sources of the contamination of our power to judge aesthetically, not our cognitive apprehension of the object. In other words, it is not knowledge that mixes with aesthetic pleasure

Alternatively, many commentators take a position that is more in line with the images that Kant appeals to in sketching the outline of the critical system in the introduction to the third *Critique*, reading the final part of the critical project as grounding and transforming the meaning of the earlier parts, in a manner analogous to the way aesthetic experience deepens our objective knowledge of nature.²¹² While leaving the claims of the first *Critique* intact, such a view allows us nonetheless to recognize that the aesthetic dimension of experience is co-original with the cognitive. Reflection on the beautiful is not an alteration or suspension of our prior experience of the world, but an independently coherent manner of confronting the manifold of appearances in order to render it meaningful in relation to ourselves. At the same time, it interacts on a foundational level with our “ordinary” experience of phenomena insofar as both are grounded in our transcendental, rather than empirical subjectivity, as constitutive elements of the finite, rational consciousness that belongs to us.

And while it would challenge both common sense and the limits of exegetical license to regard the third *Critique* as entirely supplanting the first, there are nonetheless many commentators who regard various elements of the former as revisions or retractions of the claims presented in the latter.²¹³ While it only makes sense to be as open to this

to make it impure, but similar forms of pleasure that, nonetheless, do not share with the aesthetic its quality of non-conceptual universality.

²¹² Such a position can be found implicitly in Fiona Hughes (*Kant's Aesthetic Epistemology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)), who argues that “the relation in which aesthetic judgment stands to an aesthetic object is exemplary for the openness that is required in cognitive, moral and political thinking” (p. 277) For a more developed consideration of the transformative relation of reflective judgments with respect to their cognitive counterparts, see Gasche’s account of the “para-epistemic” nature of aesthetic experience. (*The Idea of Form*, p. 81)

²¹³ See Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), who accounts for the recent interest in Kant’s account of the sublime by arguing that it is crucial in exposing new limits to the project of objective cognition, beyond those outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “Kant’s aesthetics of the sublime marks the border zone where our efforts at comprehension fail, where the unity of understanding crumbles. Yet at the same time it articulates those moments when the displeasure of this

possibility as Kant himself seems to have been, we must nonetheless exercise the utmost caution in drawing direct comparisons between specific passages from each of the *Critiques*, bearing in mind that Kant's frequent shifts in terminology and perspective make the demand for consistency a poor guide through the critical texts. We have already noted several of the many crucial concepts whose definitions seem to shift not only between the different *Critiques*, but in some cases even within them; as for the need to bear in mind the apparent inconsistencies that can be highlighted by the difference between the analysis of determinative and reflective judging, equally many examples are available. Guyer, for example, finds a substantive though merely tacit revision between the first and third *Critiques* around the issue of the systematic unity that is required by reason in its comprehension of nature. Pointing to the shift away from describing this unity as an aim of speculative reason toward its characterization as a function of reflective judgment, Guyer writes that "while in the first work Kant treats the goal of systematicity primarily as a desire of the faculty of reason to organize...laws that have already and independently been established...in the later work Kant emphasizes that the truth of empirical laws of nature cannot be established in the first place except insofar as they are part of a system of laws,"²¹⁴ the discovery of which is brought about by reflection's assent from the appearance of a particular phenomenon to a general rule capable of explaining it. But simply put, there is no mere need to consider this as an unannounced revision of Kant's position than there is to decide between these two accounts, whose difference in emphasis and perspective does nothing to threaten their compatibility. For the merely regulative status of the idea of systematic unity in the

crumbling gives way to an indeterminate felt sense for and orientation toward the whole that supercedes a discursively conceptual cognition." (p. 1) See also Nuzzo, *Kant and the Unity of Reason*, p. 63-4.

²¹⁴ Paul Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4.

organization of the laws of nature permits the discovery of particular laws within this system even in the absence of the completeness at which they aim. In the progression of knowledge by which the parts are perpetually established in view of a posited whole whose shape is under continual revision by the addition of new parts, reason and reflection are not alternatives, but rather cooperative forces aiding each other in a task that neither could complete, nor even envision, on its own. Reflective judgment establishes the connections between the parts of the system of nature as reason commands, while reason posits the unity of these parts in order to make such judgment possible.

What these three strategies for arbitrating between the claims of reflective and determinative judgment have in common, however, is an agreement concerning the incommensurability of the claims of reflection with those of cognitive determination. While this is indisputably clear if we compare them on the level of their associated propositions, there is good reason within the *Critiques* for understanding that these two forms of the power of judgment are better understood in terms of the deployment of the faculties and the movement of thought that characterizes them than they are in terms of the cognitive status of the claims to which these judgments give rise. When viewed from this perspective, it becomes clear that, despite being united as alternative cases of the power of judgment—of “the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal”²¹⁵—reflection and cognitive determination are highly distinct but related operations of thought, whose difference nevertheless does not place them in any kind of opposition to each other such that we should need to decide between their claims. Rather, in several ways that we will investigate below, reflective and determinative judgment are

²¹⁵ CJ 179

complementary mental processes whose operations support and complete one another in providing a more robust and consistent form of experience than either is capable of generating independently. This entanglement of these two powers is deeper than we can imagine if we limit ourselves to conceiving of it merely as the addition of the claims of aesthetic reflection to those of determinative cognition, as if either were capable of existing prior to or independently of the other. In fact, as we will show, it is only when we shift our focus away from the content of a particular judgment (*Urteil*) to the power of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) that facilitates it that we can grasp the systematic relation between the faculty of knowledge and the experience of taste as contributions to our overall experience of the natural world.

III. The Ubiquity of Reflection

There is a certain undeniable tendency, perhaps due to the order in which Kant first envisioned and then published each of the *Critiques*, to regard the form of experience constituted by determinative cognition as the primary and fundamental ground of experience in general, in relation to which any aesthetic contemplation of objects is established as secondary or even derivative. That is, not only does every object of reflective judgment also admit of any number of possible determinative judgments (while the reverse certainly does not hold), but the very faculty of objective cognition itself would seem to be possible in an intellect with no aesthetic sense whatsoever, giving it the appearance of being transcendently independent of the other forms of judgment alongside which it operates. After all, Kant presented a thorough account of the possibility of a priori knowledge of nature even before he had envisioned an aesthetic power of judgment; and while individuals altogether lacking in taste are perhaps all too

common, it is difficult to imagine an active and conscious intellect incapable of applying the concepts of the understanding to appearances in intuition so far as is necessary to sustain a coherent flow of experience. Nevertheless, to infer from all of this that the capacity for determinative judgment rests on conditions that are independent of the faculty of reflection is to confuse a transcendental power with the empirical activity that it makes possible, or to reduce the power of reflective judgment with the most readily available and recognizable manifestations of its operation. In order to truly understand the relation between these forms of judgment we must seek out those places where they are compared on the deepest level of transcendental investigation, rather than merely on the level of the representations that they generate.

In the Deduction of Judgments of Taste, one of the few passages outside the Introduction to explicitly refer to the first *Critique*, Kant compares the task at hand to that of the Transcendental Deduction. The two deductions of course have their differences, posing unique problems and accordingly requiring separate solutions. Yet in spite of these differences, Kant here poses the problem of aesthetic judgment in precisely those terms that define the chief inquiry of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “How are a priori synthetic judgments possible?”²¹⁶ What can the purpose of this comparison be, at precisely this point in the development of the argument? The non-cognitive status of aesthetic judgments has already been thoroughly addressed, from the beginning of the *Analytic*, and their “twofold peculiarity” already established as the entire content of the task of the deduction: judgments of taste are universally valid without concepts, and the

²¹⁶ I have altered the translation slightly here, as Pluhar contains: “How are synthetic judgments possible a priori?” (CJ 289) The deviation from Pluhar stems not from any substantive dispute over the meaning of this question, but only from the interest of preserving the perfect parallel between this text and the relevant passage in Kemp Smith’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (B20); in any case, the original German is identical in both instances: “*Wie sind synthetische Urteile a priori möglich?*”

claim a necessity that nonetheless cannot be communicated by means of logical proof. “If we resolve these peculiarities, which distinguish a judgment of taste from all cognitive judgments, we shall have done all that is needed in order to deduce this strange ability.”²¹⁷ So if the conceptual separation of aesthetic from cognitive judgments is not just a necessary step in the deduction, but is tantamount to the work of the deduction itself, then why do such positive comparisons between the two begin to emerge at this stage in the *Critique*?

However much Kant may have failed to anticipate the possibility of universally valid judgments of taste, his conviction nonetheless remains that they fall squarely within the boundaries of transcendental philosophy by virtue of their synthetic and a priori character. Yet while “we can readily see that judgments of taste are synthetic,” the question of their apriority is somewhat more problematic, faced as it is with such difficulties as the absence of conceptually determinate content and of general, empirical agreement concerning taste. Should disputes arise regarding a matter of objective knowledge, the disputants can always settle their disagreement either by recourse to universal, communicable concepts, or failing that, by appeal to general consensus. No such standards are available to arbitrate conflicts over our aesthetic judgments, lending credence to that old saw, *de gustibus non est disputandum*. By itself, this could be understood as nothing more than an indication of the inscrutability of taste’s a priori basis, and yet the problem seems to be further compounded by the fact that the very idea of a completely a priori judgment of taste sounds like an absurdity. Taste is always prompted by an encounter with a sensible appearance, making it difficult to understand on what ground their apriority can be asserted. “These judgments are, or want to be

²¹⁷ CJ 281

considered, a priori judgments as regards the demand that everyone assent, a demand they make despite the fact that their predicate is empirical.”²¹⁸ It seems more accurate rather to say that taste claims universality, or that it struggles to attain it, rather than that it possesses it as a verifiable fact. Either judgments of taste must relinquish every claim to necessary and universal agreement, and form no part of transcendental philosophy, or it must somehow be possible to form a priori judgments from a posteriori sources.

The confusion stems, in large part, from a lack of clarity concerning what it means for a form of judgment such as the aesthetic to claim a priori status. A judgment is not essentially a static, molecular phenomenon, but a delicately coordinated complex of representations. Kant’s formulation of the deductive question of transcendental philosophy is more careful and precise than we have acknowledged: “*Wie sind synthetische Urteile a priori möglich?*” In this question it is not the judgments (*Urteile*) themselves that are modified by “a priori,” but rather their possibility; in other words, the question asks about the universal and necessary faculty of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) that makes such (partially empirical) judgments concerning particular appearances possible. To be precise, it is a question of a priori capacities, and not of a priori representations. Thus aesthetic judgments are *a priori possible*, even if they are not possible prior to experience. In fact, the very notion of a beauty that is wholly independent of sensibility is inconceivable, or is merely a confused representation of the moral. As Kant writes in the Paralogisms:

Space and time are indeed a priori representations, which dwell in us as forms of our sensible intuition, before any real object, determining our sense through sensation, has enabled us to represent the object under those sensible relations. But the material or real element, the something which is to be intuited in space, necessarily presupposes perception. Perception exhibits the reality of

²¹⁸ CJ 289

something in space; and in the absence of perception no power of imagination can invent and produce that something.²¹⁹

This essential dependence of the imagination upon sensation for its material is the primary reason that aesthetic judgment is always exercised in relation to an object, even if it fails to raise its representation to the level of objectivity. Though aesthetic contemplation consists in the imaginative reflection upon the merely formal character of an appearance, and only thus rises above the level of brute sensation, the raw material of perception itself must still be acquired through the passivity of intuition. This seemingly trivial fact demands our careful attention, as it means that although aesthetic judgments cannot determine an object, they nonetheless always indicate a relation to one. Beauty does not contribute to our cognition of an object, but it does provoke that attentiveness or attunement to objects that is a necessary precondition to knowledge of them. This relation to an object is thus an essential feature of the claims of objective knowledge and of taste alike. What distinguishes these various forms of judgment whose possibility rests on a priori grounds lying within the human *Gemüt* from one another is the different species of representations that are joined together by the act of synthesis.

With the perception (*Wahrnehmung*) of an object we can directly connect the concept of an object as such, for which it contains the empirical predicates, in order to give rise to a cognitive judgment... But we can also directly connect with a perception a feeling of pleasure (or displeasure) and a liking that accompanies the object's presentation and serves it in the place of a predicate.²²⁰

Both aesthetic and cognitive judgments therefore involve the synthetic combination of a mere perception, which by itself has no claim to universality, with an additional representation by virtue of which the resulting product transcends the limits of the individual subject in whom it is formed. But whereas objective knowledge demands that

²¹⁹ CPR A373

²²⁰ CJ 288

this bare perception be brought into relation with the rule of a universal concept under which it can be fully subsumed, reflection refers it to a merely subjective feeling, in the absence of any adequate concept. The question we are now faced with is whether there is one faculty of judgment that operates according to a different set of principles in each of these forms of judgment, or whether these independent operations are based in the wholly independent powers of two forms of judgment that are alike only in their logical form.

Although it is given a new inflection by virtue of the discovery of aesthetic reflection as a unique form of judgment, this is not the first time that this question is addressed. In the *Prolegomena* as well, Kant has reason to demonstrate that not every synthetic judgment formed in relation to a mere perception yields objectively valid knowledge with a legitimate claim to universal agreement. For when the sensible presentation of an object is united synthetically with another sensation, and not with a universal concept, the resulting product is a mere “judgment of perception.” Such judgments fail to rise to the level of experience, as they “require no pure concept of the understanding, but only the logical connection of the perceptions in a thinking subject.”²²¹ While the representations formed by judgments of perception are therefore of little direct interest for the faculty of knowledge, their lack of objectivity nonetheless brings to the fore a vital pre-condition of any synthetic representation whatsoever, namely its reference to the unity of the subject in which the elements of the object are combined. Whether the distinct representations are joined together by necessary and objective laws, or by mere laws of association, their unity is merely borrowed from, and dependent upon, that unity that is presupposed by the activity of a judging subject. “A

²²¹ Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, trans. G. Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) IV: 298.

judgment is nothing but the manner in which given modes of knowledge are brought to the objective unity of apperception.”²²² Unless they belong to the unitary consciousness of a subject, no representations of an object can be joined, compared, or so much as placed alongside one another in an observable manner. The transcendental unity of apperception is therefore the deepest foundation on which the possibility of any power of judgment whatsoever is predicated. To demonstrate the prevalence of the power of judgment in generating experience even on its deepest level, we will therefore need now to consider how the cognitive disposition generated in reflection is presupposed in every act of synthetic knowledge.

The discursive nature of our faculty of knowledge—the fact that it results only from the synthesis of sensible intuitions with intelligible concepts—means that the possibility of reconciling irreducibly heterogeneous principles is essential to establishing the lawful regularity of our representations of objects. Only by being brought under universal concepts can the contents of the sensible manifold be lifted out of their brute immediacy and transformed into objects, just as the indeterminacy of concepts can only be saved from empty abstraction when they are brought into relation with a determinate sensation. And yet, the reconciliation of incommensurables that this synthesis implies cannot be understood simply as a process through which one of the elements of knowledge is transformed into its opposite, since such a process would entirely eliminate the synthetic quality of our representations. Intuitions and concepts must be joined in such a manner as allows each to retain its identity while simultaneously drawing it outside of and beyond itself. Kant characterizes this complex dynamic as a harmony or an accord (*Übereinstimmung*) between the object of our knowledge and the laws of the

²²² CPR B141

understanding: “Conformity (*Übereinstimmung*) with the laws of the understanding is the formal element in all truth.”²²³ Though the rules of the understanding do not set the limits of our capacity for representing objects, they do establish the universal standard by which they can obtain objective validity, and rise from mere perception to genuine experience. But the truly distinctive feature of Kant’s theory of knowledge is to make such an agreement between subject and object dependent on a logically prior agreement within the subject itself.²²⁴ To put it differently, the objective harmony of our representations (with their objects) is dependent upon their subjective harmony (with each other).

The necessity of grounding the objective unity of objects in the subjective faculty for representing them is first presented in the first *Critique* in the Transcendental Deduction, where Kant writes: “we cannot represent to ourselves anything as combined in the object which we have not ourselves previously combined.”²²⁵ The act of judgment that is meant to raise our representations to the level of cognition is, above all else, a unifying act; but if the pre-cognitive elements of knowledge are to be joined together, this implies the necessity of something common in which they can be joined. Whatever unites these bare representations must itself be something other than a further representation, lest it too should require a still higher act of combination.

It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me...But this representation is an act of spontaneity, that is it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. I call it pure apperception to distinguish it from empirical apperception, or,

²²³ CPR A294/B350

²²⁴ Both of these senses of relation—between subject and object, and between intuition and concept—are contained within the conception of judgment as the logical function presupposed by objective cognition of phenomena. Kant thus defines judgment (*das Urteil*) as “mediate knowledge of an object, that is, the representation of a representation (*die Vorstellung einer Vorstellung*) of it.” CPR A68/B93

²²⁵ CPR B130

again, original apperception, because it is that self-consciousness which, while generating the representation 'I think,' cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation.²²⁶

As this passage demonstrates, the unity of apperception serves as the transcendental ground of the possibility of representation in general precisely by its refusal to stand alongside other representations. It thus stands as a special case of representation, itself incapable of objective presentation, and yet the ground of all possibility of objects. Even intuition is impossible without assuming such a unity of consciousness, if by intuition we mean the formation of appearances, whether objective or merely subjective, and not merely the bare capacity for the passive reception of sense impressions. The unity of apperception is thus the farthest that the first *Critique* reaches into an issue that will figure more prominently in the third, namely the investigation of a mode of representing objects that precedes or refuses the distinction between the passivity of intuition and the spontaneity of concepts. That underlying unity that enables the synthesis of representations by subtending the variety of their content with the bare presence of a unified consciousness Kant entitles the "transcendental unity of apperception." Pure apperception indicates nothing more than the fact that these distinct modes of knowledge nonetheless spring from and belong to a common ground. "There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representation of objects is possible."²²⁷ The consciousness to which all knowledge is referred is not an actual, empirical self-consciousness, but rather the mere possibility thereof, the potential for every representation, as such, to be accompanied by the bare "I

²²⁶ CPR B131

²²⁷ CPR A107

think.” Nevertheless, without this merely logical function, no empirical consciousness of objects (as composite representations) would be conceivable.

But while the Transcendental Deduction indicates the necessity of this subjective unity of consciousness as the ground of the objectivity of our representations, it nonetheless fails to go further and indicate how the unity of apperception itself is possible. What we wish to draw attention to is Kant’s neglect, in the first *Critique*, with respect to thoroughly developing the connection between the logical function of judgment (subjective harmony) and the agreement of the object with the laws of the understanding (objective harmony). In fact, only in the Transcendental Dialectic does Kant mention the objectifying function of *Urteil* and the subjective state of *Übereinstimmung* in relation to each other, leaving the connection between the subjective conditions of judgment (*Urteilstkraft*) and the determinative act of judgment (*Urteil*) largely unexplained, and the difference between them obscured. While the account of knowledge presented in the first *Critique* succeeds in identifying the act of judgment as the original site of the possibility of truth and error, what it cannot explain is what causes judgment to either perform or fail to perform this synthesis according to an a priori rule.²²⁸ Kant’s initial account of judgment falls short insofar as it fails to discover the source of the power of judgment, the rule for the application of rules.

²²⁸ There is, of course, something fairly misleading about the claim that the *Critique of Pure Reason* fails to account for the possibility of error, insofar as the often overlooked Transcendental Dialectic is devoted entirely to the topic of “exposing the illusion of transcendent judgments, and at the same time taking precautions that we not be deceived by it.” (CPR A297/B334) Furthermore, Kant locates the source of these illusions precisely in the faculty of judgment, distinguishing illusion (*Schein*) from appearance (*Erscheinung*) on the grounds that the former, as a synthetic product, is subject to truth or falsity, while the latter, as constrained to adhere to the formal rules of sensible intuition, is not. The dialectic, then, as a “logic of illusion,” clearly attends to judgment as a condition of the truth of our representations. But the Transcendental Dialectic explicitly limits its concern to what Kant calls transcendental illusion, as distinct from logical or empirical illusion. “We are not here concerned with empirical illusion...through which the faculty of judgment is misled by the influence of the imagination; we are concerned only with

And yet however pressing this question appears, it does not belong directly to the Transcendental Deduction, nor even to the general task of the *Critique*, as Kant understands it.²²⁹ Within the first *Critique*, the possibility of the objective unity of our representations is accounted for by means of the logical function of subsumption performed through the schematizing operation of judgment. By activating a common basis underlying the formal conditions of intuition and the categories, the schemata produce “a composite action [from] the simple actions of the understanding and of the sensibility.”²³⁰ Though various forms of representation indeed present objects before the mind, the objective existence of the objects they represent is not asserted until such synthetic judgment acts upon them. But this activity of judgment works equally and simultaneously on both sides of the representations in question, that is subjectively and objectively; it unites them within the presentational power of the subject, and in the objects to which this power is referred. As a consequence of this synthetic conception of knowledge, it follows that neither the faculty of intuition nor the power of concepts is itself responsible for truth or error, but rather only in judgment, by which they are connected, is the very possibility of knowledge at stake. All of this, of course, is merely the briefest outline of the basic concepts of Kant’s critical philosophy. But in presenting

transcendental illusion, which exerts its influence on principles that are in no wise intended for use in experience.” (A/295/B352) In the account of reflective judgment, whose difference from determinative judgment can be located specifically in the activity of the imagination, Kant will thus return to the question of judgment as a transcendental source of empirical illusions.

²²⁹ Kant’s primary assertion concerning the distinction between what can be known a priori (the proper task of critique) and how this knowledge is possible, is that the latter has a largely instrumental value with respect to its assistance in addressing the former: “This enquiry, which is somewhat deeply grounded, has two side. The one refers to the objects of pure understanding, and it is intended to expound and render intelligible the objective validity of its a priori concepts. It is therefore essential to my purposes. The other seeks to investigate the pure understanding itself, its possibility and the cognitive faculties upon which it rests; and so deals with it in its subjective aspect. Although this latter exposition is of great importance for my chief purpose, it does not form an essential part of it. For the chief question is always simply this: what and how much can the understanding know apart from all experience, not: how is the faculty of thought itself possible?” (CPR Axvii)

²³⁰ CPR A295/B351

this brief synopsis of the role of judgment in the production of objective cognition, what we wish to draw attention to is the specific difference between the task of the section on the Schematism and that of the Transcendental Deduction. For the apparent similarity of the arguments of these two sections—both concerned with the application of the categories of the understanding to the manifold of intuition—has been interpreted by some commentators as a mere repetition of the demonstration of the objective validity of the categories.²³¹

Yet when we take into consideration that the synthesis of representations has both an objective and a subjective side, we can more readily understand why the task of the deduction must be complemented by a parallel demonstration capable of building on its account. Following the Deduction, the Schematism addresses a new but related question, “not whether the categories apply to appearances but under what conditions they can do so.”²³² Thus advancing from the *quaestio juris* to the question of the possibility of applying the categories to objects of experience means going beyond the formal rules of the understanding to the subjective power capable of uniting them with appearances. In pursuing this question, the Schematism picks up where the Deduction could advance no further, namely at the point of asserting the transcendental unity of apperception, though without being able to determine anything concerning its possibility. Yet as we already noted in our discussion of the Schematism in the first chapter, this section of the text is marked as much by the questions it leaves unanswered as by the advances it permits in our understanding of the faculty of knowledge. Kant’s presentation of the transcendental schemata of the imagination certainly raises the expectation of a deepening of the ground

²³¹ Cf. G.J. Warnock, “Concepts and Schematism,” *Analysis* 8 (1949), pp.77-82; and Jonathan Bennett, *Kant’s Analytic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1966), p. 150.

²³² Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism* 203

of consciousness identified in the Deduction, as its function is described in terms that closely parallel the account of the unity of apperception. The schema, for example is distinguished from the images that it makes possible in a manner analogous to the differentiation of the “I think” from the various representations that attach to it. “The schema is in itself always a product of imagination. Since, however, the synthesis of imagination aims at no special intuition, but only at unity in the determination of sensibility, the schema has to be distinguished from the image.”²³³

By determining the sensible conditions according to which alone the concepts of the understanding can be applied to objects, the schematism indeed lends concreteness to the account of the synthesis of representations that yields objective knowledge. As a product of the transcendental imagination, the schema specifies the rules according to which concepts can be matched with adequate appearances, rather than producing images for these concepts themselves. And in providing the schema for each of the categories, Kant certainly takes a major step forward in specifying the conditions of the objective synthesis of representations. Nevertheless, the question of judgment, of how these conditions are applied, not simply in general but with respect to the intuition of specific appearances, is again avoided, and indeed placed beyond the reach of critical investigation. “This schematism of our understanding, in its application to appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze.”²³⁴

²³³ CPR A140/B179

²³⁴ CPR A141/B180

As the preceding considerations have demonstrated, the objective synthesis of representations by which our faculty of knowledge generates objective nature presupposes, according to Kant's transcendental idealism, a prior subjective unity of consciousness. Without such a unity firmly in place, the synthetic function of judgment could never act upon the elements of knowledge, and the bare manifold of intuition would never coalesce into a coherent and intelligible flow of experience. It is precisely around this issue of the conditions that determine and facilitate the proper exercise of the faculty of judgment that the third *Critique* has its most direct and extensive consequences for Kant's account of our knowledge of the natural world. For if reflective judgment is, in one respect, merely another form of the power of subsuming particulars under universals, alongside its determinative counterpart, it is in another respect a more purified and potent case of this power, through which its essential features can be more readily determined. While in determinative judgments the action of bringing the particular under a universal rule is carried out under the guidance of the understanding and according to a priori laws, no such guidelines for judgment are in place where it must contend with an appearance that cannot be brought to rest under any determinate concept whatsoever. Therefore before we can consider whether the concepts of knowledge, experience, and nature are increased extensively by the discovery of an independent form of a priori representation, we must first examine the ways in which they are amplified intensively by the more thorough examination of the powers belonging to judgment as an independent faculty, capable of acting in the suspension of the laws of the understanding.

IV. The Unity of Judgment

The difficulty that arises in attempting to read the third *Critique* in light of these issues is that the form of mental activity in which this heightened power of judgment is revealed—aesthetic experience—appears at first blush to have little or nothing to do with objective cognition. This is equally true whether we consider reflective judgment from the standpoint of the critical attitude or from that of the experience of aesthetic pleasure itself. For in the former case, we are reminded at every turn that the absence of any conceptual determination prevents these judgments from attaining anything more than a merely subjective validity; while in the latter, the experience of beauty seems hardly to have either as its purpose or as a discernible consequence the expansion of our knowledge of the object to which it is in relation. An object of aesthetic pleasure can be studied, analyzed, and made into an object of science, but whoever engages in such an examination knows firsthand that doing so is quite apart from the attitude according to which its appearance is merely enjoyed as such. If we want to consider the implications of our capacity to form judgments without a given rule on our powers of representation as a whole, then, we should attend to the power of judgment, its activity, and the a priori principles that support it, rather than regarding it in terms of the relatively empty and isolated assertion—“this is beautiful”—to which it gives rise. As we discovered in the preceding chapter, aesthetic experience encompasses a far broader range of mental activities than the mere recognition of a feeling of pleasure in relation to an appearance, and it is with the whole of this experience that we are here concerned.

To begin to establish an account of the relation between reflection and determinative cognition in the constitution of our overall experience, then, we should return to the consideration from the previous chapter of the conditions that determine, in

any particular instance, to which form of judgment an appearance is given over. It is important to insist on the necessity of such a decision, since reflection and determination are mutually exclusive as powers of judgment. Understanding anything of aesthetic experience requires that we recognize that this point is indisputably true, though it is in need of some clarification. For, as Kant frequently speaks of the possibility of *pure* aesthetic judgment, the implication is that judgments are possible in which the transcendental principle of judgment interacts with principles derived from some other sources to produce an impure judgment that is at least partially dependent on the same arrangement of the cognitive powers. The possibility of such mixed judgments, to which we will turn in a moment, is an entirely separate matter from the conjunction of distinct forms of judgment in one and the same object. Such a coordination of reflection and determination might be thought to occur, for example, as the merely coincidental coordination of distinct appearances, or elements of an appearance, in the same body. That such an experience is possible would again seem to be confirmed by the above example of a beautiful artwork being subjected to intellectual scrutiny in a mode of interrogation quite apart from the appreciation of its beauty.

Perhaps the most concrete example Kant offers of the contact between an aesthetic and a determinative judgment, however, comes in his illustration of one of their key distinguishing features—namely, the absolute singularity that attends all reflective judgments. This singularity is a direct result of the fact that such judgments are non-discursive, that is, formed without reference to any determinate concept whatsoever. “For since I hold the object directly up to my feeling of pleasure and displeasure, but without using concepts, these judgments cannot have the quantity that judgments with objective

general validity have.”²³⁵ But while this singularity has at its basis a single explanation, it has a doubled effect in differentiating its object from the objects of cognition. Because, on the one hand, we cannot simply by virtue of the logical quantity of the judgment, expect others to reach the same judgment,²³⁶ as if our claim could appeal to demonstrable evidence by which others could be persuaded; and on the other hand, because insofar as in judging aesthetically we fail even to grasp the object before us as a particular instance of a general type, we have neither any ground upon which to extend our judgment concerning the particular object to the general type to which it belongs. In other words, if I say, “This rose is beautiful,” the logical quantity of this judgment does not permit me to extend it either to the claim “Everyone should find this rose beautiful,”²³⁷ or to the claim “Roses in general are beautiful.” The former is permissible only where the conditions of a *pure* aesthetic judgment obtain, and the latter only as a logical, cognitive judgment.

Still there is a seemingly inexplicable difficulty involved where Kant maintains the possibility of seamlessly making this transition between the reflective and determinative modes of apprehending the object. Almost offhandedly, and for the sake of marking a crucial distinction, Kant remarks: “For example, I may look at a rose and make

²³⁵ CJ 215

²³⁶ Of course the fact that aesthetic judgments cannot demand universal agreement by virtue of their logical quantity does not mean that they have no claim to universality whatsoever, just that this claim is derived from a different source, namely their logical quality. An aesthetic judgment owes its ability to transcend the particularity of the purely subjective sensation in which it originates “by means of a liking or disliking devoid of all interest.” (CJ 211) Kant even offers the priority of logical quality over quantity in the determination of aesthetic judging as an explanation (CJ 203n) for his deviating in the order of the presentation of the four “moments” from that found in the table of the categories in the first *Critique* (CPR A80/B106). The more transcendental and thorough explanation of the difference between aesthetic and determinative judgments would therefore be to demonstrate that their universality is derived from different sources, rather than identifying one as a singular and the other as a universal judgment.

²³⁷ Our ability to expect the agreement of others depends on what Kant calls the “aesthetic quantity” of the judgment. Pure aesthetic judgments made from a disinterested standpoint are aesthetically universal; by comparison, cognitive judgments are logically universal, and mere judgments of perception or of the agreeability of a sensation are aesthetically (and logically) singular. (Cf. CJ 215)

a judgment of taste declaring it to be beautiful. But if I compare many singular roses and so arrive at the judgment, Roses in general are beautiful, then my judgment is no longer aesthetic, but is a logical one *based on an aesthetic one.*²³⁸ What is remarkable in this comparison is that it seems to go beyond the point it intends to make insofar as, beyond marking the difference between the two forms of judgment, it asserts the possibility that the object of an aesthetic judgment can, as that same object, be made into an object of knowledge. At face value this claim sounds rather unremarkable, and seems to indicate little more than the obvious point that we made earlier, namely that any beautiful appearance, like that of a rose, is also capable of being treated as the basis for any number of conceptual judgments, for example concerning its shape, color, cultivation and so forth. But what is added here is the claim that an appearance first grasped in aesthetic terms can, without further determination, take on such a character as to be capable of transformation into an individual member of a general type. While this shift, were it to occur, would certainly mean that we had moved over into the realm of objective knowledge through concepts, we might wonder how such a connection would be possible at all. This is all the more surprising in that the absence of a concept from aesthetic reflection should mean that the object of every such judgment is merely “this,” and not a rose, a landscape, or a painting.

Nevertheless, maintaining the absolute quality of this distinction, such that we would question the possibility of moving from an aesthetic to a logical judgment, leaves us faced with two major difficulties. First, it does not sit well with the common sense experience of passing back and forth quite freely between such claims; and second, it leaves little room for understanding how reflection is meant to serve as a principle for

²³⁸ CJ 215 (emphasis added)

connecting the supersensible in nature with our moral freedom. The recognition of this difficulty has led some commentators, therefore, to take Kant at his word and accept this as a possibility, but at the expense of maintaining the firmness of the distinction between subjective taste and objective knowledge. Cohen, for example, dismisses this assertion as the result of a simple logical error, maintaining that on Kant's own account there is no ground for establishing the identity of the object necessary for moving from the aesthetic to the logical judgment.²³⁹ For insofar as an aesthetic judgment is singular, it cannot immediately be explained how its reference should be capable of the comparison to another such singular judgment that would seem to be required as an intermediate step towards the logical generalization that could be formed from it. In other words, if it is the case that nothing of the object is known to us through taste, then it is difficult to see how the object's beauty could become the basis for a cognitive judgment. We could, of course, appeal to the fact that when we generalize from an aesthetic judgment that we are in fact making the earlier judgment itself, rather than its object, into the object of the secondary judgment. But in that case, Cohen argues, "there no longer seems any reason to say that each premise is a reflective, aesthetical, subjective judgment, while the generalized conclusion is a determinate, logical, objective judgment."²⁴⁰

But such examples do not offer us a case of a truly mixed aesthetic judgment, since such a synthesis would occur in an empirical judgment that follows and depends upon two prior transcendental judgments. As we indicated above, Kant clearly has in mind the possibility that the principle underlying aesthetic judgment may be mixed with some other basis for judgment *prior* to its action upon its object. In fact, presupposing

²³⁹ Ted Cohen, "Three Problems in Kant's Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42 (2002), p.4.

²⁴⁰ Cohen "Three Problems," p. 6.

such a combination of principles is ultimately the only ground for asserting the possibility of making “false” aesthetic judgments, since the subjectivity of these judgments means that the conditions of objective communicability cannot serve as such a standard. But when Kant considers the principles that threaten to contaminate the purity of aesthetic judgment, the laws of the understanding that regulate objective knowledge are nowhere to be found. Rather, the greatest threats to the exercise of the principle of free purposiveness are likewise the greatest obstacles to our understanding of it, in both cases because they bear the closest resemblance to it of any other form of experience commonly available to us. These principles are, of course, those of the feeling of the agreeable and of the morally good, both of which closely resemble the beautiful insofar as they are experienced primarily through a feeling of pleasure in connection with a given presentation.

What Cohen seems to neglect in his treatment of this problem, however, is that the primary difference between the two forms of judgment consists not in what they predicate of their objects, but in the manner of this predication. Thus, even while both judgments assert the presence of beauty, one treats it aesthetically, that is as something experienced in the singularity of an immediate sensation, while the other regards it merely as a particular case of a conceptually determinate form of experience. The greater question at issue in this relation between aesthetic feeling and knowledge, then, is precisely the definitive question of judgment—how the singular object comes to be transformed into an instance of a general rule, or how a rule determines an object capable of serving as an example of its meaning. The upshot of all of this is that there must be some factor capable of manifesting itself in the mere appearance of an object that

determines whether that appearance leads us to seek for a given concept of the understanding or rather to reflect on its formal arrangement in the absence of such a concept.

In this light, a far more serious and general concern is raised by Gadamer in his treatment of the third *Critique*. In keeping with the project of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer aims to liberate reflective judgment from what he sees as the Kantian restriction of it primarily to the realm of art and beauty. But in order to demonstrate that such judgment is applicable beyond the bounds of aesthetic experience, Gadamer appeals to the demand for reflective judgment that is implicit even in the most straightforward acts of theoretical and practical reason. “Kant indirectly admits this inasmuch as he acknowledges the value of examples for sharpening the judgment.”²⁴¹ Gadamer’s contention is that Kant implicitly acknowledges the dependency of the concepts of the understanding themselves, the supposedly fixed rules for the determination of objects (be they theoretical or practical), on the singular apprehension objects they are meant to determine. The point is to demonstrate that even where judgment is conceived merely as the subsumption of an individual case under a universal rule, that is in purely determinative judgment, reflective judgment is required in order to determine the suitability of this application, and that this fact greatly undermines the rigidity of the distinction between determinative and reflective judgments.²⁴²

Gadamer, therefore, tends in his discussion of Kantian judgment to dispense nearly altogether with this distinction, reserving the term judgment for what Kant calls reflective judgment, and treating theoretical and practical judgments as conceptual

²⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 39.

²⁴² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 38-40.

operations that dovetail with and depend upon acts of judgment proper. Any time we are required to apply universal principles to a determinate object, we call upon something further than our knowledge of such principles. No amount of clarity and specification in universal rules can overcome a deficit in the capacity to generate concrete examples.

“Our knowledge of law and morality too is always supplemented by the individual case, even productively determined by it.”²⁴³ What Gadamer recognizes in the third *Critique* is a subtle but distinct retreat from the account of judgment presented in the first, according to which the individual case is always determined in advance by the universal rule under which it is subsumed. While reflective judgment does indeed follow an a priori, universal rule, this is a rule that it does not know it possesses, and thus cannot utilize, until it discovers it in an encounter with the beautiful object. In the determinative judgments that produce objective knowledge of nature, the understanding has at its disposal a specified, universal rule according to which it merely subsumes the particular that stands before it. “But if only the particular is given and *judgment has to find the universal for it*, then this power is merely reflective.”²⁴⁴ Only when it is called upon, in being confronted with the unschematizable appearance of the beautiful, to create synthetic unity in a representation without the assistance of a concept, does reflective judgment begin to search for this universal principle that lies dormant within it. Judgment’s encounter with the beautiful object becomes transformed into an encounter with itself.

But what is it precisely that is disclosed in this self-examination of judgment? The absence of a readily available concept to facilitate the objective synthesis of whatever appearances may present themselves to the faculty of intuition could seem to disable

²⁴³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 38.

²⁴⁴ CJ 179 (emphasis added)

Urteilkraft altogether; indeed if we merely follow the definition of judgment (in general) given in the first *Critique*—“in every judgment there is a concept which holds of many representations”²⁴⁵—we could not maintain otherwise. The discovery that judgment can nonetheless perform its synthetic operation on appearances that cannot be brought under such concepts is therefore a genuine revelation concerning the powers that belong to it. The procedure of objective judgment can be reversed, leading from the presentation of a singular appearance to the formation of a broader representation that is no longer bound to the specificity of a passive intuition. Of course if this capacity is to have any validity as the basis for a universalizable form of experience, rather than a merely arbitrary and contingent power of association like that belonging to the reproductive imagination, then it must adhere to some standard of lawfulness such as is provided for determinative judgments by the concept. Such a standard, on the other hand, “it cannot take from somewhere else (since judgment would then be determinative); nor can it prescribe it to nature.”²⁴⁶ The only remaining possibility, therefore, is that “this transcendental principle must be one that reflective judgment gives as a law, but only to itself.” Yet only when it is prompted by the failure of the determinative synthesis through concepts does judgment come to recognize this law that it holds within itself at the heart of subjectivity. It is by virtue of this revelatory power of such uncognizable appearances that we refer to them as models, or as exemplary cases of the rule of judgment.

In light of these considerations, it is interesting to note the difference in the treatment of the status of examples between the first and third *Critiques*. While the third *Critique* makes the ability to produce and understand exemplary presentations as such

²⁴⁵ CPR A68/B93

²⁴⁶ CJ 180

nearly synonymous with taste, the first treats examples with far greater ambivalence. We should recall here that the chief difference between the transcendental logic—which Kant entitles a “doctrine of judgment” to indicate that it is concerned with the application of the concepts of the understanding to appearances, rather than simply with the laws of these concepts themselves—and general logic is that only the former can contain rules for the subsumption under the categories that determines appearances as objects. The task of the Analytic of Principles, therefore, is to discover the principle for the application of rules, with the recognition that whatever offers such guidance cannot itself be simply another rule. For if we “sought to give general instructions how we are to subsume under these rules, that is, to distinguish whether something does or does not come under them, that could only be by means of another rule; this in turn, for the very reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgment (*Urteilkraft*).”²⁴⁷

It is important to notice that this sense of judgment as a capacity for thinking in conformity with, but not in a manner determined by rules is present even in the first *Critique*. This is in stark contrast with the primary meaning that judgment takes on in the theoretical texts, namely as “functions of unity among our representations.”²⁴⁸

Considered in this aspect, judgment serves as a kind of shorthand for the discursive nature of our knowledge, indicating the formal rules according to which intuitions are combined with concepts in order to yield objective experience of the world. These two meanings are of course connected with each other, and the difference between them can, in large part, be explained by appeal to the distinction between judgment as a logical function (*Urteil*) and the transcendental capacity for uniting representations that this

²⁴⁷ CPR A133/B172

²⁴⁸ CPR A69/B94

function presupposes (*Urteilkraft*). The narrower definition of judgment more common in the first *Critique* would thus be a description of the particular function performed by the more general power when restricted by the rules imposed upon it by the understanding and taken up by judgment as if they were its own. In the *Prolegomena*, for example Kant offers the following definition of judgment that seems to proceed from just such a restricted perspective: “Judgments, when considered merely as the condition of the unification of given representations in a consciousness, are rules.”²⁴⁹ But such a definition of a judgment, when compared to the passage we cited earlier calling upon judgment as a principle for applying the rules that are supplied by concepts,²⁵⁰ suggests that the subordination of the reflective power of judgment to the aims of the cognitive synthesis has already been presupposed. But the ability of judgment to serve the rules of the understanding in this way²⁵¹ obscures the difficult problem of judgment itself, namely how it can provide guidance to the categories by determining their applicability to appearances without itself merely adopting a higher rule.

This essential difficulty of the task of judgment is expressed through Kant’s efforts to define the sort of talent that constitutes judgment, in distinction from the aptitude for thinking according to concepts that constitutes sound understanding.

“Though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules,

²⁴⁹ *Prolegomena* §23

²⁵⁰ “If understanding in general is to be viewed as the faculty of rules, judgment will be the faculty of subsuming under rules.” (CPR A132/B171)

²⁵¹ See §24 of the B Deduction, where Kant refers to the figurative synthesis as “an action of the understanding on the sensibility.” (CPR B152) The alteration of such claims from the A edition of the Deduction, where this action is attributed to the transcendental imagination rather than to understanding, is of course the source of Heidegger’s famous interpretation in the *Kantbook* of a retreat from the radicality of the insight opened up by the Deduction. But where Heidegger sought to retrieve the centrality of the imagination and its temporalizing function in the Schematism, we will give greater consideration to the obscurity that overtakes Kant’s identification of judgment’s indispensable role in the determinative judgments of objective cognition.

judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practiced only, and cannot be taught.”²⁵²

Judgment cannot be taught because it cannot be reduced to a determinate set of rules or principles that can be guaranteed of universal communicability. To attempt to formulate guidelines or formulas for judgment would only inhibit its proper function, which is to allow thought to move from a universal idea *in abstracto* to the particular case *in concreto*. The inability to make this mental transition, which Kant famously deems irremediable stupidity, can be aided only by the use of examples. Judgment deals in particulars, and therefore can be developed only by use of illustration, rather than demonstration. As Kant writes:

Such sharpening of judgment is indeed the one great benefit of examples. Correctness and precision of intellectual insight, on the other hand, they more usually somewhat impair. For only seldom do they adequately fulfill the requirements of the rule. Besides, they often weaken that effort which is required of the understanding to comprehend properly the rules in their universality, in independence of the particular circumstances of experience.²⁵³

The example is thus treated as a kind of lamentable expedient, a necessary crutch to compensate for a lack of shrewdness in judgment, but just as much a distraction from the universal concepts it is meant to help in applying, and a detriment to the transcendence of thought above the immediacy of the given. This potentially disruptive influence of the conditions supporting judgment therefore registers a kind of profound ambivalence with respect to the role of *Urteilkraft* in the synthetic constitution of objective experience. On the one hand Kant recognizes that everything in his account of the elements of knowledge has pressed toward the need for such a power of reconciling incommensurable laws as the ground of all objectivity. “Transcendental philosophy has the peculiarity that besides the

²⁵² It is worth noting, as some evidence of the continuity between the conception of judgment in the first *Critique* and in the third, that Kant will make almost exactly the same claim about the talent that constitutes artistic genius.

²⁵³ CPR A134/B173

rule, which is given in the pure concept of the understanding, it [must] also specify a priori the instance to which the rule is to be applied.” This is the task to be completed by the Schematism. And yet, on the other hand, drawing undue attention to this operation of judgment seems to threaten the stability and the certainty of these same rules of the understanding, whose singular charge it is to guarantee the objectivity of our representations.

But if, as we are suggesting, Kant places the power of judgment under the yoke of the concept for the sake of preserving the dignity of transcendental philosophy’s claim to a priori, objective validity, this does not excuse him from the task of a more thorough analysis of judgment, but simply defers this demand into the project of a separate critique. This suggests that what Kant “discovered” in coming to recognize the need within his system for a third pillar of critical philosophy, is not so much the possibility of a critique of judgment as the fact that the experience of taste and the field of aesthetics offered the most fertile ground for its development. Indeed there is evidence to support such an interpretation in the fact that even shortly prior to the completion of the third *Critique*, Kant had not yet recognized the strength of the link between taste and judgment. If the third *Critique* offers insights that depart dramatically from the project of the earlier critical philosophy, then this is not insofar as it includes the further elaboration of the conditions of *Urteilkraft*. That much of the argument of the text, at least, is fully consistent with the basic claims of the theoretical philosophy.

Such a line of interpretation is taken up by Longuenesse, who argues that “to suppose that the first *Critique* is concerned only with *determinative* and not with *reflective* judgment is to miss the fact that even in the first *Critique*, the *application* of the

categories is inseparable from a thought process that has a *reflective* aspect.”²⁵⁴

Challenging the dominant reading of the first *Critique*, which regards determinative judgment as merely responsible for discovering the correct particular to connect with the ready-made, universal concept (category), thus determining the object according to a rule that precedes and governs the act of judgment, Longuenesse argues that reflection plays a central role in the production of discursive knowledge. According to her interpretation, the *merely* reflective judgments that ground our aesthetic and teleological thinking are simply determinative judgments that fail to arrive at conceptual determination, and thus remain suspended in the moment of reflection in which all appearances apprehended by the imagination begin. “What makes judgments *merely* reflective is that in them, the effort of the activity of judgment to form concepts fails; and it fails because it *cannot* succeed.”²⁵⁵ Aesthetic judgments result when the figurative synthesis described in the Transcendental Deduction fails due to the inability of the imagination to discover a concept in the understanding capable of containing the complex presentation of its object. But insofar as even ordinary cognition requires the imaginative synthesis by which the intuitable manifold of an appearance is ordered into an ever greater unity in preparation for subsumption under a concept, every mental act involving judgment thus requires the kind of reflection that is conceptually isolated and subjected to greater scrutiny in the third *Critique*.

But what is, from the perspective of the aims of objective knowledge, a failure to arrive at the goal of synthetic comprehension is, from the standpoint of aesthetic experience, a gain. For what determines the failure to arrive at an adequate concept is an

²⁵⁴ Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, p. 164.

²⁵⁵ Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, p. 164.

excess, rather than a deficiency in the contents of the imagination, and this surfeit of the sensible becomes a bounty for the imagination. Such a state is what Kant refers to in the third *Critique* as the “lingering” (“*Wir weilen bei der Betrachtung des Schönen*”) of the cognitive powers in their contemplation of the beautiful,²⁵⁶ or the free play of the imagination.

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.²⁵⁷

Inasmuch as we consider the forms of judgment that support them, Longuenesse is entirely correct in her assessment of the relation between cognition and reflection. So fundamentally interconnected both in the form of their operation and in their transcendental conditions are these two forms of judgment that it becomes difficult even to imagine one without the other, or to present either one as simply derivative of the other. Without the reflective contemplation (*Betrachtung*) of appearances in the play of imagination, objects could never be “synthesized in the spatiotemporal forms of unity required for them to be reflected under concepts combined in judgments, and in the end subsumed under categories.”²⁵⁸ But with equal certainty we can say that the possibility of opening the space for the free play of reflective judgment requires a kind of productive tension between the imagination’s presentation of the sensible appearance and the understanding, the faculty of concepts. To be sure, the understanding must adopt a new form of relation to imagination in reflection—“understanding too is required (as it is for all judgments) for a judgment of taste, as an aesthetic judgment, yet it is required here not

²⁵⁶ CJ 222

²⁵⁷ CJ 217

²⁵⁸ Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, p. 196.

as an ability to cognize an object”²⁵⁹—but it is crucial to not that understanding does not drop out of reflective judgment, simply because it fails to provide a concept capable of subsuming the contents presented to it by the imagination.

But this failure of the understanding to bring the appearance to cognition dramatically transforms the playing field of the cognitive powers, redrawing the lines that assign them their respective roles in the logical coordination of the elements of experience that each brings to the table. Any claim that the understanding has to legislative priority over sensibility is here relinquished, as now “the understanding serves the imagination rather than vice versa.”²⁶⁰ Understanding still has something to contribute, as it must in any form of judgment, where individual representations are brought under the unity of a higher representation. But what contribution can the understanding, which was identified in the first *Critique* as “the faculty of rules (*das Vermögen der Regeln*),” have to make in a form of judgment whose chief distinguishing feature is its freedom from determination by any rule or concept?

V. From Schema to Symbol: Lawfulness without Law

Though we have been brought to this question by virtue of our comparison between the forms of judgment proper to the cognitive and reflective modes of experience, discovering an adequate answer to it will require us to momentarily retreat from the perspective of the first *Critique*, which, as the site of the critical delimitation of the understanding’s proper domain, dominates our conception of this wide-ranging faculty. So long as we have in mind the particular categories, with their specific content, that the understanding applies to appearances in its determinative judgments, we obscure

²⁵⁹ CJ 228-9

²⁶⁰ CJ 242

from our own view the more general function of this faculty of rules. In other words, we need to take into consideration the general meaning of *Regeln*, or *Regelmässigkeit*, apart from the particular rules that belong to the concepts by which objects are determined for cognition. Kant reminds us of this broader function of the understanding when he describes the arrangement of the cognitive powers that is sustained by the mindset of aesthetic contemplation:

The understanding alone gives the law (*Gesetz*). But when the imagination is compelled to proceed according to a determinate law, then its product is determined by concepts; but in that case the liking... is a liking not for the beautiful but for the good, and the judgment is not a judgment made by taste. It seems, therefore, that only a lawfulness without a law, and a subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony—where the presentation is referred to a determinate concept of an object—is compatible with the free lawfulness of the understanding and with the peculiarity of a judgment of taste.²⁶¹

When the concepts through which the work of the understanding is directed in the constitution of ordinary experience are suspended, this faculty of rules reveals itself in an entirely different light. What was first designated as the “faculty of rules” in consideration of the specific contributions it makes to the constitution of empirical knowledge, is here referred to as the source of lawfulness (*Gesetzmässigkeit*) in general, even where it lacks a specific law to impose on objects. This shift from “rule” (*Regel*) to “law” (*Gesetz*) may appear to be a merely nominal and meaningless alteration, and yet Kant does sometimes appeal to a technical distinction between the two terms. In the first *Critique*, for example, shortly after characterizing the understanding as a “faculty of rules,”²⁶² Kant offers the following explanation of the relation between the rules of the

²⁶¹ CJ 241

²⁶² In fact, Kant gives several determinations of the faculty simultaneously: “We have already defined the understanding in various different ways: as a spontaneity of knowledge, as a power of thought, as a faculty

understanding and its lawfulness: “Rules, so far as they are objective, and therefore necessarily depend on the knowledge of objects, are called laws.”²⁶³ This passage is highly significant for the comparison of the role of understanding in determinative and reflective judgments for at least two reasons. First, it demonstrates that, as a faculty of rules, the understanding has applications that extend beyond its function of conferring the objectivity of our representations upon knowledge. Understanding may fulfill its lawful nature while not committing itself to the application or the service of any particular law. Such a dynamic, of course, is precisely what characterizes the activity of the understanding in the free harmony it forges with imagination in aesthetic reflection.

But secondly, and more importantly, it reveals something crucial about the nature of the relationship between the various rules that belong to the faculty of the understanding, something that is contained in Kant’s conception of the law. The fact that objectivity is associated with the lawfulness of our representations is directly connected with their being directed toward the highest possible systematic unity in their organization, and not just toward the proper application of rules to the objects they govern. “Thus the understanding is something more than a power of formulating rules through comparison of appearances; it is itself the lawgiver of nature.”²⁶⁴ Indeed, we can even say that the ability of the understanding to properly apply and to form individual (empirical) rules capable of legislating with respect to objects is dependent upon its inherent lawfulness. The particular rules that the understanding employs “are only special determinations of still higher laws, and the highest of these, under which the others all

of concepts, or again of judgments. All these definitions, when they are adequately understood, are identical.” (CPR A126)

²⁶³ CPR A126

²⁶⁴ CPR A127

stand, issue a priori from the understanding itself.”²⁶⁵ The hierarchy of laws referred to here, and culminating in the idea of a supreme law of the understanding, is determined by its capacity to contain within itself the representations contained in all lower concepts. The highest law of the understanding is thus the a priori rule by which all of the representations belonging to a single consciousness are bound together under the only representation capable of containing every one of them, namely “the formal unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the manifold of representations,”²⁶⁶ which Kant entitles the transcendental unity of apperception.

When Kant then describes the function of the understanding in the operation of aesthetic reflection as a lawfulness without law and a free harmony with the imagination, this should be understood as a reference to this same unity of the representative powers in general. What the unifying function of the understanding brings to the surplus of the imaginative presentation is “an ability to determine the judgment and its presentation in accordance with the relation that this presentation has to the subject.”²⁶⁷ But the nature of this unity of consciousness appears quite different when viewed in the light of aesthetic contemplation. Where the transcendental unity of apperception, as a ground for the representational unity necessary to the objectivity of our knowledge, determined in a priori, legislative fashion the nature of the relation between the faculties, the lawfulness of the understanding in reflective judgment is subordinated to the unschematizable excess of a sensible presentation of the imagination, whose surplus with respect to the concept it must struggle to keep pace with. What results is a mutual cooperation between the faculties that, precisely because it is not in the service of giving rise to any further

²⁶⁵ CPR A126

²⁶⁶ CPR A105

²⁶⁷ CJ 229

representation, expands the scope and the magnitude of these powers, both individually and collectively. Freed from the demands of determinate cognition according to rules, all our presentational powers undergo what Kant refers to as a quickening, by which the full range of their possible employment is revealed.

This is where the continuity between the reflective element in determinative judgment and the pure aesthetic judgment breaks down. For an aesthetic judgment is not merely a figurative synthesis that fails to arrive at the conceptual determination that is its final purpose, but rather gains something by this subtraction. Pure aesthetic reflection indicates a mental state in which the synthesis of imagination is not just frustrated, but relieved of its schematizing task and thereby liberated to adapt itself to the form of lawfulness without the imposition of a given law. Expressed from the perspective of the first *Critique*, this appears simply to be a deprivation of the complete conditions of knowledge, a fact expressed in the merely subjective status of aesthetic judgments. This means, on the one hand, that our aesthetic claims tell us nothing about the objects in relation to which they are made, failing to constitute knowledge in the proper sense. But by the same token, it also means that taste is destined to remain an indication of a mental state that cannot be directly communicated in the language of objective concepts. Such a condition, however, is only a loss on the assumption that objective knowledge is the proper and highest aim of thought. Aesthetic judgment claims for itself a higher dignity, not by producing discursive knowledge itself, but rather the very subjective conditions that make it possible. For if the faculties are capable of being deployed in a cooperative arrangement under the guidance of rules of the understanding, this is only on the condition that they are first capable of a free, purposive harmony with each other.

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, that proportion suitable for turning a presentation (by which an object is given us) into cognition—must also be universally communicable. For this attunement (*Stimmung*) is the subjective condition of cognition.²⁶⁸

This passage indicates a far more fundamental sense in which the determination (*Bestimmung*) of objects that results from determinative judgment depends on an underlying attunement (*Stimmung*) of the faculties that is first brought about as a condition of reflective judgment. Reflection, then, seems not merely to be a preparatory step in the synthesis of imagination that culminates in the subsumption of the object under the categories, but further, an essential condition for the applicability of concepts in general to objects—which is to say, a condition of their objectivity. Without such a prior attunement of the faculties underlying judgments, “we could not attribute to them a harmony (*Übereinstimmung*) with the object, but they would one and all be a merely subjective play of the presentational powers.”²⁶⁹ This subjective attunement of the faculties thus becomes synonymous with the universal communicability that serves as the ultimate standard for the validity of all our judgments and the representations they contain. In light of the discovery of the subjective *Stimmung* of the faculties that serves as the basis for the objectivity of *Bestimmung*, it becomes possible not only to demonstrate the communicability of aesthetic judgments, but further to show that such subjective reflection is the ground of all communicability.

But before we can demonstrate how the expansion of Kant’s conception of the communicability of representations leads to a parallel broadening in his understanding of experience, we should recall why it initially appears that subjective, aesthetic judgments

²⁶⁸ CJ 238

²⁶⁹ CJ 238

do not share the communicability of their objective counterparts. In order merely to have an experience of any object—or rather of any *appearance*, since objects, strictly speaking, are *products* of experience—we must first succeed in making that appearance presentable. Presentation (*Darstellung*) occurs when the raw material of sensation is brought into relation with the form-bestowing rules of the concept. Without such coordination of the sensible with the intelligible, nothing whatsoever is understood, or even experienced. As Kant writes in the emblematic phrase of the first *Critique*, “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is, therefore, just as necessary to make our concepts sensible, that is, to add the object to them in intuition, as to make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts.” This synthesis of the raw manifold received through sensation with the concepts of the understanding lends objectivity to our representations by bringing them under the rules that govern our apprehension of nature; but by the same token, it also guarantees that these representations will attain the universal communicability (*Mittelbarkeit*) that will allow them to transcend the singularity of their presentation.

Wherever it is a matter of the objective cognition of natural objects, this coordination of the sensible with the intelligible occurs according to the schematization of universal, objective concepts by the formal condition of sensibility. This mutual action of sensibility and intelligibility upon each other by means of the mediating power of the imagination is described by Kant primarily in terms of its effect upon the concept—“the categories . . . without schemata, are merely functions of the understanding for concepts, and represent no object; this objective meaning they acquire from sensibility, which

realizes the understanding in the very process of restricting it”²⁷⁰—but it is critical to recognize that the schematism works equally upon sensibility, raising its contents out of the immediacy that prevents them from having any claim to universal agreement between subjects. Thus the very possibility of building any kind of consensus about the world of experience seems to be staked upon the schemata. In a schematic presentation, the intuition is merely subsumed under the concept, and is capable of so being subsumed by virtue of some content which it shares in common with the concept. “In all subsumptions of an object under a concept the representation (appearance) of the object must be homogeneous with the concept; in other words, the concept must contain something which is represented in the object that is to be subsumed under it.”²⁷¹ The appearance of a round stone, for example, is subsumed under the concept of circularity by virtue of their similarity, thus granting concreteness to the concept, while lending determination and clarity to the appearance. Knowledge is the product of this relation.

In objective knowledge, therefore, the concept shares a relation of identity with the object, by virtue of which it is capable of referring directly to the object in such a way as to make it intelligible, and therefore also communicable. Within the Kantian theory of knowledge, communicability becomes the hallmark of objective cognition. The communicability of knowledge is guaranteed by the fact that the same set of concepts that is responsible for constituting objects, the categories, is likewise responsible for giving them determination and intelligibility. Kant calls the concepts of objective knowledge discursive concepts because they contain a relation of direct and immediate reference

²⁷⁰ CPR A147/B187

²⁷¹ CPR A 137/B176

between the intelligible sign and its sensible referent. To know something, therefore, is to know how to communicate it; knowledge is discursive in its very essence.

But the experience of aesthetic taste, with its peculiar expectation of universal agreement concerning a merely subjective feeling, raises the question whether there is not some other form of experience which, while valid as knowledge, is nonetheless not directly communicable. In other words, is there a form of truth that, because not organized according to determinate concepts, cannot be spoken? Is there any manner of object that, although it can be experienced, cannot be represented according to the logic of schematic presentation? Kant discovers an answer to this question in aesthetic experience, which, in its simplest instance, takes the form of the judgment of the beautiful. Standing before the appearance of beauty, we find ourselves in a peculiar position with respect to language. The beautiful simultaneously provokes and frustrates speech; on the one hand it inspires a desire to communicate the feeling of beauty with others and the expectation that they will share our judgment; on the other hand it leaves us utterly speechless, incapable of accounting for the conviction that underlies our feeling, “so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it.”²⁷² The aesthetic object, we might say, subjects us to the experience of a pure and original *presentation*, refusing by the sheer excess of its sensible form to be brought under our power of *representation*.

It is his inability to account for such an experience with the resources of schematic presentation alone that drives Kant to search for a new form of presentation, one in which the sensible appearance has no direct relation to an intelligible concept that would allow us to schematize it, thus rendering it incommunicable—or at least not

²⁷² CJ 314

directly communicable. As Kant says of the principle underlying our judgments of 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.”²⁷³ Beauty, it would seem, is thus a merely aesthetic form of truth, in which the sensible is worked up into a valid form of experience without being schematized by a concept. The beautiful has no determinate concept as its basis—there is no rule for what is beautiful—and thus it seems to have no relation whatsoever to the concept; and yet it must, since, as Kant writes, “unless we assumed that a judgment of taste relies on some concept or other, we could not save its claim to universality.”²⁷⁴ Therefore we must say that a judgment of taste “is indeed based on a concept, but on an indeterminate one.” An indeterminate concept is a thought which, according to its very determination, cannot be adequately presented through a corresponding sensible intuition. Also referred to as supersensible ideas, such concepts—which include God, freedom, and immortality—cannot, according to the Kantian distinction be *known*, though they can—and for the sake of our moral purposes must—be *thought*.

The introduction of the theory of symbolic presentation, therefore, is meant to account for how such supersensible ideas can be made to present themselves through a sensible appearance in the form of the beautiful. Unlike a schematic presentation, which need only discover a sensible illustration for a concept that in its very determination already contains a reference to sensibility—circularity, for example—the symbol enables us to give concrete exhibition to a concept without any such intuitable aspect. The idea of freedom, for example, is in fact so determined as to expressly exclude the possibility of

²⁷³ CJ 341

²⁷⁴ CJ 340

being made demonstrable, insofar as it refers to a causal basis which lies entirely outside of nature understood as a series of conditioned appearances. How then can freedom be made to appear in the world? It becomes readily apparent, therefore, how the cognitive dimension of the question of symbolic presentation merges with the moral dimension. The question of how phenomenal freedom can be manifested in the phenomenal world—and more broadly, of how the supersensible can be integrated into the sensible—is one of the most persistent enigmas of the Kantian moral philosophy.

Since freedom cannot be shown directly in nature, it must be capable of an indirect, symbolic presentation, otherwise nothing could sustain the belief in our moral purpose. How then does the symbol make this transition from freedom to nature possible?

In symbolic hypotyposis (exhibition) there is 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.²⁷⁵

Symbolic exhibition operates according to a relationship of analogy, comparing one intuition to another on the basis of their relationship to their respective concepts, rather than directly to such a concept. Thus there is no direct commonality between the symbol and the thing it symbolizes, though Kant is quick to remark that the symbol is not a mere sign, which he regards as containing a merely arbitrary and conventional connection to its object. The symbol establishes a genuine kinship, but on the basis of the relation between, rather than the content of its terms.

The most immediate and important consequence of this is what we might call the inexhaustibility of the symbol. Because it contains only an indirect reference, the symbol

²⁷⁵ CJ 351

is an inconclusive appearance, an intuition that exceeds the capacity of any concept to contain it. The symbol, therefore, provokes thought by appearing to point toward a concept, while leaving the imagination without any clear resolution to its search for an adequate concept. On this basis, we may legitimately ask how then Kant can declare so conclusively that beauty provides us with a symbolic presentation of the morally good. His theory of the symbol would seem to prohibit any determinate conclusion about the content of a particular symbol.

Symbolic presentations are characterized above all by their inherent incompleteness, their insufficient givenness, which they encourage the imagination to supplement with its own capacity to refer sensible presentations to supersensible ideas. If beauty, then, is the symbol of morality, this is not because the beautiful and the moral share some sensible determination—nor even because the mental disposition required for receptivity to the beautiful is the same as that required for a disposition towards the morally good—but because the symbolic character of the beautiful demands a concrete response to an indeterminate idea, which is the deepest sense of our moral vocation. Beauty, therefore, is not a representation of the moral law, but a summons to ethical life.

Chapter Four

Beauty as a Summons to Moral Life

In the previous chapter, we saw several ways in which the expansion of our forms of thinking occasioned by a confrontation with the beautiful may be understood as a genuine contribution to our experience of the natural world. Not only was aesthetic consciousness shown to play an indispensable role in the constitution of our objective knowledge of nature by preparing the faculties for their necessary synthesis in the schematism of the imagination, it was also revealed as source of ideas capable of extending our comprehension of objects beyond what is possible under the guidance of the categories alone. That pure reflection on the sensible presentations of the imagination could make a direct and positive contribution to our knowledge of the world, let alone that it might do so according to a priori principles, was a surprising discovery in the course of the completion of the critical philosophy, even for Kant himself.²⁷⁶ For although the principles discovered at the basis of our power for forming reflective judgments were meant to connect with our faculty of knowledge by means of the supersensible principle underlying nature,²⁷⁷ their purely subjective status as representations would seem to disqualify them categorically from any direct involvement in the systematic collection of concepts that we refer to as nature.

²⁷⁶ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in a footnote concerning his use of the term “aesthetic” for the title of the section concerned with the a priori forms of intuition, Kant writes: “The Germans are the only ones who currently make use of the word ‘aesthetic’ in order to signify what others call the critique of taste. This usage originated in the abortive attempt made by Baumgarten...to bring the critical treatment of the beautiful under rational principles, and so to raise its rules to the rank of a science. But such endeavors are fruitless. The said rules or criteria are, as regards their chief sources, merely empirical, and consequently can never serve as determinate a priori laws by which our judgment of taste must be directed.” (CPR A21/B35)

²⁷⁷ As Kant writes in the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*:

But while the idea of a sensible presentation of the imagination seems merely to fall short (by virtue of its lacking any connection with a determinate concept of the understanding) of the standards for the theoretical cognition of nature set forth in the first *Critique*, it is rather in direct violation with the most basic standards set forth in Kant's moral philosophy for the practical cognition of freedom. For Kant's opposition to the empirical character of Humean "moral feeling," as well as his own critical confrontation with the boundary between faith and knowledge, lead him to the conclusion that if the ideas of pure reason are to have any legitimate employment whatsoever in the overall field of experience, then it can only be as the determining source of practical concepts of the will. But the dignity that practical reason enjoys as the source of our motives is preserved for it only so long as it operates upon the will without the influence of anything empirical. As Kant writes in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*: "Whereas, so far as nature is concerned, experience supplies the rules and is the source of truth, in respect of the moral laws it is, alas, the mother of illusion! Nothing is more reprehensible than to derive the laws prescribing what ought to be done from what is done."²⁷⁸ It would seem, therefore, that the beautiful object could offer neither instruction in the principles of morality nor even guidance in matters of practical judgment. For any concept derived from experience puts contingency and particularity in the place of the universal necessity of the moral law, and threatens to supplant freedom with mere inclination.

Familiarity even with these most basic premises of Kant's moral philosophy is thus more than adequate preparation for the surprise of Kant's announcement, at the

²⁷⁸ CPR A318/B375; see also *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* 4:408

conclusion of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, and without further elaboration,²⁷⁹ that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good.” Even granting the indirect nature of symbolic presentation that Kant elaborates, through which the symbol refers to its concept by means of an analogical relation independent of any similarity of content, it seems that nothing could be farther from the principles of practical reason than a form of experience based solely on the reflective contemplation of the subject in relation to a feeling. Nevertheless, despite the rather elliptical announcement of this connection between the beautiful and the morally good, any careful reading of the sections preceding it cannot fail to notice the careful preparation for this claim. Even in his most preliminary and basic efforts to determine the transcendental principle behind aesthetic taste Kant makes constant reference to the related concept of the good, though this is most often done by way of drawing a deep and principled contrast. The aim of the present chapter, therefore, will be to determine how, after closely marking the difference between them, Kant comes finally to assert such an intimate connection between aesthetics and morality, allowing for the possibility that a mere appearance might “make intuitive what the practical rule expresses more generally”²⁸⁰—and thereby providing our moral vocation with an indispensable and irreplaceable service.

As with the principles of theoretical cognition, however, the transcendental basis for the possibility of aesthetic judgment is meant to have some connection with morality,

²⁷⁹ Even the rhetorical form in which Kant introduces this claim is as peculiar as the content of the claim itself, as if Kant were well aware that the arguments leading up to this point have not fully prepared the reader to understand his assertion. After spending the opening paragraphs of §59 discussing the difference between schematic and symbolic presentation, Kant abruptly introduces this argument as follows: “Now I maintain that the beautiful...” Excepting only a short appendix “On Methodology Concerning Taste,” this brief discussion of the symbolic relation concludes the first part of the *Critique*, and is not directly addressed again in the entirety of the Critique of Teleological Judgment, which returns to the question of our systematic knowledge of the natural world. (CJ 353)

²⁸⁰ *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* 4:408

insofar as the beautiful object alone is capable of providing the transition between the realms of freedom and nature. Yet for all of Kant's promises in the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* regarding the discovery of an a priori principle capable of uniting the domains of theoretical and practical philosophy, there is scarcely anything within the account of the free purposiveness of reflective judgment that speaks directly to its status as "a basis uniting the supersensible that underlies nature and the supersensible that the concept of freedom contains practically."²⁸¹ That is, although the objects of the disinterested liking that we call taste are frequently compared to the presentation of those objects whose concepts meet our moral approbation, Kant gives little consideration outside the Introduction to the third *Critique* of the connection between the transcendental powers supporting our capacity for making aesthetic and moral judgments. Furthermore, the conditions that apply to objects of taste and those adequate to our idea of the good seem to contain an inherent opposition that would prevent their converging in a common object. "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."²⁸² In fact, judgments of beauty seem rather to depend on the absence of any determinate concept under which the appearance can be subsumed, flourishing in the suspension of the cognitive function of thought.

In spite of these inherent difficulties, however, the comparison between our aesthetic experience of the world and our moral relation to it is encouraged by what appear to be the intractable problems of Kant's attempts to explain how the supreme principle of the moral will, independent in its determination of all empirical influence,

²⁸¹ CJ 176

²⁸² CJ 207

can come into contact with the realm of nature in which alone it can fulfill its purpose. For although the faculty of desire within us is so determined as to be capable of being activated within us even in the absence of any immediate relation to objects, it nonetheless belongs equally to its nature to demand that such a relation be brought about as a result of the pure determination of the moral will. Freedom does not simply interrupt the chain of causation, it sets it into motion, and without the prospect of freedom, the concepts of morality wither. Hence “it must be possible to think of nature as being such that the lawfulness in 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.”²⁸³

The experience of encountering beautiful objects within the world of our everyday experience helps to sustain our belief in the possibility of fulfilling our moral destiny by suggesting, through a concrete manifestation of it, the compatibility of the mechanistic causation of nature with our moral freedom. As we saw in our earlier discussion of the beautiful, the a priori principle that subtends aesthetic judgments, namely purposivity without a purpose, imbues objects whose determinate sensible character identifies them as products of nature with a visible excess in the form of their presentation, the presence of which can only be understood by appeal to a causation that escapes the closed causal chain of natural mechanism. Hence the apparent purposiveness in the object awakens the purposiveness in our own moral freedom, adding to it a glimpse of its possible conjunction with an object belonging to the order of nature. By itself, this is certainly a faint indication of such a possibility, and yet it is all the same an unequivocal one. For although the aesthetic object may be marked above all by its refusal to be adapted directly to any of our rule-bound, cognitive processes, this

²⁸³ CJ 176

incomprehensibility results from nothing more than the apparent conjunction of mechanistic and purposive forms of causation within a single object. The appearance of beauty thus beckons the moral attitude at the same time that it promises its fulfillment within the world of lived experience. Beauty is the kingdom of ends, that highest representation of the morally good, appearing in its sensible guise.

Nevertheless, any presentation of the synthesis of natural mechanism with a principle of undetermined, teleological causation would remain a matter of purely speculative interest were it found to lie entirely outside the reach of human action. This is why, despite the privileged treatment of natural beauty and the skepticism concerning the possibility of making pure aesthetic judgments in relation to any appearance known to be a product of deliberate human activity, Kant nonetheless finds it necessary to make an account of the fine arts part of his treatment of the power of aesthetic judgment. For if beauty demonstrates that nature, thought in terms of a realm of phenomenal objects, is receptive to causality through freedom, then the artwork exemplifies the promise that the principles of human morality can become the source of this unlikely conjunction. In other words, the beauty in art advances on the beauty of nature insofar as it shows that the production of the effects of freedom in nature is not just possible, but that it is possible for human agency. Only in light of the moral demand that the principles of aesthetic reflection be transformed into guidelines for practical freedom does the shift from the analysis of the receptive pleasure of artworks to the account of their creative production become fully explicable. The account of artistic genius, therefore, represents the pinnacle of this discussion of the fine arts insofar as it, not merely through its products but

additionally through its own constitutive activity, exemplifies the reflective attitude capable of discovering in nature a site for the development of our moral calling.

But while the causal ambivalence of free purposiveness and the exemplarity of the genius help to prepare the space in which nature and freedom can converge, they nonetheless fail to reach the heart of the moral law itself on a substantive level. To some extent, this failure is inevitable. The concepts of morality cannot admit of direct sensible presentation, and throughout the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment Kant takes considerable care to remind us of the merely formal analogy between the aesthetic and moral judgments. The beautiful cannot itself be the good, nor can taste be a sign of the good—in other words, receptivity to the pleasure of beauty is not a reliable indicator of moral virtue—but only as symbolic representation can what appeals to our disinterested pleasure in its mere appearance be thought in relation to the unswaying standard of the moral law. But though the principles on which these distinct forms of judgment are grounded remain thoroughly incompatible, they nonetheless share a moment of direct contact on another level, namely insofar as each provokes its respective synthesis in us through an a priori feeling. For as thoroughly as Kant distances the determining ground of the principle of morality from anything empirically sensible, he nevertheless recognizes that such a principle, meant to determine in a priori fashion our faculty of desire, can have no purchase on our motivations lest it exceed its mere abstract determination and activate within us some manner of feeling. To be sure, this must be a most unusual kind of feeling (*Gefühl*), one that, unlike others, does not result from the passive receptivity of a sensible intuition, but rather from a kind of auto-affection in which the subject responds without mediation to the moral law that it gives to itself.

The name that Kant gives to this feeling before the moral law is “respect” (*Achtung*), though his account of how such a feeling is possible remains as unclear as the argument for its necessity is clear. In the experience of aesthetic pleasure, however, Kant discovers another model for such an a priori form of feeling, and one which admits of a much deeper analysis than can be managed in relation to the respect for the law of morality. In taste, too, we find a feeling of pleasure that, because it derives none of its intensity from the actual existence of its object, but only from the contemplation of its formal qualities, is not dependent on the sensible manifold of intuition. Aesthetic pleasure is always occasioned by the pleasant sensation of what is intuited, but its real basis consists in the sensation felt by the subject reflecting on its own harmonious activity when liberated from the demands of cognitive responsibility. The account of the experience of beauty thus has the further advantage of demonstrating with great clarity and depth of understanding how this auto-affection of the subject is possible, in a way that greatly advances the insight into the transformation of morality’s formal rules into direct imperatives for action in the world.

I. The Elusive Object of Moral Judgment

In principle, we are already thoroughly familiar with the problem of the transition between distinct forms of representation as the problem of judgment. Judgment unites whatever is so constituted as to be incapable of joining itself without mediation, as we have already seen in several different contexts. Of course what we have also seen is that judgment is not a faculty, unlike those with which it interacts, that is determinable according to a set of unalterable laws. Rather, it belongs to the nature of this unifying faculty to adapt itself to whatever rule it finds necessary to handle the task before it. In

that sense, we have already anticipated the problem of moral judgment, and at the same time not at all. For while the intervention of the faculty of judgment is required in the process of forming representations belonging to the a priori powers of knowledge and of feeling, moral judgment concerns only the application of our moral concepts to possible actions or objects, rather than their determination.

The ideas of practical reason, Kant is careful to note, constitute a form of objective, a priori knowledge, despite being distinguished from the concepts of theoretical reason according to the familiar distinction between thinking and knowing. But to deny objectivity to our moral concepts would be to deprive morality of one of the indispensable conditions of its dignity, namely its universal validity and the communicability of its constitutive concepts. For however difficult it might be to persuade someone to act in accordance with the good, learning what morality demands is so much a matter of the utmost simplicity that it requires no special instruction whatsoever. But recognizing the objectivity of our moral claims therefore means that practical reason is somehow determinative with respect to “objects,” while the central task of the first *Critique* was to demonstrate that objects belonging to the phenomenal world are thoroughly determined by the comprehensive system of the laws of nature. The objectivity of moral reason must therefore be of a fundamentally different kind than that which characterizes the rules of our cognitive faculty. Our moral concepts do not themselves affect sensible bodies, but only our power of desire to act upon them.

To be an object of practical cognition (*ein Gegenstand der praktischen Erkenntnis*) so understood signifies, therefore, only the relation of the will to the action by which it or its opposite would be made real, and to appraise whether or not something is an object of pure practical reason is only to distinguish the possibility or impossibility of willing the action by which, if

we had the ability to do so, a certain object would be made real.²⁸⁴

In other words, practical reason is only directly causally efficacious in relation to the will, the faculty of desire, but not at all in relation to the objects and actions that populate the world of sense. What the will calls an object is not itself a phenomenon, and indeed eludes phenomenality altogether. Whether or not the same subject in whom this faculty of desire operates is even capable of bringing about an action that is commensurate with what practical reason commands is something that “experience must judge,” falling entirely outside the scope of the moral faculty.

That practical reason itself lacks this capacity is no mere accident of the human constitution, but belongs necessarily to the very idea of a universally communicable good-in-itself as the object of the will. For if practical reason were, in its determination of the good, to limit its choice among objects that are possible through some prior practical law derived from experience, then it would relinquish its claim to universal necessity and unseat itself as the supreme principle of our moral conduct. Only by proving itself capable of self-determination in the absence of the influence of any laws of nature, be they empirical or a priori, can practical reason assert its claim to legislate in the realm of freedom and practical choice. Nevertheless, insofar as the will that practical reason determines is denied its central purpose if it loses any claim whatsoever on the sensible world, it must not violate the laws of nature, but rather must act “conformably with the concepts of the understanding.”²⁸⁵ It is in the effort to explain how the principles of freedom may conform with the laws of nature while not sacrificing their independence from them that Kant introduces the “categories of freedom,” those concepts according to

²⁸⁴ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5:57.

²⁸⁵ CPrR 5:65

which practical reason alone carries through the determination of the will. Unlike the categories of the understanding, which must, as a constitutive condition of their legitimacy, be applicable to objects that are subject to the forms of sensible intuition, these categories of freedom answer only to themselves, “and do not have to wait for intuitions in order to receive meaning.”²⁸⁶ But insofar as the table of these categories is meant to reflect the progressive levels of the use of practical reason generally (that is, not only in its pure use), they proceed from the least to the greatest independence of practical reason from the sensible conditions to which it is always in relation, whether as determining ground or as the field of its necessary effects.

While the elaboration of such a progression indeed provides the advantage for which it seems to be intended—namely, that of demonstrating how actions motivated by empirical precepts yet in conformity with the moral law might gradually come to be determined by a ground “outside the world in freedom as the property of an intelligible being”—it nonetheless proves entirely inadequate for showing how the opposite movement can be effected. By beginning from concrete actions and gradually abstracting from the specificity of their content, it is possible to determine the general rule to which they correspond, by means of a mechanical procedure. Yet to begin from the moral law itself and discover an action or an object that thoroughly satisfies what it commands requires another power altogether. In other words, it is not at all clear how the determination of the will by the pure moral law is meant to discover for itself an action that is adequate to the purity of its principle. In order to bring about such a synthesis of the moral with the empirically possible, something beyond the pure concepts of practical reason is required, namely judgment. “Now, whether an action possible for us in

²⁸⁶ CPrR 5:66

sensibility is or is not a case that stands under the rule requires practical judgment, by which what is said in the rule universally (*in abstracto*) is applied to an action (*in concreto*).”²⁸⁷ On the face of it, this is the textbook Kantian definition of judgment, the subsumption of a concrete, particular instance under the umbrella of a general concept, through which the former gains in intelligibility while the latter achieves the conditions of an object of possible experience. And yet moral judgment seems to offer a fundamentally distinct version of this problem, insofar as here it follows upon the a priori determination of the object in question, rather than preceding and grounding it. And yet, insofar as this judgment is necessary to the fulfillment of the moral law in the sensible world, the very practical character of its activity seems to be at stake in these judgments. Does moral judgment itself obey an a priori principle, and if so, from where is such a principle derived? If it came from the same principle of practical reason that determines the will, then this determination would already include reference to a sensible object or action, and hence would fail to be a pure law of freedom.

Practical reason would seem to be up against an insurmountable difficulty of its own making here, as it commands a moral vision that not only does it lack the power to fulfill, but indeed whose fulfillment it would seem to expressly prohibit by the incompatibility of its principle with the object toward which it is directed. As Kant acknowledges, “it seems absurd to want to find in the sensible world a case which, though as such it stands only under the law of nature, yet admits of the application to it of a law of freedom and to which there could be applied the supersensible idea of the morally good, which is to be exhibited in it *in concreto*.”²⁸⁸ To assert the existence of an

²⁸⁷ CPrR 5:67

²⁸⁸ CPrR 5:68

object standing under both the causal laws of nature and those of freedom would appear to be an attempt to find a way around the antinomy of nature and freedom by simply denying the conflict between these opposing principles.²⁸⁹ Although practical reason here finds itself in a perplexity that is similar to that of theoretical reason in its need to reconcile the incommensurable sources of objective knowledge, the problem now differs in two important ways, the first of which Kant explicitly acknowledges. Though the categories present objects in a manner entirely distinct from the intuitions with which they must be synthesized, they are nevertheless, as concepts of experience, so constituted as to admit of such a synthesis through the mediation of the schemata. In other words, the categories are, in their essence, sensibly determined concepts. It belongs to the very definition of ideas of reason, on the other hand, that no sensible presentation can be adequate to their content, a fact which renders the mediation of the transcendental imagination seemingly useless.²⁹⁰

Furthermore, while the conflict within theoretical reason is manifest simply with a view to the elements of cognition themselves, the tension inhabiting practical reason would seem to be intelligible only in terms of the presupposition of an already constituted sensible world to oppose to practical reason's moral law. In other words, the principle of the will, as such, contains neither conflict nor ambivalence, but only discovers the need

²⁸⁹ Kant describes such an indifference or ambivalence to the alternatives posed by the antinomies as the state toward which reason would naturally tend, were it somehow cut off from any interest in the stakes of this question. "If men could free themselves from all such interests, and consider the assertions of reason irrespective of their consequences, solely in view of the intrinsic force of their grounds, and were the only way to escape from their perplexities to give adhesion to one or the other of the opposing parties, their state would be one of continuous vacillation." (CPR A475/B504) The only thing that releases reason from such an impasse is to be summoned to action, and hence forced out of its indecision.

²⁹⁰ In trying to further develop the parallel between theoretical and practical judgment, Kant uses the expression "schemata of a law" of practical reason, but then immediately expresses reservation about the applicability of the term to a purely formal law. In any case, it is clear that he means only to indicate that practical reason must employ a form of mediation that is analogous to that of the schematism, even though its concept cannot be supplied by the transcendental imagination.

for the assistance of a mediating judgment insofar as it is related to the phenomenal nature of theoretical reason. Perhaps this why Kant calls upon the understanding to perform for practical reason what imagination is called upon for in the service of theoretical reason, namely the application of their respective concepts to whatever manner of object they are suitable for determining. “Thus the moral law has no cognitive faculty other than the understanding (not the imagination) by means of which it can be applied to objects of nature, and what the understanding can put under an idea of reason is not a schema of sensibility but a law.”²⁹¹ So while the schematism of the concepts of the understanding generates a full-fledged object of experience from out of the judgment that it facilitates, the moral law can be “schematized” only by another law, though a law of nature rather than freedom. This “type of the moral law” allows reason to determine, in a purely formal manner, the outline of such an object in nature as would conform to the moral law itself, thus bringing it into contact with the natural rules for the construction of objects, if not with objects themselves.

This gap between the formal and the real conditions of objects will remain crucial, as it presents a persistent and serious obstacle to the actualization of the purpose of the moral law. For Kant seems here to have backed himself into just that corner whose danger he anticipated with respect to the discussion of judgment in the first *Critique*, where he recognized that the application of rules cannot itself be determined by a rule, or else “this in turn, for the very reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgment.”²⁹² The type of the moral law, though it facilitates practical judgment to the extent that it places it in relation to a law of nature, appears only to defer the problem of

²⁹¹ CPrR 5:69

²⁹² CPR A133/B172

its application to an object, or else to shift responsibility for it outside of the sphere of pure moral concepts. For this law of nature too must be applied to a concrete object before the determination of the will can result in any action affecting a sensible object. All the same, the typic of judgment plays an invaluable part in directing the abstract formality of the moral law itself toward the sensible actions—though it must be remarked that it fails to translate the principle of morality, if we understand that to mean offering a direct and reversible equivalent of its meaning. For although this typic can be derived from pure practical reason—it “stands under” it, in Kant’s language—it would not be similarly possible to reverse the procedure of judgment and derive the law from its type. This makes the typic of moral judgment something like an example, though a non-sensible and purely formal one. Kant offers the following formulation, though like the categorical imperative from which it is derived, the typic would have to admit of alternative renderings: “ask yourself whether, if the action you propose were to take place by a law of nature of which you were yourself a part, you could indeed regard it as possible through your will.”²⁹³

This consideration of the consistency of the action as a law of nature with the will stands as a sufficient test of its morality, insofar as the maxim governing any action that would fail to satisfy its conditions would similarly fail to stand up to the scrutiny of the moral law. In that respect, the typic of judgment provides the auxiliary benefit that, in addition to allowing us to schematize the law of freedom, it stands as a kind of shorthand expression of it, serving as a practical guideline for even “the most common understanding,” whose grasp of the purely intelligible moral law may be somewhat wanting. But there is a danger in such a use of such expedients, namely the possibility

²⁹³ CPrR 5:69

that such a law of nature would come to usurp the rightful moral law as the determining ground of the will, due to a confusion of what is a mere consequence of the law with its ground. Such a subreptive displacement of the moral principle could occur in either of two directions, one which Kant refers to as the “empiricism,” and the other as the “mysticism of practical reason.”

In general, the role of practical reason in moral judgments is usurped when the concepts of good and evil, which are meant to directly determine the object of the will, instead allow themselves to be determined by objects in experience. This occurs as the empiricism of practical reason when good and evil are thought merely in terms of the consequences that are expected to result from a particular action. Though such a calculus based on the pleasure to be gained or the displeasure avoided by a choice, dependent as it is on past experience, clearly cannot serve as an a priori principle of the will, Kant nonetheless maintains that it serves as a suitable type for the morally good, if it is made into a universal law of nature. In other words, actions performed as if their moral purpose consisted merely in delivering the greatest possible happiness would not be morally good insofar as they are not performed with the good as their purpose or determining ground, but they would most often be consistent and compatible with what the pure principle of morality commands. But the confusion of the concepts of good and evil can also occur in a quite different direction, one Kant calls the mysticism of practical reason. This results from the confusion of the moral principle by transcendent thoughts, which Kant calls “real but not sensible intuitions,” such as the idea of an invisible kingdom of God. The problem with allowing such a thought to govern our moral decisions is that it “makes

what served only as a symbol into a schema.”²⁹⁴ This remark is highly suggestive for the possibility of thinking the relation of the second and third *Critiques* insofar as it provides a terminological continuity between the discussion of the type of moral judgment and the symbolic form of exhibition of concepts described in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. Though Kant clearly has in mind the technical distinction between schematic and symbolic presentation as early as the second *Critique*, the more thorough discussion of the symbol provided by the third *Critique* helps to clarify this crucial passage on moral judgment, and more importantly suggests that the moral law depends on the assistance of a strategy learned from aesthetic consciousness in the crucial question of its application to an object.

In fact, the logic of the symbol proves a far better way of accounting for the possibility of forming moral judgments through the application of the moral law to an object than any practical precept offered by the understanding. For although the symbol can be understood a species of example—that is, a concrete presentation of a concept that lacks such sensible determination in itself—it belongs to a special class of example that makes it uniquely suitable for the presentation of a moral principle that, by definition refuses sensible presentation. The chief advantage that the symbol enjoys over the schema is that it is capable of serving as the representation for ideas or concepts with which it has absolutely no intrinsic relation. When Kant first introduces the concept of symbolic hypotyposis in the third *Critique*, the definition he offers seems far more interested in the problem of moral judgment than that of aesthetic judgment, the latter seeming to have little immediate connection to the following description: “In symbolic hypotyposis there is a concept which only reason can think and to which no sensible

²⁹⁴ CPrR 5:71

intuition can be adequate, and this concept it supplied with an intuition that judgment treats in a way merely analogous to the procedure it follows in schematizing.”²⁹⁵ Analogy is crucial to Kant’s understanding of the symbol; not only is symbolic exhibition analogous to its schematic counterpart insofar as it draws a mediating relation between representations that are unrelated in themselves, but further it relies on an analogical relation in order to connect a supersensible idea with its sensible image. “Schemata contain direct, symbols indirect, exhibitions of the concept. Schematic exhibition is demonstrative. Symbolic exhibition uses an analogy.”²⁹⁶ While it would be inconceivable to make a direct, sensible presentation of any moral concept, the symbol uncovers an essentially limitless resource for making the practical rule speak through an indirect image. The analogical presentation of the symbol not only provides an understanding of this rule, but also gives us a glimpse into the procedure by which it can be applied to a concrete action.

The implications of this analysis in relation to the discussion of moral judgment are remarkable. For on the one hand, it suggests that confusion about moral concepts is akin to that lack of judgment which Kant famously refers to as stupidity, noting the insuperability of such a condition resulting from a natural deficiency of a talent that cannot be learned by instruction. Failure to distinguish the essence of the pure moral law from the examples or the expedient formulas that are useful in calling it to mind would be identical to the failure to comprehend an analogy as such, mistaking an identity of relation for an identity of substance. On the other hand, it also suggests that insofar as a remedy might exist for overcoming this moral deficiency, the lessons learned from

²⁹⁵ CJ 351

²⁹⁶ CJ 352

aesthetic experience stands as the foremost candidate, by virtue of their ability to awaken and develop in us that form of analogical representation that is required to make the moral law speak in the tongue of ordinary experience. For Kant's insistence that judgment cannot be *taught* should not be confused with the claim that it cannot be *learned*. The point is rather that the incommunicability of this talent that must reach beyond what can be contained within concepts in order to apply them makes its operation impossible to encapsulate in a set of prescriptive rules that can be adequately captured in ordinary, discursive language. Judgment rather admits only of examples, but these can certainly be employed to promote the development of indirect thinking, as Kant indicates by referring to them as "the go-cart of judgment." Examples can help judgment along, but they cannot be expected to substitute for its absence.

But the seemingly insurmountable difficulty in developing an aptitude for analogical thought in someone who lacks the capacity for it altogether is the likelihood that exposure to a multiplicity of examples will confuse, rather than clarify, the issue in question. Making the example appear as an example, rather than as something to be understood on its own terms, requires more than indirect exhibition. What is demanded is some manner of appearance that, because it refuses intelligibility in itself, gestures toward something further which it requires the viewer to assume an active role in supplying. Such a species of indirect exhibition would contain within itself an aura of incompleteness, and yet without giving any particular determination to what is missing from it. It is precisely in this respect that the aesthetic object reveals its unique advantage, insofar as it is singularly capable of provoking that reflective thought in which the subject considers its own capacity to actively supplement what stands out as lacking in the

object. Nowhere does Kant more directly or unreservedly praise this quality of the beautiful arts than in his evaluation of poetry, which he deems as the highest ranking among the arts for the directness with which it appeals to the play of the imagination.²⁹⁷

[Poetry] expands the mind: for it sets 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. Poetry fortifies the mind: for it lets the mind feel its ability—free, spontaneous, and independent of natural determination—to contemplate and judge phenomenal nature as having aspects that nature does not on its own offer in experience either to sense or to the understanding.²⁹⁸

The point here extends far beyond the ability of the image to move among concepts whose meaning eludes the capture of conceptual thought and language, though this service is relevant to the force of the aesthetic image. What the indirection of poetic or analogical presentation permits is the active participation of the viewer in establishing the connection between disparate representations, along with the possibility of making ideas

²⁹⁷ Kant distinguishes poetic writing from other forms of rhetorical and literary composition on the basis of its straightforward announcement of its intention to provoke the activity of the imagination, rather than to persuade the intellect. “Indeed, since the machinery of persuasion can be used equally well to palliate and cloak vice and error, it cannot quite eliminate our lurking suspicion that we are being artfully hoodwinked. In poetry on the other hand everything proceeds with honesty and sincerity. It informs us that it wishes to engage in mere entertaining play with the imagination, namely, one that harmonizes in form with the laws of the understanding; it does not seek to sneak up on the understanding and ensnare it by a sensible exhibition.” (CJ 327) In the footnote that follows this passage, Kant confesses his own preference for the pleasures of poetry over those of the speeches of the politician or the preacher, citing his distrust in the latter for “an art that knows how, in important matters, to move people like machines to a judgment that must lose all weight with them when they meditate about it calmly.” (CJ 328n) The parallels with Plato’s extensive reflections on rhetoric and sophistry are striking, particularly since Kant continues to illustrate his point by reference to the rising prominence of the art of oratory in ancient Athens and Rome, linking this development directly to the deterioration of public life in both cities. Though Plato of course does not demonstrate the same unrestrained enthusiasm for “poetry” that Kant does, he nonetheless articulates a distinction similar to Kant’s along different lines. In the preliminary discussion of poetry in Book III of the *Republic*, Socrates separates what he refers to as a “simple” form of narrative from those produced by the imitation of what they describe, expressing a greater concern for the potential of deception in the latter. Such a narrative style of poetry as belongs to Homer, for example, is treated as more honest and therefore more likely to depict its subject in a praiseworthy way, insofar as “if the poet nowhere hid himself, his poetic work and narrative as whole would have taken place without imitation.” Plato, *Republic*, trans. A. Bloom (New York: Basic, 1991), 393c.

²⁹⁸ CJ 326

manifest that would otherwise be unavailable through the avenues open to us in the empirical experience of nature. In other words, beautiful images such as are regularly presented through poetic language stir thoughts within the mind that, although they are destined to produce effects in the world of sense, cannot originate there, such as the pure principle of the morally good.

Only by reference to this unique power of the aesthetic image can the legitimacy of Kant's rather enigmatic assertion that the beautiful is a symbol of the morally good be thoroughly understood. For in presenting an intangible idea of reason through the specificity of a concrete, sensible presentation, choosing from among "the unlimited variety of possible forms that harmonize" with that concept, the artist confronts precisely the same problem—or at least a thoroughly analogous problem—to the one that faces every moral agent who must transform the abstract but binding mandate of the moral law into one specific choice from among the objects and actions available in the lived world of sense. Again we find the doubled applicability of the concept of analogy to this situation. The artistic genius must struggle to discover the most fitting analogy for a supersensible concept, in a manner that parallels the capacity of the person of distinguished moral judgment to discover an object for the will that most closely conforms to the law of practical reason, even though it cannot exhibit it directly. Thus Kant might have further, and with greater specificity, said that the symbolic power of the beautiful is itself the symbol of the type of moral judgment, the mechanism by which its law comes into contact with its object.

This still leaves us with a more difficult question on our hands, however, namely why, after having asserted the infinite variety of relations that are open to any single

symbolic presentation, Kant nonetheless declares with so little hesitation that “the morally good is *the* intelligible that taste has in view.”²⁹⁹ In other words, are we not forced to admit that the source of the symbol’s singular power is also a form of limitation, inasmuch as the merely analogical relation between representations contained within the symbol would prevent us from ever finally determining its proper or final reference? The moral law, of course, is not just a determinate object, making the reference of beauty to morality wholly distinct from the only other example Kant offers as a symbol, namely that of a hand mill to the form of oppressive power exerted in a despotic state. While the latter example assigns a specific and sensible content (albeit by means of a general, sensible concept) to its symbolic image, the former refers it rather to a supersensible thought that, while conceptually distinct, is wholly indeterminate as to its object. Furthermore, the indeterminacy of the moral law in relation to a sensible content, and the problem this poses for the faculty of judgment, is precisely parallel to the enigma faced by the artist, at least insofar as the latter acts from conscious and deliberate intention. As Kant writes, “In this ability [taste], judgment does not find itself subjected to a heteronomy from empirical laws, as it does elsewhere in empirical judging—concerning objects of such a pure liking it legislates to itself, just as reason does regarding the power of desire.”³⁰⁰ Thus, despite Kant’s own formulation of the relation, it seems more accurate to regard *taste* as the symbol of evaluating the moral worth of actions, and *genius* as the capacity for choosing the actions that most closely correspond to the moral law.

²⁹⁹ CJ 353 (emphasis added)

³⁰⁰ CJ 353

But while such a distinction is highly relevant in the realm of aesthetics—where production and reception are divided from each other by the beautiful appearance that stands between them, as well as by the difference in subjects who display these talents—the separation of knowledge and action is less easily applicable to the realm of morality. Perhaps this explains why Kant simply regards the phenomenon of beauty itself, in the most inclusive sense, as the symbol of morality, rather than choosing between the activity of the genius and that of the spectator. That is not to say that the conceptual distinction between the cognitive determination of an action and its execution is unthinkable in principle, but rather that it is a difference that disappears in practice, as it belongs to the essence of a self-sufficient practical law to legislate directly and without the assistance of any external conditions. For while taste, the power through which we comprehend the beautiful, would require the addition of *Geist* as well as the discipline of technique in order to rise to the talent of genius, the moral law needs nothing more than a will that stands under its legislation upon which to stamp its imprint. Indeed, any principle shown incapable of thus directly commanding the will would thereby relinquish its claim to being practically legislative. “What is essential to any moral worth of actions is that the moral law determine the will immediately.”³⁰¹ This means, on the one hand, that nothing further must act upon the faculty of desire beyond what is contained merely in the idea of an object in accordance with the law of practical reason, and on the other hand, that knowledge of this law must not only provide the formal conditions of any moral action, but the sole motivation for it as well.

Regarding the first of these points, the complete adequacy of the moral law to determine the object of the will without mediation, it is important to recognize that Kant

³⁰¹ CPrR 5:71

understands the will as the ground determining our moral decisions, rather than immediately pressing us toward the actions that fulfill them. In other words, though there can be no gap between the knowledge of the good and the desire for it, such knowledge does not of itself bring about a consequence in conformity with practical reason. As Kant writes in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, “The will is therefore the faculty of desire considered not so much in relation to action (as choice is) but rather in relation to the ground determining choice to action.”³⁰² It is therefore no threat to the autonomy of practical reason that our actions often fail to conform to the moral law, as other forces can influence the determination of choice without undermining the authority of the will. The human power of choice, as a synthesis of free, rational choice and the impulsiveness of subjective inclinations, “is a choice that can indeed be affected but not determined by impulses, and is therefore of itself (apart from an acquired proficiency of reason) not pure but can still be determined to actions by a pure will.”³⁰³ Though the practical faculty does not directly contain the power to affect sensible objects, it remains the sole power capable of determining the will. Any action resulting from a choice mandated by inclination is merely a failure of the will to determine choice, but not a misstep of practical reason. The will is only will insofar as it is exercised in freedom.

As to the point that pure practical reason must be the actual, and not merely the possible, determining ground of any action with moral worth, Kant makes his case by appealing to the distinction between legality and morality in our actions. While a legal action conforms to the letter of the law by falling within the boundaries of its mandate, only a moral action is pursued for the sake of such conformity, and thereby embodies the

³⁰² Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 13 (6:213).

³⁰³ *Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:213

spirit of the law in addition to its letter.³⁰⁴ The juridical law can only extend its domain as far as an analysis of the formal quality of an action, insofar as it has no means by which to interrogate as far back as the action's purpose. But the moral law, knowing no such limits, is concerned not at all with the outcome of the will's action upon its object, but only with the motivation that underlies it. Here the practical law of reason demands only that freedom act for the sake of its own preservation, allowing nothing outside the autonomy of the will to determine choice. "For the sake of the law and in order to give it influence on the will one must not, then, look for some other incentive by which that of the moral law might be dispensed with."³⁰⁵ The issue, therefore, is not whether practical reason determines the will, but whether the will determines choice. In order for the will to overcome the influence of inclinations and subjective interests and command our practical decisions, the moral law must be capable, in and of itself, of offering some incentive to choice.

II. A Priori Feeling

It is with respect to the objectivity and the cognitive status of their respective representations that the analogy between aesthetics and morality seemingly begins to break down. For while practical reason alone is sufficient to determine its object, reflective judgment not only falls short of determining any object whatsoever, but furthermore seems to require the assistance of the labor generated by the theoretical and practical faculties even in producing its own state of harmonious agreement within the subject. Objects whose mere appearance pleases us do not become, by that fact alone, the basis for pure aesthetic judgments. In order to provoke in us that special form of

³⁰⁴ CPrR 5:72

³⁰⁵ CPrR 5:72

attunement that we call beauty, the pleasure must seem to be grounded in the free purposiveness of the object's organization, and this in turn is only provocative for the imagination insofar as it appears to belong to an object with its causal origins in nature, rather than in human freedom. This remains true even for artworks, which must emulate the causal power of nature in order to avoid the trap of appearing to be deliberately concocted for the sake of pleasure, something that inhibits rather than encourages aesthetic judgment. Without reference to the mechanism of nature, there is nothing whatsoever astonishing in beauty, and the quickening of our cognitive powers that characterizes aesthetic consciousness depends on this astonishment for its initial impulse.

But the dependence of aesthetic judgment upon the practical faculty seems to be even greater, if far less tangible, than its necessary reference to nature. A judgment of the beautiful, to be sure, does not hold its object up to the standards of pure practical reason, nor does it show favor to those objects in which a distinctly moral quality is observable. In fact, the presence of such a moral concept in the presentation of an object is rather likely to stultify true aesthetic pleasure, by constraining the play of imagination within determinate boundaries. This is equally true whether the pleasure we take in an object misses the mark of pure aesthetic enjoyment either in the direction of the agreeable or of the morally good.

Neither an object of inclination, nor one that reason enjoins on us as an object of desire, leaves us the freedom to make an object of pleasure for ourselves out of something or other. All interest either presupposes a need or gives rise to one; and, because interest is the basis that determines approval, it makes the judgment about the object unfree.³⁰⁶

The point, of course, is not to suggest that the concept of the morally good is itself in tension with freedom. On the contrary, it is only insofar as the will is fully determined by

³⁰⁶ CJ 210

pure reason alone that the faculty of desire can overcome external compulsion and assert its causal independence of nature. But with respect to the feeling of pleasure that our contemplation of this moral law produces, and in comparison to the purposeless enjoyment of the aesthetic object, our liking for the good seems to be constrained by the usefulness of the concept through which it is presented. And yet, a subtle shift takes place in Kant's introduction of the theory of symbolism, and his assertion that the beautiful symbolizes morality in the manner by which it appeals to the feeling of pleasure within us. For while Kant has been building a parallelism between aesthetic liking and the incentive that draws us to the morally good from the very beginning of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, it is not until its conclusion that he announces a substantive connection between the beautiful and the good.

In his effort to identify the basis according to which the feeling of pleasure experienced before the beautiful, despite being merely subjective nonetheless entirely of itself and without further reflection demands the assent of every other subject, Kant recognizes that reflective judgments must contain a "subjective principle." If such judgments were made without any rule whatsoever, and merely according to private sensation, then there would be no ground on which to even anticipate the agreement of others. And yet if the rule on which they are based were an objective rule, i.e., one on the basis of which the object is determined, then the judgment would not be aesthetic at all, but merely cognitive. A pure aesthetic judgment must retain the subjective quality of a mere sensation, while somehow also claiming the universality that belongs solely to representations produced according to a law, but just what is this middle ground that Kant tries to establish in the notion of a subjective principle? The possibility of a

universalizable taste presupposes what can only be called a “common sense” (*Gemeinsinn*), where sense refers not to a weakly articulated or ambiguous state of understanding, but rather to a feeling (*Gefühl*). Yet such a form of feeling would differentiate itself from others in that it would transcend the limits of the individual subjectivity to which, as a representation, it nonetheless refers. Only on this basis can the universal validity of subjective judgments be conceived. “So they must have a subjective principle, which determines only by feeling rather than by concepts, though nonetheless with universal validity, what is liked or disliked. Such a principle, however, could only be regarded as a common sense.”³⁰⁷

Common sense is therefore a universal capacity for the cognitive powers within the subject to achieve such a state of harmonious coordination in their reflection on an appearance as to constitute a discernible representation. The evidence of the existence of the principle lies in the distinctness and the regularity of the judgment it enables: “That we do actually presuppose this indeterminate standard of a common sense is proved by the fact that we presume to make judgments of taste.”³⁰⁸ Yet since this representation is not referred to any concept by which an object might be determined, it remains a merely subjective reflection of the state of the mental powers in relation to each other, not just a feeling, but a reflexive feeling. This auto-affection of the subject forms the ground of the disinterested pleasure by which we identify the beautiful. But the transcendental demonstration of the necessity of such a subjective principle does little to clarify the content that belongs to this common sense. Unless the ground of this feeling can be articulated, its universality can only be indirectly presupposed by means of the

³⁰⁷ CJ 238

³⁰⁸ CJ 239

expectation that accompanies the disinterested pleasure. And yet if the principle were to admit of such conceptual articulation, it would thereby immediately become an objective principle.

As this principle resides merely within a subjective feeling, which by definition lacks the direct communicability of the concept, it therefore does not even permit us to regard the resulting judgments as “unconditionally necessary,” only to feel a certain disappointment in face of empirical variations in taste. The difference between a subjectively universal and an objective principle in such cases where experience fails to conform to the law expressed by its rule is worth noting. Objective principles of cognition allow knowledge to run ahead of experience without sacrificing the certainty of their judgments, but the subjective nature of common sense nevertheless earns it an advantage precisely by virtue of its lacking this ability. For while an empirical concept of nature would need to be revised or discarded altogether in the face of empirical counter-evidence, the subjective expectation of agreement regarding taste maintains its resiliency even in light of unrelenting opposition from experience. “For it seeks to justify us in making judgments that contain an ought: it does not say that everyone will agree with my judgment, but that he ought to.”³⁰⁹ Judgments of taste are therefore capable only of demanding, rather than predicting, agreement. To find beauty in an appearance is not to determine the object in which it originates, but to express an expectation concerning any subject in which it may be received. The capacity to make pure aesthetic judgments, unhindered by the interference of concepts or of merely private inclinations is thus a kind of prelude to the moral calling which confronts us in pure practical reason.

³⁰⁹ CJ 239

But the crucial aspect of this connection between the beautiful and the morally good is its basis in a form of feeling, an attunement that strikes deep at the heart of the subject's own being, and yet without thereby limiting the scope of its domain to the individual in whom it arises. For in this *Gemeinsinn*, aesthetic judgment provides an exemplary model for the power of a lawful representation to provoke desire within the subject, despite its merely formal and abstract determination. This is why the distinction between the beautiful and the merely agreeable is so important, and why the latter can have no relation to the promotion of the moral disposition. While both these forms of pleasure in relation to the appearance of an object begin in the immediacy of a pure sensation, the beautiful distances itself from any concern with the existence of the object, thereby freeing itself to reflect merely upon the presentation of its form. On the other hand, the "agreeable is what the senses like in sensation (*angenehm ist das, was den Sinnen in der Empfindung gefällt*),"³¹⁰ binding the associated pleasure to the expectation of the satisfaction that the object itself will bring, and thereby reducing it to a form of inclination.³¹¹ What the forms of pleasure connected with the beautiful and with the morally good have in common is a complete indifference to the gratification associated with the object's physical presence. "Good is what, by means of reason, we like through its mere concept."³¹²

³¹⁰ CJ 205

³¹¹ According to Kant, the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful is in principle so pronounced that the tendency to confuse the one with the other can only be explained by an equivocation in the meaning of sensation (*Empfindung*). For it can refer, on the one hand, to mere feeling (*Gefühl*), and on the other hand, to the sensible element in the presentation of an object. "When something determines the feeling of pleasure or displeasure and this determination of that feeling is called sensation, this term means something quite different from what it means when I apply it to the presentation of a thing (through the senses, a receptivity that belongs to the cognitive power). For in the second case the presentation is referred to the object, but in the first it is referred solely to the subject and is not used for cognition at all, not even for that by which the subject cognizes himself." (CJ 206)

³¹² CJ 207

Thus when Kant says of both the agreeable and the good that the pleasure each produces is “connected with interest (*ist mit Interesse verbunden*),” it is important to recognize that this connection is in each case something quite distinct. For while the agreeable sensation is itself the result of the existence of the object, the pleasure associated with good is rather directed *toward* the object’s possible, rather than actual, existence. The one follows upon the object, while the other intends it as a purpose. Nevertheless, what this comparison of the morally good with the agreeable and the beautiful demonstrates is that, despite its primary significance as a concept for the faculty of desire, a principle for determining the will according to a rule of practical reason and without the need to refer to pleasure as a motive, the idea of the good is at the same time intrinsically related to a feeling of pleasure. Deciding whether, and in what manner, this account is in tension with the position of the second *Critique* is no simple matter. For even there Kant struggles to articulate the relation of the moral law to pleasure, recognizing at once that the will cannot be determined by pleasure while still maintaining its freedom, and yet that without such direct incentive over our capacity for choice it would remain powerless to motivate actions.

In introducing the problem of the relation between the objective moral law itself and the incentive of any rational agent to act upon it, Kant writes: “What is essential to any moral worth of actions is that the moral law determine the will immediately (*unmittelbar*).”³¹³ In other words, should any subjective ground—whether pleasure, external compulsion, or the expectation of an advantage to be gained—be required to supply the motive for an action, then that action would be undertaken merely in accordance with morality, rather than from out of the good. What all this means is that

³¹³ CPrR 5:71

unless the moral law is to remain powerless to promote the realization of the good that it commands as its object, it must include some incentive capable of explaining “how a law can be of itself and immediately a determining ground of the will.”³¹⁴ But Kant ultimately pleads to the insufficiency of human reason to penetrate to this deepest ground of the will; the incentive supplied by the moral law can only be observed through its a priori effect upon the power of feeling. The difficulty, however, is that the moral law seems to exert a primarily restrictive or prohibitive influence over the faculty of desire, demanding the rejection of every sensible impulse and every inclination as the determining ground of choice. The effect of our conception of the good according to the law of pure practical reason, therefore, is to impinge on, rather than to promote feeling.

Nevertheless, even the imposition of such a restriction upon pleasure is itself a form of feeling; pain, as much as pleasure, is capable of acting as an incentive to action, albeit a merely negative one. Through its capacity to strike down every pleasure available to choice through mere inclination, the moral law can indeed effect not only the power of desire through the determination of the will, but further the faculty of feeling by which a priori desire gains a direct relationship with sensible objects. Inasmuch as the principle of practical freedom asserts itself not through the rejection of this or that sensible object, but of sensibility as such, the incentive of the moral law furthermore exerts an a priori effect upon feeling. Only by virtue of this capacity to provide an object for the will independently of every external and contingent condition does practical reason stand apart from the causation of nature as a principle of freedom. “But since this law is still something in itself positive—namely the form of an intellectual causality, that is, of

³¹⁴ CPrR 5:72

freedom—it is at the same time an object of respect (*Achtung*).”³¹⁵ The intellectual respect for the moral law in its capacity to elevate human action above the realm of nature is therefore the positive expression of its prohibitive force. Yet only insofar as it offers a basis for opposing or resisting the brute mechanism of actions determined according to impulse does practical reason assert itself as a positive form of causality.

The clarity of the law of practical reason is thus matched only by the profound ambiguity of the incentive by which it empowers the will to determine choice, a peculiar dynamic that Kant struggles visibly to articulate in terms of its status as a feeling of pleasure. Insofar as feeling can function as an incentive to action, it presents itself either positively, as pleasure, or negatively, as pain. Though it is entirely conceivable that one and the same object could, under different conditions, become a source of both pleasure and pain, it is difficult to imagine how anything could fail to be either while still supplying a motive for action. Nonetheless, this is precisely what Kant enigmatically suggests concerning that unique form of a priori feeling that is respect for the moral law. “So little is respect a feeling of pleasure that we give way to it only reluctantly...But in turn, so little displeasure is there in it that, once one has laid self-conceit aside and allowed practical influence to that respect, one can in turn never get enough of contemplating the majesty of this law.”³¹⁶ As the a priori feeling that follows upon the determination of the will by practical reason, and exerts its resistance to the various motives supplied by inclination, respect seems to hover somewhere between pleasure and displeasure. The subject in whom it becomes active experiences this respect as a painful

³¹⁵ CPrR 5:73

³¹⁶ CPrR 5:77

rejection of her pleasure, and nonetheless feels herself elevated by it to a form of moral dignity that would otherwise remain a merely abstract possibility.

It is worth noting, before we turn to the Analytic of the Sublime, where Kant delves into the “insoluble problem” of the ground of the feeling of respect, that the moral nature of this feeling restricts its applicability to the sphere of finite, moral beings: “Respect is always directed only to persons, never to things...Admiration, and this as an affect, amazement, can be directed to things also, for example, lofty mountains, the magnitude, number, and distance of the heavenly bodies, the strength and swiftness of many animals, and so forth. But none of this is respect.”³¹⁷ In other words, Kant cites precisely those examples that he will hold up as the chief sources of judgments of the sublime in order to contrast them with the respect that we feel towards the dignity of the moral law. From the standpoint of morality, there should be nothing surprising in the assertion that products of nature reveal nothing to us, which indeed is Kant’s position in the second *Critique*. And yet, with the discovery of aesthetic judgment, Kant recognizes the possibility not only of resuming the investigation of a priori feeling where it had earlier found its limit, but furthermore of basing such an advance on the reflective contemplation of nature. “It is true that in the *Critique of Practical Reason* we did actually derive a priori from universal moral concepts the feeling of respect...And yet, even there, what we derived from the idea of the moral, as the cause, was actually not this feeling, but merely the determination of the will.”³¹⁸ In the sublime, we encounter a feeling of respect analogous to that esteem in which the moral law is held, and yet without its dependence on the concept of the morally good. Indeed, sublimity reveals that

³¹⁷ CPrR 5:76

³¹⁸ CJ 222

the deepest ground of the experience of “negative pleasure,” without which the moral law would remain a mere concept for us, lies not in the principle of morality itself, but in a more primordial attunement of the reflective subject.

In comparison to its counterpart in aesthetic judgment, the beautiful, the sublime has an intrinsic, and yet deceptive, relationship with nature. While nature enjoys a pronounced advantage over art with respect to its propensity to produce appearances capable of being judged according to pure aesthetic criteria, there is nevertheless little doubt that beauty is possible through artistic creation. The sublime, on the other hand, belongs exclusively to nature, to such an extent that Kant draws all his examples of sublimity, and limits his consideration of it entirely to natural objects.³¹⁹ For in all products of human labor, and even in “natural things (*Naturdingen*),” the concept of a determinate purpose compensates for the failure of the imagination to comprehend the overwhelming magnitude presented before it. Therefore only in the face of crude nature, where imagination is abandoned to the total and unmitigated exhaustion of its resources, is the negative pleasure of the sublime possible.

The dependence of the experience of sublimity on the most untamed of natural appearances might lead us to the conclusion that it is somehow an intrinsic property of the system of nature, yet nothing could be farther from the truth. Nature is a mere foil to the experience of the sublime, the necessary vehicle through which the ideas of reason on which this negative pleasure are truly grounded can reveal themselves. For although every aesthetic judgment is merely subjective, a judgment of the sublime does not even

³¹⁹ Kant does entertain the possibility of a sublime art, though subject to the most stringent standard: “The sublime in art is always confined to the conditions that art must meet to be in harmony with nature.” (CJ 245) It is indeed doubtful that Kant believes that an artistic object could appear as such and yet be the basis of a judgment of the sublime.

“constitute in itself an object of our liking,” as a judgment of the beautiful does. It is nothing at all that we discover in nature that strikes us worthy of admiration and respect, but rather what we discover in the resiliency of reason in overcoming the violent disruption of ordinary consciousness. “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.”³²⁰ In other words, when the inestimable presentation of a natural power or magnitude violently stretches the power of imagination beyond the limits of its capacity, confronting it with its own failure, this restriction of the imagination opens the space in which reason first asserts itself. But such an experience in the face of sublime nature would never be possible if its basis did not already lie latent within the subject, waiting to be discovered. “One must already have filled one’s mind with all sorts of ideas if an intuition is to attune it to a feeling that is itself sublime, inasmuch as the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness.”³²¹ Only because this inadequacy of the imagination draws attention to the lofty ambitions of reason does the experience of the sublime transform this pain into a negative pleasure, in a manner structurally analogous to the way that the pleasure of inclination must be denied in order to allow the moral law to assert itself. Thus the experience of the sublime presents us with another case in which a presentation stands in an a priori relation to the faculty of feeling.

And yet the kinship between the sublime and the attitude of respect for the moral law is deeper than this analogy alone suggests. In much the same way that the experience

³²⁰ CJ 245

³²¹ CJ 246

of beauty was shown to work upon the general cognitive power in order to prepare it for the objective knowledge of nature, so Kant will argue does the encounter with the sublime stir within reason an awakening of its moral attunement, made possible in large part by sublime nature's capacity to do what practical reason alone cannot—namely, to make a pure, abstract idea into the object of a sensible presentation. The mere possibility of such an experience is significant because it bears witness, in whoever undergoes it, to the moral calling of reason; that it is possible *in nature* is crucial, because it thereby sustains the expectation that this moral calling can, as it must, obtain a direct influence in the phenomenal world. Before we can fully articulate the basis of the connection between the principle of the contra-purposiveness of nature and the principle of the good in moral reason, however, we will first need to highlight some key similarities in the forms of experience that these principles enable.

We noted earlier that judgments of the sublime, like our contemplation of the effect of the supreme principle of morality upon the faculty of desire, determine a priori a connection between a representation in consciousness and its effect on feeling (*Gefühl*). To that extent, what is true of the sublime can equally be claimed with respect to the beautiful, which also determines the faculty of feeling in relation to an object according to a universal, a priori principle of judgment. And yet, outside of the section entitled “On Beauty as the Symbol of Morality” (§59), Kant makes no positive comparison between the beautiful and the good. The reason for the more direct kinship of sublimity with the morally good can be partially explained, therefore, by the dynamic of the process according to which the feeling of the sublime is produced, and its similarity to the feeling of respect.

In presenting the sublime in nature the mind feels agitated (*bewegt*), while in an aesthetic judgment about the beautiful in nature it is in restful contemplation. This agitation (above all at its inception) can be compared with a vibration, i. e., with a rapid alternation of repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object.³²²

The encounter with a sublime presentation of nature registers a profoundly ambivalent feeling, vacillating between the extremes of terror and joy, and yet without this alteration being grounded in the object in any way. In this sense, the sublime is perhaps better understood as a disposition of receptivity to feeling, rather than as a feeling itself. Only by creating in the subject an openness to the disruption of its restful contemplation and a willingness to suspend its own interests for the sake of witnessing something higher within itself does the presence of an overwhelming magnitude or power in sensible nature prepare us for feeling that “negative pleasure” that cannot otherwise be experienced through sensibility. Thus not only does the sublime, like the moral law, inspire an a priori manner of feeling, but it does so according to the same logic, transforming displeasure into pleasure by appealing to a higher form of feeling.

Hence, to the a priori universality of the feeling of the sublime we can add its affective reversal, or the vacillation between pleasure and displeasure, as the ground for its comparison to the moral law of practical reason. Yet Kant’s contention is not merely that this similarity reveals itself to the scrutiny of critical examination, but more importantly for the fulfillment of our moral vocation, that it is brought actively to the attention of even the most ordinary consciousness in the face of sublime nature.³²³

If in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength to regard as small the objects of our natural concerns...[and] elevates our imagination, making

³²² CJ 258

³²³ “It is in fact difficult to think of a feeling for the sublime in nature without connecting it with a mental attunement similar to that for moral feeling.” (CJ 268)

it exhibit those cases where the mind can come to feel its own sublimity, which lies in its vocation and elevates it even above nature.³²⁴

This insight into reason's vocation that the frustration of the imagination affords, however, never truly surpasses the pain and disappointment from which it begins, as the loftiness of reason's ambition remains bound to the limitations of the sensible faculty with which it shares its fate. Therefore the peculiar combination of pleasure and pain that attends the sublime is not simply analogous to, but precisely the same feeling as the respect in which we hold the moral law. In both cases what the subject experiences is the presence of nature within her coming into direct conflict with her rational duty as a free being. "The feeling that it is beyond our ability to attain to an idea that is law for us is respect,"³²⁵ whether that limitation in our ability has its origin in the limits of the imagination or in the tendency of practical choice to succumb to the vicissitudes of inclination. Although sensible nature presents very different material before judgment in the experience of the sublime and in the provocation of desire, this sensible element is in each case merely what is to be suppressed in order to let the feeling of admiration for the law of reason to rise to the fore. Though the sublime remains of course a vastly different experience from the contemplation of the moral law of practical reason, they are nonetheless identical in the affective response that they elicit.

By turning our attention to the presence of the a priori feeling of respect in the experience of the sublime, however, we risk effacing its difference from the moral attitude it so closely resembles. However apparent and strong the kinship between the sublime and the morally good may be, we in no way advance upon our understanding of practical philosophy unless we can demonstrate that the emergence of such a sign of

³²⁴ CJ 262

³²⁵ CJ 257

freedom within the natural world transforms our capacity to “presuppose the condition under which it is possible to achieve this final purpose in nature.”³²⁶ In other words, the sublime only truly becomes of interest from a moral perspective if it provides the principle of morality with that which it most deeply lacks in itself, namely, that opening through which to insert its purposive freedom into the world of lived experience. As we noted earlier, the basis of judgments of the sublime lies entirely within subjectivity, rather than in the products of nature through which it is revealed. Such a distinction, however, is more easily observed from the distance of critical reflection than from the position of aesthetic judgment, where the cause of this negative pleasure is in fact presumed to originate in the object itself.

The feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation. But by a certain subreption (in which respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within ourselves as subjects) this respect is accorded an object of nature that, as it were, makes intuitable for us the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive powers over the greatest power of sensibility.³²⁷

The sublime thus brings the feeling of respect for our capacity to produce representations from reason alone, in resistance to the influence of sensibility, into direct contact with the sensible world. Despite the subreptive nature of this representation, which disguises ideas of reason as products of objective nature, it nonetheless accomplishes a positive gain for the fulfillment of purposive freedom. If the feeling of the sublime were to be ascribed to objective nature, as a claim of knowledge, then it could claim no entitlement to universal agreement. And yet insofar as it asserts that by the violent transgression of the limits of the imagination we reveal the subjective basis of our ability to respect the moral law, it demands the assent of every finite, rational being.

³²⁶ CJ 196

³²⁷ CJ 257

III. An Imagination that Emulates Reason

The experience of the sublime does not offer guidance in matters of moral judgment, nor does it dispose us to act morally, by its humbling reminder of our finitude before the power of a universal law. But it does provide us with the condition, in the absence of which our moral calling would always stand at risk of fading into abstraction and the appearance of unattainability. In the sublime, we discover our capacity to desire what directly violates our own interest, insofar as that interest is given to us by nature.³²⁸ The sublime has no object proper to it, no objective reference in the world, but it does contain an a priori, subjective reference: “the reference is to the subjective bases as they are purposive in relation to moral feeling, namely, against sensibility but at the same time, and within the very same subject, for the purposes of practical reason.”³²⁹ Therefore, beyond its capacity to cultivate within us the subjective ground for the receptivity to the pleasure of rational self-determination, the effect of the sublime upon us, because we are conscious of it, may further act as an incentive to believe in the possibility of a world in conformity with the moral order envisioned by practical reason. The law of reason is worthy of our respect insofar as it presents the possibility of putting purposive freedom to work. Yet however much the sublime inspires a desire for the morally good and the conviction that it can be accomplished through our actions, it nonetheless carries with it no danger of being transformed into a dangerous enthusiasm.

This pure, elevating, and merely negative exhibition of morality involves no danger of fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*), which is the delusion of wanting to see something beyond the bounds of all sensibility, i. e., of dreaming according to principles (raving with reason). The exhibition avoids fanaticism precisely because it is merely negative. For the inscrutability (*Unerforschlichkeit*) of the

³²⁸ “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.” (CJ 268)

³²⁹ CJ 267

idea of freedom precludes all positive exhibition whatever.³³⁰

The sublime does not in fact exhibit rational ideas belonging to morality. Such ideas are, by their very essence, indemonstrable, as the concept on which they are based excludes any particular, sensible determination. Rather, sublime nature presents an appearance that indirectly exposes the presence of rational ideas by removing whatever hindrance in sensibility obstructs their influence upon cognition.

This negative manner of exhibition has the advantage of avoiding the enthusiastic fervor that would obviate nature through the desire to transform what is into what ought to be. The sublime does not offer a model for imitation, but rather calls upon the judging subject to discover a principle for action that is not immediately given. In fact, the sensible indeterminacy of the principle of purposive freedom is such that the experience of the sublime merely serves to bring into focus the problem of moral judgment, namely, how to bring the universal command of practical reason to bear on a particular object of choice. To recognize the connection of this burden of moral responsibility with the violent displeasure of the sublime is simply to be reminded that assigning a definite purpose to freedom presents the finite subject with an arduous task, in which neither nature nor reason offers sufficient guidance. Yet here once again aesthetic experience offers a solution to the impasse of human subjectivity as it is bound between nature and freedom. In order to understand how the exemplarity of the artistic genius provides moral freedom with a model for negotiating the unrelenting weight of moral responsibility, we need only be reminded that the artwork represents a response to the problem of the insertion of human freedom into the order of nature. It is neither the ideas nor the

³³⁰ CJ 275

products of genius that ultimately concern us, but the process by which it makes the transition between them possible.

In our earlier discussion of genius, we noted that there is a dimension of Kant's account that treats this power purely as a capacity for creativity, originality, and inventiveness in the absence of any guiding rules or formulas. In fact, though Kant recognizes that the creative *artist* requires the discipline of rules and technical skill to harness this creative spirit and impose meaning on its products, he nonetheless maintains that what is unique to genius, and cannot be acquired except through inborn talent, is that capacity to generate original appearances for which no rule can be discovered. "Genius can only provide rich material for products of fine art; processing this material 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."³³¹ This passage illustrates two crucial points in connection with our argument that the figure of the genius provides a powerful model for the problem of assigning the purposiveness of freedom to a determinate object. First, it makes evident that genius is not essentially a talent for artistic production, even though it can quite easily be adapted to such a purpose. Rather, only when it is "academically trained"—which is to say, when some additional power is combined with it, as the talent of genius cannot be acquired by instruction—does the raw material generated by the genius become elevated into the realm of fine art.

While it is true that Kant often explains the peculiarity of the talent of genius by contrasting the nature of scientific discovery with artistic inspiration, this comparison is not intended to limit the channels through which this creativity can be expressed. Homer and Newton alike distinguish themselves by the exemplarity and the inventiveness of

³³¹ CJ 310

their labors, yet only Homer's talent requires the concept of genius in order to be explained. "The reason for this is that Newton could show how he took every one of the steps he had to take in order to get from the first elements of geometry to his great and profound discoveries...not only to himself, but to others as well, in an intuitively clear way."³³² Genius, therefore, is the capacity for discovering actions that, once performed seem to embody the purposiveness of a rule, yet for which no "intuitively clear" set of instructions may be laid out in advance. But as the passage cited above also demonstrates, this talent is meaningless unless it is put to work in cooperation with another power that is capable of giving form to its material. There is an implicit distinction between the raw and the cultivated power of genius that runs throughout the discussion of the artwork in the third *Critique*. Whenever this raw talent is cultivated through the discipline of rules, it is given purpose and direction, but it is also altered in such a way that the original talent may be obscured behind the activity through which it is directed. The cultivation of genius is thus a double-edged sword: it gives purpose to this singular talent, and yet simultaneously threatens to deprive it of its foremost benefit, namely its ability to serve as an exemplary figure for unifying nature and freedom.

Nonetheless, Kant's discussion of genius is focused entirely on its application to the endeavors of artistic creation, and therefore it would be futile to try to examine the figure of the genius outside of this context. Rather we will attempt to show that the genius possesses a further talent, neither consisting entirely of creative originality, nor of the discipline of taste, that is revealed in the artwork. On this basis, we hope to show that the talent of genius transcends not only the fine arts, but any product through which it demonstrates itself in sensible terms. In fact, the applicability of the talent of genius to

³³² CJ 309

the fine arts depends in turn upon a deeper and more characteristic power of the genius, namely its capacity to make the imagination into a limitless resource for mediating between incommensurable representations. This productive power of imagination embodied by genius brings ideas of reason to bear on the realm of nature, thus resolving that seemingly intractable problem of moral judgment.

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...In this process we feel our freedom from the law of association; for although it is under that law that nature lends us material, yet we can process that material into something quite different...Such presentations of the imagination we may call ideas.³³³

Prior to the third *Critique*, Kant reserves his use of the term “idea” for those representations belonging to the faculty of reason that do not admit of sensible determination. An idea is an unschematizable concept, a universally communicable representation to which no object of the faculty of sensibility could possibly be adequate, and for which, therefore, we can have no intuition. Ideas, to follow the emblematic distinction, can be thought, but can never be known. “A concept formed from notions and transcending the possibility of experience is an idea, or a concept of reason.”³³⁴ The term is indeed so closely related with whatever cannot be given in sensibility that it is not at all immediately apparent what Kant means in referring to an idea of the imagination.

In the *Analytic of the Beautiful* and the *Analytic of the Sublime*, where Kant accounts for the transcendental conditions that enable us to judge pure, aesthetic presentations according to an a priori principle that nonetheless contains no universally communicable concept, he introduces all of the considerations necessary to allow for the introduction of what he will later call “aesthetic ideas.” Yet it is not until he switches

³³³ CJ 314

³³⁴ CPR A320/B377

from the perspective of the reflection on aesthetic objects to their production that he finds it necessary to discuss the capacity to generate “a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e., no determinate concept, can be adequate.”³³⁵ This description of the talent peculiar to the genius could, of course, just as easily be applied to a beautiful or sublime appearance. The decision to refer to such a presentation under the term “aesthetic idea” is therefore prompted by an interest in the transformation that occurs when aesthetic objects are no longer merely regarded as objects for contemplation, but rather as examples of a productive power to be followed. In other words, the feeling of beauty can serve as a response to the experience of nature; but it can also function as the impulse behind the effort, characterized by the genius, to act upon nature through the purposiveness of freedom. In this latter respect, such a presentation of the imagination deserves to be called an idea simply insofar as brings to consciousness a thought that cannot be exhausted by any conceptual determination, no matter how much it prompts the mind to search for an adequate concept.

But in referring to the representations that genius has in mind in the creative act as aesthetic ideas, Kant accomplishes more than the transition from aesthetic reflection to artistic production. For as he writes immediately after introducing the concept of an aesthetic idea, “it is easy to see that [it] is the counterpart (pendant) of a rational idea, which is, conversely, a concept to which no intuition (presentation of the imagination) can be adequate.”³³⁶ With the discovery of aesthetic experience, Kant is forced to transform his conception of the idea, making space within it for the “unexpoundable”

³³⁵ CJ 314

³³⁶ CJ 314

images of the creative genius, but also joining them together in a peculiar kinship with the ideas of reason. What these seemingly opposite forms of representation have in common, expressed negatively, is their incapacity to represent objects that can be given in experience. Nothing whatsoever can be known objectively of the idea of freedom, or of the beautiful image. “Ideas, in the broadest sense, are presentations referred to an object according to a certain principle (subjective or objective) but are such that they can still never become cognition of an object.”³³⁷ And yet if we express this same condition positively, we recognize that both rational and aesthetic ideas grant us the capacity to “restructure experience” according to a priori laws that assert our freedom over nature. The rational idea of freedom cannot be demonstrated through a determinate action, any more than the purposive arrangement of a beautiful flower can be exhausted through any concept; both, however, remind us that the purposiveness in our representations has its source in us, rather than in nature, and call upon us to connect the indemonstrability of freedom with the unexpoundability of the aesthetic object in nature.

The genius ultimately stands as the highest embodiment of moral purposiveness because it holds this power in exemplary fashion, and not merely because it inspires aesthetic reflection through the products of its creativity. In the activity of genius, which incorporates a manifest facility with both rational and aesthetic ideas, the distinction between the two is suspended.

A poet ventures to give sensible expression to rational ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation, and so on. Or again, he takes things that are indeed exemplified in experience, such as death, envy, and all the other vices, as well as love, fame, and so on; but then, by means of an imagination that emulates the example of reason in reaching for a maximum, he ventures to give these sensible expression in a way that goes beyond the limits of experience, namely, with a completeness

³³⁷ CJ 342

for which no example can be found in nature.³³⁸

The activity of the poet moves seamlessly between the sensibly unintuitable ideas of reason and the conceptually inexhaustible ideas of the imagination, uniting freedom and nature at the very limits of their incommensurability. It is in this capacity for transition between ideas that genius marks its exemplarity, furnishing a model for the merger of freedom with the phenomenal realm, and thereby for accomplishing the unity of experience in all its forms.

³³⁸ CJ 314

Chapter Five

Beauty, System and the Highest Possible Unity

All knowledge begins with experience, though it does not end there. The same resources of reason that make experience, as a synthetic product of heterogeneous representations, possible, also ensure that the general faculty of cognition will endlessly seek beyond the limits of objective nature for new territory into which it can extend its dominion. The question raised by Kant's critical system, however, is not only to what extent knowledge can surpass the lowest level of experience; we must ask as well in what way knowledge, despite its various forms of transcendence, remains limited by the constraints imposed on it by the possible objects of experience. Knowledge is not limited to experience, though it remains anchored to it. When Kant says that knowledge *begins* with experience, he means more than that it has its inception there. Experience is a beginning of all objective experience in the sense of a founding determination, which persists with knowledge as it advances toward speculative unity, and without which it perpetually threatens to evaporate back into mere illusion.

In the third and fourth chapters, we witnessed the variety of effects that the discovery of reflective judgment registers upon the theoretical and practical modes of cognition described in the first and second *Critiques*, respectively. The teleological principles uncovered in aesthetic experience reveal far greater resources for establishing the overall unity of experience than what is contained in the concepts of nature and freedom, or suggested by the division of the system of critical philosophy into distinct, autonomous realms. But lest we allow enthusiasm over these new prospects to overtake the limits established by criticism, we should also keep in mind that accomplishing the

speculative unity Kant describes is not the task of philosophy itself. Though the experience whose possibility it accounts for is driven by a demand for synthetic totality, transcendental philosophy itself is an activity of analysis, taking apart into its components and its principles what experience seeks always to unite. Thus we should not expect systematic unity to be achieved within Kant's philosophy, even while we must demand that it provide an account of the ground of this unity in experience. As Longuenesse writes, "for Kant...unity is never taken for granted, but produced, as it were bit by bit and effort after effort. We have only as much unitary world as we are able to *produce* by the painstaking use of our *Vermögen zu urteilen*."³³⁹

I. Criticism and Systematic Unity

Inasmuch as the critical turn enacted by the first *Critique* constitutes a response to the endless feud between dogmatism and skepticism—a battle whose depraved character Kant accuses of having degraded metaphysics to the point of calling its very possibility into question—it is clear that it is not aimed at settling this dispute so much as exposing the common presumption that underlies and sustains it. But though they share a common presupposition, namely that our knowledge must conform to objects, rather than the reverse, the dogmatic and the skeptical attitudes are not, on Kant's account, alternative responses to a common question. On the contrary, he regards their opposition genetically, conceiving of the systematic doubt of the skeptic as a response to the excesses of the dogmatic rationalist. Indeed, it is Humean skepticism that Kant credits with rescuing him from his own dogmatism, and not the reverse. Skepticism is seen as an advance beyond

³³⁹ Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, 204

dogmatism insofar as it, according to Kant, provides the only hint in the history of metaphysics at the possibility of, or the demand for, critical philosophy.³⁴⁰

The defeat of skepticism, therefore, does not come at the hands of criticism, but rather is self-inflicted. When doubt is elevated from a strategy to a positive principle,³⁴¹ it gives way to the radical indifference that constitutes the death of all philosophical doctrines, and yet at the same time, the awakening of philosophy. The indifference Kant identifies is a historical attitude, specific to the moment at which he is writing, and which justifies his assertion that the present is the “age of critique.” It is, he insists, “the effect not of levity but of the matured judgment of the age, which refuses to be any longer put off with illusory knowledge.”³⁴² Criticism thus begins with the recognition that what has been taken for knowledge is nothing more than a sophisticated illusion. It is born not of idle curiosity, but of failure and destitution. This failure, however, consists in not simply having been deceived, but in finding one’s deception both unavoidable and self-imposed. The critique of pure reason is thus a confrontation of reason with its own nature, a reckoning with its ownmost fate, its inherent tendency to deceive itself in the pursuit of its own conflicting interests.

It is a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws.³⁴³

So long as reason assumes that the source of its confusion lies in the objects under its investigation, rather than in itself, then it is destined to fall into disorder, lacking a lawful

³⁴⁰ “There exists a completely new science, of which no one had previously formed merely the thought, of which even the bare idea was unknown, and for which nothing from all that has been provided before now could be used except the hint that Hume’s doubts had been able to give.”

³⁴¹ “Hume... foresaw nothing of any such possible formal science, but deposited his ship on the beach (of skepticism) for safekeeping, where it could then lie and rot.” Prolegomena 12/4:262

³⁴² CPR Axi

³⁴³ CPR Axi

principle of self-organization. The appeal to lawfulness is a call to assume the critical standpoint from which the competing principles that drive knowledge into these extremes may be discovered for what they are. Criticism is thus misunderstood insofar as it is taken to be the dissolution of the spells of dogmatism and doubt. It is rather the search for their sources within the properties of human reason, the attempt to arbitrate their competing but necessary claims within the construction of human experience. Criticism is first and foremost a call for reason to confront its own conflicted nature as the underlying source of its confusion regarding the world.

Thus while the same conditions that give rise to this conflict in reason also perpetuate the conflicts littering the endless “battlefield” of metaphysics, the inevitability of this fate demands a response whose character is neither resignation nor indifference. Critical philosophy answers the call to this responsibility, though according to what standard of success remains to be determined. The effective history of transcendental philosophy is in essence a dispute over this very question. According to Hegel, for example, the discovery of aesthetic judgment constitutes “the most interesting point in the Kantian system, the point at which a region is recognized that is a middle between the empirical manifold and the absolute abstract unity.”³⁴⁴ Yet any prospect of transforming this region of the highest possible synthesis between opposites into the foundation of a truly speculative philosophy languishes under the failure to recognize that the synthetic work of the imagination depends upon the prior unity of reason. According to Hegel, Kant essentially mistakes the nature of imagination in regarding it from the standpoint of its synthetic activity, as if this constituted its essence, rather than a limited aspect of its broader power that is brought to the fore by the insistence on the finitude of

³⁴⁴ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H.S. Harris. (New York: SUNY Press, 1977), p. 85.

consciousness. “We must not take the faculty of [productive] imagination as the middle term that gets inserted between an existing absolute subject and an absolute existing world...[but] as what is primary and original, as that out of which subjective Ego and objective world first sunder themselves into the necessarily bipartite appearance.”³⁴⁵

The recognition that any attempt to overcome the perceived limitations of transcendental idealism must begin with a serious and sustained contention with Kant’s conception of imagination is a common thread running through the work of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. As Taminioux writes, “If we... consider German Idealism, it is clear that in it a synthetic mode of apprehension...ruled over the reception and the interpretation of the *Critique of Judgment*.”³⁴⁶ The philosophical legacy inspired by the third *Critique* grew largely out of the undeveloped speculative potential it discovered in this final piece of the critical system. That Kant’s project in the third *Critique* played such a decisive role in determining the contours of German Idealism³⁴⁷ stands as evidence of its failure to resolve the conceptual oppositions that set it in motion, and reason to question whether such final resolution ever constituted one of its aims. For despite Kant’s professed satisfaction in the successful completion of his systematic philosophy, the critical project only loosely resembles a genuine system—at least insofar as systematicity implies a kind of speculative unity capable of surpassing or at least justifying all of the contradictions contained within it—and has only achieved modest success in persuading Kant’s most significant interlocutors of its completeness.

³⁴⁵ Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 73.

³⁴⁶ Jacques Taminioux, *Poetics, Speculation and Judgment*. (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 25.

³⁴⁷ “There is an overlap between the history of the interpretation of this work on the Continent and the history of philosophy itself—specifically, that of German philosophy.” Taminioux, p. 21.

The systematic character of the critical philosophy is often attributed to Kant's enthusiasm for architectonic structure. "In all sciences, especially those of reason, the idea of the science is the general delineation or outline of it, thus the extension of all cognitions belonging to it. Such an idea of the whole... is architectonic."³⁴⁸ Presumably, Kant must have brought this presupposition, namely that a philosophical system demands such organization as can be explained by "the simple and primary parts of human knowledge,"³⁴⁹ to his approach to the problems of transcendental philosophy. What I would like to show is that, to the contrary, the notion of systematicity driving Kant's project develops out of the material in question. It is a response to the character of reason itself, rather than an effort to force reason into some pre-conceived notion of systematicity. This is at least indisputably his declared intention in the Introduction to the first *Critique*, where he describes the challenge before him as follows:

The answer to these questions has not, indeed, been such as a dogmatic and visionary insistence upon knowledge might lead us to expect... Such ways of answering them are, indeed, *not within the intention of the natural constitution of our reason*; and inasmuch as they have their source in misunderstanding, it is the duty of philosophy to counteract their deceptive influence, *no matter what prized and cherished dreams have to be disowned*.³⁵⁰

Kant's aim is clear enough, even if his success in reaching it is left to us to evaluate. The purpose of his investigation is to develop a system of philosophy out of the "natural constitution of reason," and to rid it entirely of the influence of any preconceptions concerning the reach or the aims of philosophical knowledge. This is why metaphysics can truly begin only after "locating the point at which, through misunderstanding, reason

³⁴⁸ Kant, *Logic*, p. 98.

³⁴⁹ Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence*, p. 44.

³⁵⁰ CPR Axiiii (emphasis mine); the Preface to the B edition, despite its numerous differences, strikes precisely the same tone on this point: "In these circumstances, we shall be rendering a service to reason should we succeed in discovering the path upon which it can securely travel, even if, as a result of so doing, much that is comprised in our original aims, adopted without reflection, may have to be abandoned as fruitless." (Bvii)

comes into conflict with itself.”³⁵¹ Barring such an initial purification, philosophy is bound only to perpetuate the established images of itself, rather than to claim the true destiny of human reason.

Though these preliminary considerations provide the cornerstone of the critical project, they clarify only its methodological commitments, without yet adequately specifying the aims of the investigation. Of course this is no mere omission, as this is precisely the task of the tribunal of reason: to judge accurately and definitively, according to the nature of purified reason, the territory that belongs rightfully to the science of metaphysics. Kant conceives of this grounding of metaphysical knowledge as, simultaneously, the greatest in scope and yet the most utterly simple of all tasks belonging to philosophy.

Metaphysics, on the view which we are adopting, is the only one of all the sciences which dare promise that through a small but concentrated effort it will attain, and this in a short time, such completion as will leave no task to our successors save that of adapting it in a didactic manner according to their own preferences, without their being able to add anything whatsoever to its content.³⁵²

The aim of critical philosophy, understood as a means of securing the possibility of metaphysics, is conceived in such a way as to place the utmost priority on the idea of its perfect completeness and systematic arrangement. Indeed, anything short of an exhaustive account of the powers belonging to pure reason would amount to utter failure, leaving open the possibility that what appears as universal and necessary is merely an illusion resulting from the misunderstanding of reason’s powers. The difficulty that Kant had not adequately anticipated is that critique itself does not simply encounter a static monolith in pure reason, but a restless principle that is transformed by the very process of

³⁵¹ CPR Axii

³⁵² CPR Axx

self-reflection that it is exposed to. Set free from the groundless pretensions which formerly plagued it, pure reason discovers unprecedented tasks for itself, jeopardizing the very possibility of systematic exhaustiveness in its account. In other words, just as “human reason in its pure use, as long as it lacks a critique, first tries all possible wrong ways before it succeeds in finding the only true way,”³⁵³ so the philosophical system in which this tribunal is performed will also necessarily develop and refine its own systematic aims as it progresses and discovers aspects of reason’s vocation it had not previously anticipated. Critical philosophy, therefore, must be understood as a reflexive endeavor, always given over to self-transformation, and Kant’s claims to systematic perfection must be read always in this light.

This reflexive, transformative character of critical philosophy is particularly active in the third *Critique*, where Kant’s attention is directed not towards a particular form of cognition, but rather towards the possibility of a single perspective from which all our representations can be united. In light of this highly fluid approach, whereby critical philosophy begins to respond to questions produced out of its own discoveries, Nuzzo writes: “Kant’s task reveals therein the most peculiar and authentic character of his philosophy, the nature of critical philosophy as an enterprise open to the experience of philosophizing. Philosophizing, in turn, is regarded as the process of reason’s own self-questioning, as its inevitable tendency toward a constant self-transcendence.”³⁵⁴ What

³⁵³ Kant, *Groundwork*, p. 90/4:441.

³⁵⁴ Nuzzo continues as follows: “The internal tensions of the third *Critique* are precisely a consequence of Kant’s way of practicing philosophy. At the end of the whole critical project, the 1790 *Critique* displays this practice in its fullest meaning.” (*Kant and the Unity of Reason*, pp. 63-64) For Nuzzo, this response to the nature of criticism thus accounts for the apparent disunity of the *Critique*, and argues against readings that attempt to explain this same fact by reference to the history of its composition, a strategy that “imposes a forceful unity on the text and explains its inconsistencies by bringing its composition back to different times, and phases, to different and successive twists and turns. For a particularly illustrative example of this approach, see Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment*.

reason discovers when the totality of its representations is subjected to the *quaestio juris* of criticism is that it contains representations that—as unrepresentable according to the a priori forms of spatio-temporal intuition—cannot be legitimated by appeal to the conditions for objective cognition of phenomena, yet which nonetheless conform to certain principles of lawfulness. The concept of the freedom of the will, for example, which, as clearly as it cannot be adequately given through any intuitable object therefore also is not derived from any experience of an object, nonetheless stands up to the test of criticism and must find its place alongside the concepts of phenomenal experience, even though it remains thoroughly incompatible with them.

The existence and validity of noumenal concepts is not merely a possibility left open by the restriction of knowledge to phenomena, but is in fact necessitated by it and conceptually bound up in it. Introducing one of the pivotal distinctions of the critical system, but simultaneously the one that he will later come to describe as an “immense gulf” dividing it into irreconcilable halves, Kant asserts that though we cannot know (*erkennen*) things in themselves, we can and indeed must be capable of thinking (*denken*) them without contradiction. Such ideas claim their legitimacy, then, not from their applicability to objects of experience, but, by precisely by virtue of their *inapplicability*, to the objects of the practical faculty. In fact, without such a separation *and* legitimation of noumenal and phenomenal concepts, it would be impossible to maintain both the claims to knowledge and the freedom belonging to the human soul. It is essential to recognize, however, that this assertion of the validity of noumenal concepts is not merely a *deus ex machina*, cleverly designed to rescue the possibility of morality. The “reality” of the noumenon must be assumed even by theoretical reason, “otherwise we should be

landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears.”³⁵⁵ That we cannot know anything about this noumenon, and thus have a merely negative conception of it, does nothing to diminish its necessity for our own understanding of the source and cause of our cognition of phenomena. Thus while the theoretical and practical elements of the system each have their foundation in entirely separate principles, they are nonetheless united in the decisive restriction of our claims to knowledge to the phenomenal sphere.

Taken as a whole, the three *Critiques* constitute an exhaustive account of the limits of a priori knowledge. But the system that comprises the three *Critiques*—if indeed it is meant to establish such a comprehensive reconciliation—includes no guidelines for arbitrating the competing claims of the separate critical texts. The closest we find to any such account is in the published version³⁵⁶ of the Introduction to the third *Critique*, in which Kant continues to defend the divisions of the system, even while arguing for the necessity of accounting for their reconciliation. In fact, some form of mediation between the claims of nature and freedom is needed, lest some conflict arise between them in which one need be abandoned for the sake of preserving the other. For “although these two different 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.”³⁵⁷ Though the separation of their domains of legislation is secured by the distinction of noumenal and phenomenal principles, nature and freedom collide in the disputed territory of objects over which each claims the right to exercise this legislation. In other words, the brute fact

³⁵⁵ CPR Bxxvii

³⁵⁶ Among the many differences between the published Introduction and the unpublished “First Introduction” is the inclusion in the former of extensive consideration of the role of the third *Critique* within the system of transcendental philosophy. See also *Prolegomena*, p. 12/4:262.

³⁵⁷ CJ 175

of human experience, undivided in its contents between noumena and phenomena, forces freedom into nature, the practical into the theoretical.

But as much as we might, from the perspective of the coherence of the ordinary experience of the world, feel justified in demanding the compatibility of the concepts of morality with those of knowledge, our insistence is met with a stubborn and principled refusal. Just as the need for their merger is a fact of lived experience, so is its impossibility, their irreducible alterity, a fact of reason. This is because, beneath the level on which nature and freedom are experienced, their division is grounded in a pre-cognitive division between the roots of experience, intuition and concept, out of which their respective legislative domains are forged.

The gulf between sensibility and intellect, whose necessary synthesis is the subject of the section entitled the “Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding,” though not identical with that between nature and freedom, nonetheless rests on the same conditions. Both of those divisions are manifestations of the same division within reason, and thus both are placed in a new light by the discovery of the experience of reflective judgment. Again, the point is not that objective cognition of nature is primarily intuitive while the problem of moral judgment is by comparison intellectual, but rather that theoretical judgments are grounded in the receptivity of concrete intuitions in the same way that moral concepts are what they are only insofar as their basis retains a purity with respect to the contribution of empirical sources. “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.”³⁵⁸ By definition, concepts of nature must be intuitable, concepts of freedom must not be.

But even setting aside the parallelism between the division of the elements of experience and the separation of the forms of experience that these elements, in their various arrangements give rise to, there is further cause to consider the impact of reflective judgment on the whole of the critical system. The *Critique of Judgment* is, of course, not the first place within the system that the power of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) is called upon to accomplish the work of integrating or arbitrating between the interests of conflicting principles. This is precisely what the transcendental imagination must manage in bringing intuitions under concepts to yield cognition of nature, and precisely what determinative judgment requires the schemata in order to accomplish. The synthetic work performed on the critical system by the third *Critique*—and thus analogously, on the divide between theoretical and practical concepts in experience—is not limited to the way in which reflective judgment deepens the meaning of synthesis within Kant’s philosophy. For just as the critical system is characterized by the separation of the principles of nature and freedom, and in fact prior to the enactment of this separation within the system, the great rupture haunting transcendental philosophy and threatening its very possibility is that between the heterogeneous sources of experience, sensible intuition and the concepts of the intellect. The burden of the unification of reason in the multiplicity of its operations thus comes to rest ultimately upon the activity of the transcendental imagination, a faculty whose operation in reflective judgment is released from its subordination to the principles of nature and of freedom.

II. The System of Purposes

³⁵⁸ CJ 175

Despite Kant's declaration of the unifying task of the third *Critique*, little explicit attention is devoted to its relation to the whole of the critical philosophy; the notable exception to this silence lies in the Introduction, where Kant sets the faculty of judgment between the theoretical and practical pillars of the system. The introduction considers the contributions of aesthetic judgment largely from the perspective of the supersensible principle it must contain in order to serve as "the mediating link between the cognitive power [in general] and the faculty of desire."³⁵⁹ Reflective judgments are accordingly situated in terms of, first, their necessary role in supplementing the knowledge of objective nature established principally according to the categories, and second, their employment of a supersensible principle which, while belonging neither to the principles of nature nor those of freedom, nonetheless makes contact with each, and thus gestures towards the possibility of an a priori transition between the theoretical and the practical. As an introduction to the critical investigation that follows, this approach has the advantage of signaling the rich systematic implications of the account of reflective judgment for the rest of Kant's philosophy, but the disadvantage of creating a rather sharp disconnect between the introduction, with its broad, speculative concerns, and the multiple and seemingly unrelated interests of the investigation of the various manifestations of reflective judgment in practice.

This apparent tension, however, is entirely appropriate to the problem at hand, not merely insofar as Kant has both types of consideration in mind, but inasmuch as the tasks most proper to reflection will have everything to do with the speculative unity of the seemingly disparate elements of experience. Thus while the significance of the third *Critique* as announced by Kant in the introduction is certainly rich with implications for

³⁵⁹ CJ 168

other areas of the critical philosophy, we would do best to understand the independence of its argument by ignoring the specific contributions that the introduction attributes to this newly discovered form of judgment, and attend rather to the unique mode of thought and powers of comprehension belonging to it. So, for example, Kant argues that the impossibility of determining the specific properties of an individual object according to the broad gestures provided by the categories indicates the basis for assuming a broader capacity for judgment than that proposed in the account of determinative judgment: “Hence judgment must assume as an a priori principle for its own use, that what to human insight is contingent in the particular (empirical) natural laws does nevertheless contain a law-governed unity, unfathomable but still conceivable by us.”³⁶⁰ That is, what Kant here comes to call “cognition in general”³⁶¹—a concern which was largely ignored or suppressed in the previous critiques—requires that judgment seek beyond the limits of objective knowledge for a principle capable of bringing unity to our experience of empirical nature in the particular variety that we discover in it. And yet, what is most telling is that Kant insists such a principle, by which judgment regulates its own operation, is necessary not because it is demanded by the understanding, but because “otherwise our empirical cognition could not thoroughly cohere to form a whole of experience.” The overarching concern of reflective judgment is thus not reducible to any of the particular services into which it can be pressed, nor even to their sum total, but rather is directed more fundamentally towards the goal of establishing and maintaining,

³⁶⁰ CJ 183

³⁶¹ In the first *Critique*, the term “cognition” (*Erkenntnis*) was restricted in its use to refer only to objective knowledge of intuited appearances by means of the categories, while here Kant expands its meaning to include any valid representation according to a priori principles. Hence, in addition to the objective determination of empirical nature, cognition in general includes the maxims of practical judgment and the teleological principles of aesthetics and natural purposiveness.

in spite of the tensions within reason threatening to drive it apart, the coherence of experience in the broadest sense—or as Kant now refers to it, cognition in general.

Principles of reflective judgment, insofar as they require us to look beyond the limits of objective cognition, but for the sake of expanding our knowledge, therefore attain their special status precisely from the fact that they enable us to investigate questions that cannot be undertaken on the part of understanding alone. For while the laws of mechanism can, as Kant writes, explain everything in nature, they cannot so much as tell us *why* a blade of grass exists. That we can put such questions to nature does not of course mean that we can answer them objectively; such insight is in principle unavailable to us, and to demand it is to ignore the limits of our knowledge. But at the same time, even if it does nonetheless help to promote the aims of the kind of cognition that is available to us, by presupposing that unity in the system of nature's laws which would never be visible to us unless we assumed it was there, this does not mean that its possible significance is limited to such a role. For these transcendental principles of judgment do not merely seek to further objective cognition, but more importantly, to do so by means of an analogy that would connect the faculty of cognition in us (and thereby nature, as a product of this faculty) with the practical faculty governing our moral will. For in order to comprehend the natural world as a systematic and organic whole, no principles for such an understanding being provided by the a priori concepts of understanding, the faculty of cognition in general is forced to appeal to the only resource available to it, namely its own capacity to act as the cause of effects which, while independent in their existence and objective properties, are nonetheless united in a common system of purposes.

In other words, the faculty of knowledge must assume, for the sake of furthering its own ends, that the natural objects under its investigation have been brought about by a deliberate and purposive agency which it can think only by analogy with the agency within itself.

Since universal natural laws have their basis in our understanding...the particular 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.³⁶²

An assumption is therefore made, not about how the natural objects of knowledge in fact are, but with respect to how we must judge them if we are to experience them in a coherent and consistent manner, that they must have been produced according to an understanding which, unlike our own, is directly connected to a power of objective causation. In other words, an intellectual intuition is posited, though only as a regulative principle, and not as our own cognitive power, but one belonging to nature. The genuine significance of this cognitive sleight of hand, however, remains concealed so long as we focus on the expansion of the power to comprehend empirical objects in nature. For what is truly exposed by this insight is no mere contact between our theoretical and practical principles, but a genuinely novel (from the perspective of the transcendental system of philosophy) form of cognition belonging to and issuing from neither concepts of nature nor precepts of the will. “Now this transcendental concept of a purposiveness of nature is neither a concept of nature nor a concept of freedom, since it attributes nothing whatsoever to the object (nature).”³⁶³ The fact that this assumed unity of nature is not regarded as a property of objects but rather of our power of judgment itself suggests that

³⁶² CJ 181

³⁶³ CJ 184

reflective judgments premised on the purposiveness of nature as a system do not belong to the understanding as the faculty responsible for the determination of phenomena. But this can also be demonstrated simply by recalling that it is precisely in order to address a deficiency in the categories with respect to the complete determination of empirical objects that the necessity of positing a further form of judgment is initially recognized. Reflective judgment is not itself a contribution to knowledge of nature, yet it assists in it by thinking nature according to an analogy with purposive freedom. So why, then, is this principle of purposiveness assumed by transcendental judgment not a principle of freedom? Kant passes over this question in silence.

Establishing that the principle of purposiveness presupposed by the faculty of reflective judgment—that is, the faculty charged with preserving the overall coherence of experience by arbitrating between the competing claims generated according to the various principles underlying cognition in general—does not belong among the concepts of freedom is not merely a matter of transcendental score-keeping. Rather it concerns us on the deepest level of our experience, insofar as it determines whether either the theoretical or practical principles by which our capacity for producing representations is alternately determined, ultimately predominates over the other, or whether both must submit to a third and still more fundamental principle. In other words, if Kant does not maintain that purposiveness is a concept originating neither in the categories governing nature, nor in pure practical reason as determinative of the moral will, then it must either be the case that objective cognition is simply an indirect, veiled manifestation of the faculty of desire, or that the will is ultimately reducible to a mechanistic, and thus calculable, member of the conditioned series of appearances—which is to say, nature.

Either alternative is strictly unacceptable, insofar as it amounts to an abandonment of, in one case, the possibility of objective knowledge, and in the other, the reality of the freedom of the will necessary for our moral vocation.

It is interesting that Kant so diligently demonstrates in the introduction that purposiveness is not an a priori principle of nature (i.e., it cannot be derived from the categories), leaving the alternative largely unexamined, since purposiveness would seem to be very closely related to the principles of morality, and thus need to be carefully distinguished from them. For while the exclusive causal schema governing our objective cognition of nature is thorough and unmitigated mechanism, the noumenal realm of morality is distinguished from the phenomenal insofar as it requires a teleological principle of spontaneous, unconditioned freedom to supplant the conditioned series. Only such spontaneity as could be provided by an a priori purpose, determined by pure practical reason alone, is capable of introducing freedom into the basis of a representation.

What Kant must demonstrate, therefore, is that the concept of purposiveness that the understanding in some way borrows from the practical faculty in order to supplement and assist its own comprehension of nature does not belong to the principles of freedom, even though it bears such a resemblance to them as to presuppose a structurally analogous causal basis. Kant manages to allow himself the space for such a distinction by separating the concept of a purpose, as the causal principle underlying an object, from the idea of purposiveness, as the outward manifestation of such a causal principle in the mere appearance of that object. “Now insofar as the concept of an object also contains the basis for the object’s actuality, the concept is called the thing’s *purpose*, and a thing’s harmony

with that character of things which is possible only through purposes is called the purposiveness of its form.”³⁶⁴ A purpose, therefore, is a concept that not only contains the principle for determining it as an object of knowledge, but further as an object of the will, which is to say that it is a practical principle. Taken by itself, the assertion that certain concepts are practical, and therefore causal with respect not simply to the intelligibility of the object, but rather its existence, illuminates very little regarding the question about the principle of purposiveness underlying reflective judgment. But Kant further contends that certain objects, merely in their particular existence as such objects, may be conceivable only as the products of such a causation—that is, as products of an intellect conjoined with the freedom to be capable of acting for the sake of purposes. Such beings, when found among the products of nature, are referred to as natural purposes. “If a thing is a natural product but yet we are to cognize it as possible only as a natural purpose, then it must have this character: it must relate to itself in such a way that it is both cause and effect of itself.”³⁶⁵ Only according to such criteria can an object appear to as both subject to the causation of nature and yet also purposive with respect to its own existence.

Even further, however, and still more remarkably, Kant maintains that we discern this quality in such objects merely through some formal quality of their appearance. “In a thing that is possible only through an intention, such as a building or even an animal, that regularity which consists in the thing’s symmetry must express the unity of the intuition that accompanies the concept of the thing’s purpose, and is part of the cognition.”³⁶⁶ In other words, objects that we can comprehend as possible only through purposive freedom carry visible signs of this character which can be apprehended by us even in the absence

³⁶⁴ CJ 180

³⁶⁵ CJ 372

³⁶⁶ CJ 242

of any objective knowledge of the object's causal origins. This purposiveness expresses itself, according to Kant, in the formal arrangement of the object insofar as it contains qualities, like symmetry, order and regularity, whose presence in the mere appearance seems consistent only with the product of a deliberate design. Indeed, Kant emphasizes repeatedly in his analysis of the pleasure related to beauty that it concerns the "mere form" of the object, even to the exclusion of any interest in its existence. But the restriction of aesthetic experience to the "form" of the object should not be understood as a requirement of abstraction from its matter or content and the reduction of his theory to a formalist aesthetics.³⁶⁷ On the contrary, this formal reduction is intended only to eliminate whatever is particular to an individual sensation, in order to distinguish the subjective universality of taste from the subjective particularity of the merely agreeable.³⁶⁸ The point is therefore not to distinguish sensible matter from intelligible form—Kant rather regards the "matter" of an appearance as itself sensible³⁶⁹—but rather to distinguish the element of sensation that can form the basis for an a priori judgment from that element that cannot. After all, Kant employs the term "aesthetics" in the strict sense of its reference to sensibility, and reflective judgment is meant to represent an a priori and universally valid form of *sensation*, despite the seeming contradiction in this

³⁶⁷ For a sustained argument against a formalist reading of Kant's aesthetics that nonetheless gives central importance to the prominence of "form" in the third *Critique*, see Gasché, *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant's Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), especially pp. 60-65. On Kant's use of the term, Gasché writes: "Its conception is entirely non-aestheticist or formalist. Form, in the case of a single object of experience for which no concept is available (at least for its immediate intuition) here names only the form of empirical 'object' or 'thing' as something that is in principle cognizable because it has this form." (p. 81)

³⁶⁸ "As regards the agreeable everyone acknowledges that his judgment, which he bases on a private feeling and by which he says that he likes some object, is by the same token confined to his own person." (CJ 212)

³⁶⁹ "We compare our judgment not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and thus put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that may happen to attach to our own judging; and this in turn we accomplish by leaving out as much as possible *whatever is matter, i.e., sensation*, in the presentational state, and by paying attention solely to the formal features of our presentation or of our presentational state." CJ 293 (emphasis added)

very idea. The interest in beauty attends to the formal properties of an appearance, then, insofar as it judges on the basis of those aspects in it that, because they display a purposiveness in their arrangement, are capable of being universalized.³⁷⁰ The form of a beautiful appearance is that in it which, through mere sensation alone, arouses in us the idea of purpose.³⁷¹

So while the determinate purpose of an object can be known only to that intellect in which it has its source, the harmony in the form of an object with the kind of objects that are only intelligible to us insofar as we think them as coming into existence through an analogous form of causation is available to whoever apprehends its mere appearance. Now, presumably, any product that is brought about according to a purpose would also bear the discernible marks of purposiveness in its appearance. But what this distinction of the mode of causation from the formal properties of its products allows is the possibility that an object would bear the signs of purposiveness, and thus appeal to reflective judgment, without our being able to gain any insight whatsoever into the true cause of its existence. Thus it is because it depends on a conception of purposiveness as distinct from the idea of a determinate purpose that reflective judgment operates according to a principle that, while analogous to the practical principle of freedom, is nonetheless distinct from it. This peculiar analogy with freedom on the basis of a formal resemblance

³⁷⁰ This is, of course, not the first time in the critical philosophy that the notion of the formal dimension of sensible intuition appears in a crucial role. When Kant designates space and time as the pure forms of intuition he does not mean to suggest that they are thus immaterial or intellectual, but rather that they are, besides being fundamental conditions for the possibility of any empirical sensation (insofar as all sensible appearances are spatio-temporally determined), also the only qualities of intuition that can be demonstrated a priori and joined with the categories through synthetic a priori judgments. Human sense intuition of course contains many other immutable properties, but these, belonging to biology and empirical psychology, are not necessary conditions of objective cognition and thus not pure forms of intuition.

³⁷¹ The same point holds for the sublime as well, even though there it is an absence of purposiveness, or a sensible contra-purposiveness, that the appearance manifests.

among appearances Kant entitles “purposivity without purpose,” the indeterminate concept that makes every act of reflective judgment possible.

Accordingly, we can see why Kant insists that purposiveness, insofar as it underlies reflective judgments, is a concept that is borrowed neither from the concepts of nature nor those of freedom. Nonetheless, it can just as readily be seen to share certain characteristics with each, to such an extent that it would appear to be a concept that would remain entirely inaccessible to an intellect that did not comprise both noumenal and phenomenal faculties. In any case, it can be said with certainty that this new capacity for judgment is enabled by precisely the same intellectual powers that, differently configured, also give rise to objective cognition and the determination of the will. But the discovery of the concept of purposiveness as distinct from a determinate purpose is not a solution to the transcendental, juridical problem of reflective judgment, it is just the clue towards this solution. Structurally, it occupies the same status as the categories with respect to the a priori element in our objective knowledge of nature, or the categorical imperative in the account of our moral freedom. Every time we judge any product reflectively, we appeal to its formal correspondence to the products of purposes without attributing such a cause to it, but this does not tell us by what right and according to what intellectual process we are so able to judge. This is the deductive task of the critique of judgment, and the point at which a project with a single agenda ruptures into a fragmented collection of seemingly disparate concerns.

III. The Ground of Purposiveness

This fragmentation occurs first and foremost because the power of reflective judgment manifests itself in at least three distinct species of experience, whose relation to

each other Kant either does not fully understand or simply does not manage to give explicit account of. On the one hand, the concept of purposiveness emerges through our teleological judgments of natural systems, the cognitive significance of which we have already touched upon, and on the other hand it appears everywhere that pure aesthetic judgments are made, whether they be of pleasure or displeasure, and relative to objects of nature as well as art. Aesthetic judgments again divide into two forms, the beautiful and the sublime, leaving Kant with three distinct but entangled forms of thought by which to approach the transcendental basis of *Urteilkraft*.

In turning to the consideration of these three forms of reflective judgment, two key issues will command our attention. First, we must give consideration to the question of the cognitive status of the aesthetic consciousness that has its transcendental basis in reflective judgment. Insofar as the determinative judgments of the first *Critique* were held to be constitutive of experience (*Erfahrung*) as such, we must determine whether aesthetic judgments fall somehow outside of the realm of experience, or whether they constitute some part of it; and in the latter case, we must decide as well whether this discovery constitutes an expansion of experience, a transformation of it, or whether it occurs as a separate and parallel form of the experience of phenomena. Second, we will attend to the function of the transcendental imagination as the basis for determining the essential difference between reflective and determinative judgments. For despite their considerable difference as forms of thought, these two types of judgment share considerable formal similarity, and depend on many of the same conditions in the mind. Our investigation of the role of imagination in the procedure of reflective judgment will therefore be directed towards identifying the ultimate basis that determines why some

appearances are received as cognitive objects while others are regarded in aesthetic terms. Since each of these is itself an *a priori* mode of apprehension, then whatever decides between their respective modes of engaging the object must itself have its basis prior to and independent of any experience of the object.

Recognizing this foundational decision as an act of imagination probably does not neutralize the force of Heidegger's observation concerning the retreat from the radicality of the imagination as described in the A edition of the Transcendental Deduction.³⁷² It does, however, suggest a response that preserves this insight while also granting a place to the revisions of the B edition, with all the advantages they provide in terms of resolving the basic problems of the Deduction.³⁷³ In fact such an interpretation might even grant imagination a more foundational role in the constitution of experience *as a whole* than that which Heidegger feared it was forced to relinquish to the categories.³⁷⁴

³⁷² The ambivalence of Heidegger's estimation of Kant's entire project can rather neatly be summarized in the issues surrounding the role of the transcendental imagination in the first *Critique*. Heidegger, on the one hand, credits Kant with having discovered the role of imagination in grounding experience at its most fundamental level, and on the other hand, finds fault in his inability to follow through on this insight. "This original, essential constitution of humankind, 'rooted' in the transcendental power of imagination, is the 'unknown' into which Kant must have looked if he spoke of the 'root unknown to us,' for the unknown is not that of which we simply know nothing. Rather it is what pushes against us as something disquieting in the known...Kant shrank back from this unknown root." (Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 112)

³⁷³ On the relation between the A and B versions of the Transcendental Deduction, and Kant's reasons for changing the strategy of his exposition, see Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, particularly chapters 2 and 3: "Instead of the method of the A Deduction that consisted in uncovering the 'threefold synthesis' underlying the psychological genesis of our empirical cognitions, Kant will [in the B edition] adopt a positive method that consists in deducing the nature of the acts of thought from the 'exactly specified definition of a judgment in general.'" (p. 58) Longuenesse thus sees the content of the two versions of the Deduction as entirely compatible with each other, and questions Heidegger's reading of the B Deduction on this basis. "The role of imagination is not eliminated from the B Deduction, but the understanding itself becomes more clearly linked, in its transcendental function, to sensibility." (p. 60)

³⁷⁴ Heidegger attempts to explain this retreat from the imagination as the result of Kant's anxiety concerning the implications of what he discovered in a moment of enthusiastic insight: "In the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the transcendental power of imagination as it came to light in the impassioned course of its first projection was thrust aside and given a new interpretation—one favoring the understanding." (*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 113) Longuenesse responds to Heidegger's suggestion by emphasizing the continuity between the two Deductions and the mutual interdependence of the imagination and understanding: "To be sure, Kant is led to show that the clarity of discursive thought is itself dependent on the 'blind but indispensable function' of imagination...But imagination itself, in its

Where the first *Critique* relegated the imagination to a backstage position in the exposition of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, the third announces from its very opening a far more prominent role: “If we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not we do not use understanding to refer the presentation to the object so as to give rise to cognition (*Erkenntnis*); rather we use imagination (perhaps in connection with understanding) to refer the presentation to the subject.”³⁷⁵ Thus it is established from the first section of the text that the imagination is to perform a function with respect to our subjective apprehension of *appearances* that is analogous to the one attributed to the understanding in the objective apprehension of *objects*. Though the objectivity of these judgments must necessarily be sacrificed, this confirms the suggestion that arises obliquely through the discussion of the schematism, that the imagination is capable of itself guiding an act of judgment, and one suited to an *a priori*, universal mode of thought.

And yet, it is almost impossible to fail to notice that this opening sentence of the third *Critique* almost immediately retracts, or at least greatly qualifies, the preeminence that is just as quickly granted to imagination in aesthetic judgment. Though such judgments are performed by the imagination, the possibility is left open that they nonetheless continue to depend on some “connection with understanding.” The question guiding our investigation will then be to what extent and in what respect the understanding is required for this autonomous operation of the subjective power of a *priori* presentation. For even as the assistance of the concept will be in some way required for reflective apprehension, this is less a reassertion of the subservience of imagination to

transcendental function, is for Kant to be understood in light of its relation to discursive thinking and its logical forms, not the reverse.” (*Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, p. 204)

³⁷⁵ CJ 203

the concept, than a total reversal of their relation in the schematism. Just as there the understanding made use of the distinctive power of imagination for the sake of a judgment over which it retained legislative rights, so imagination will here make use of a particular aspect of discursive thought, without surrendering to its demands for objectivity. What sets a presentation within the sphere of reflective judgment, rather than relegating it to the objective determination of the categories depends largely upon its reference to a mere subjective feeling. Yet since even subjective sensations are capable of objective determination, as demonstrated by the transcendental deduction, it must be added that the reflective judgment refers to a specific form of feeling lacking any potential reference to the object, namely the feeling of pleasure or displeasure: “this reference designates nothing whatsoever in the object, but here the subject feels himself, namely how he is affected by the presentation.”³⁷⁶

The peculiar quality of a reflective judgment is thus grounded largely in the fact of its reflexivity, or its auto-affection. To be sure, the aesthetic judgment is brought about by a sensation that has its origin outside the subject, but this sensation is not itself the immediate reference of the judgment. Rather it is itself that the subject feels, making this judgment merely subjective in a doubled sense: not only is this sensation non-discursive and incommunicable, but it is also a judgment about the subject. Further, this reflexive character of the aesthetic judgment is directed toward the subject *as affected by a sensation*. The apparent familiarity of this formulation threatens to obscure the unique quality of the experience described; the subject is not simply affected by something sensible, but rather by the sensation of something sensible. To put it slightly differently, this is a second-order sensation, the sensation of feeling a sensation, an aspect of aesthetic

³⁷⁶ CJ 204

experience that Kant attempts to capture by designating these judgments as *reflective*. In this peculiar form of reflexive and reflective sensation, the subject encounters itself encountering an object, though this object is not cognized as such. It is a mere appearance, the equivalent to a synthetically apprehended manifold in the imagination that would otherwise then be subsumed by the categories, were this a determinative judgment aimed at objective cognition.

This fact is significant because it suggests that the task assigned to transcendental imagination is greater than merely assuming the lead in judging those appearances that have already been relegated to aesthetic experience. Rather, whatever originally decides between reflective and determinative judgment would itself be located in the presentation of the appearance, which is to say in imagination. For, as the nature of aesthetic judgment as an act of reflection or “contemplation” (*Beurteilung*) suggests, the objects that it judges are also potentially, and in fact ordinarily, objects of cognitive judgments. They are objects which are subject to two different mental processes, two distinct but perhaps convergent forms of experience, the difference between which is somehow located in the transcendental imagination. But what is at stake here is more than a simple argument over which faculty plays a more fundamental role in the constitution of experience. If indeed the imagination is responsible, in a manner that can be determined according to *a priori* rules, for this decisive moment in the unfolding of experience, then this gives the critical philosophy access to a much deeper source of experience than had been conceivable from the standpoint of either the first or second *Critiques*. Thus what is at issue in aesthetic experience is not simply *another* form of experience, but one which grounds, and thus explains the tenuous unity, of all others. It is on this insight that Kant famously stakes the

possibility of traversing, by means of philosophy, the “immense gulf” between the theoretical and the practical modes of thought that lived experience shows to be somehow capable of coming together.

Having already constructed a philosophical system which in no way anticipated the inclusion of a form of *a priori* thought beyond the foundational distinction between the theoretical and the practical, Kant is initially rather focused on demonstrating that, contrary to his earlier explicit denial, feeling (*Gefühl*) admits of a form capable of claiming universal and necessary assent.³⁷⁷ According to the terms of the first *Critique* to have conceded that objective knowledge might be possible through sensible intuition alone would have been either to confuse our merely sensible intuition with an intellectual one, or to have denied the possibility of any knowledge independent of experience. The third *Critique* must therefore show how mere appearances can rise to the status of representations requiring universal assent without the intervention of the concept. But this is merely the first part of its task, which if it accomplished nothing more would leave even greater confusion within the system as a whole, having exacerbated the problem of the disunity of experience rather than resolved it. For after demonstrating the *a priori* basis of a form of experience through which the imagination can produce universally valid judgments in relation to appearances without the assistance of discursive concepts, Kant must then show how such an experience itself mediates between the theoretical and the practical consciousness in such a way that they may converge in a common space.

³⁷⁷ “All practical concepts relate to objects of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, that is, of pleasure and pain (*Gegenstände des Wohlgefallens oder Mißfallens, d.i., der Lust und Unlust*), and therefore, at least indirectly, to the objects of our feelings (*auf Gegenstände unseres Gefühls*). But as feeling is not a faculty whereby we represent things, but lies outside our whole faculty of knowledge (*Erkenntniskraft*), the elements of our judgments so far as they relate to pleasure or pain, that is, the elements of practical judgments, do not belong to transcendental philosophy, which is exclusively concerned with pure *a priori* modes of knowledge.” (CPR A802/B829n)

Demonstrating that a third and conceptually independent universal principle exists is therefore only a mediate goal of the *Critique*, the means to a greater end, and yet its independence is no merely incidental fact. For unless such a principle were discovered, it would be necessary to concede that either the theoretical or the practical principle is capable of subsuming the other, or else abandon the possibility of their *a priori* unity altogether. What the account of reflective judgment must explain is what in the mere presentation of an appearance enables and entitles the imagination to initiate a synthetic act of judgment without any concept toward which to direct itself. In other words, how does imagination achieve the unity in its apprehension of the appearance that is implied by the idea of synthesis without presuming the transcendental unity of apperception as grounded in the understanding? The key to understanding the role that imagination plays in this primordial and original synthesis of experience is contained in the crucial “concept” that undergirds our very idea of what constitutes beauty, that fertile form of appearance that Kant identifies as “purposivity without purpose” (*zwecklose Zweckmässigkeit*). Purposivity in the absence of any determinate and identifiable purpose is a quality of the mere appearance on the basis of which it is apprehended through a reflective judgment, rather than by means of the figurative synthesis of cognition. This, in fact, is precisely what a judgment of the beautiful holds: that a presentation in the imagination is so ordered as to contain a formal structure that is only fully conceivable by analogy with the sort of appearance that is produced according to a determinate concept, yet for which no concept can be discovered in the understanding.

In order to be capable of judging a presentation relative to the question of purpose, even if only to deny any such involvement, the imagination must itself benefit

from some relation to the concept of purposivity—hence the qualification that though the imagination is autonomous in performing aesthetic judgments, it nonetheless may require some assistance from the faculty of concepts. The question of the relation and interdependence between determinative and reflective judgments will be decisive for our understanding of the systematic unity of Kant’s philosophy. As our investigation of their relation in the third chapter demonstrated, the two kinds of judgment presuppose one another—or to put it differently, only an intellect capable of objective knowledge is also capable of a universally valid faculty of taste, and vice versa. But before we can further address this issue, we must begin by considering the particular concept to which imagination must have reference in order to judge aesthetically, namely purposivity. In order to explain the meaning and the function of this concept in reflective judging, we must begin still further back, in the feeling of pleasure that results from the judgment based upon it.

IV. Lawfulness without Law

All of our representations, as such, refer to something beyond themselves; in the case of our ordinary cognition, they refer to the phenomenal objects about which alone we can have knowledge. But in our experience of the aesthetic object, “the presentation is referred only to the subject, namely, to his feeling of life, under the name feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and this forms the basis of a very special power of discriminating and judging.”³⁷⁸ Kant begins his account of aesthetic judgment from the feeling of pleasure because it is the most readily identifiable characteristic of the beautiful, but his interest is rather directed toward the power of judgment (*Urteilkraft*) of which this feeling is merely one aspect. For it is immediately apparent upon investigating this

³⁷⁸ CJ 204

feeling, even and perhaps especially for the subject experiencing it, that this is a unique form of pleasure marked by a peculiar feature, namely, the total indifference of that pleasure to the existence of any object corresponding to the beautiful appearance.³⁷⁹ In fact, this is just what Kant means when he says that the subject experiencing this pleasure has no concern for its existence; it is the objective reality that is indifferent, while the continued presence of the sensation is, undoubtedly, of the greatest concern.³⁸⁰ Thus even though the feeling associated with beauty is a reflexive sensation, in which the subject feels its own mental state, this latter in turn depends on an external cause of the sensation. The feeling of pleasure that is beauty is an auto-affection, but not a solipsistic and thoroughly autonomous one. Beauty demands a beautiful thing, though it does not demand it in the same way that other sensations attach directly to the object from which they originate. For once the sensation is drawn up into the imagination, there it is sufficient to reproduce the sensation so long as it remains preserved as a mere impression.

In fact, such preservation within the faculty of imagination is crucial to the temporal character of the process that gives rise to the pleasure of aesthetic judgment. Whereas the process of cognitive judgment is described in language that suggests activities of limited duration directed toward the production of discrete representations, aesthetic judgment is referred to as an activity of “contemplation” (*Betrachtung*) or reflection, suggesting a protracted activity that can hardly even be considered as a

³⁷⁹ “If the question is whether something is beautiful, what we want to know is not whether we or anyone cares, or so much as might care, in any way, about the thing’s existence, but rather how we judge it in our mere contemplation of it.” (CJ 204)

³⁸⁰ “That a judgment of taste by which we declare something to be beautiful must not have an interest as its determining basis has been established sufficiently above. But it does not follow from this that after the judgment has been made as a pure aesthetic one, an interest cannot be connected with it.” (CJ 296)

process, insofar as it seems directed toward no definite end. Indeed, one might even wonder in what sense this pleasure deserves to be associated with the act of judgment, since it is so lacking in any apparent purpose as, Kant notes, to appear entirely without causal explanation: “Yet it does have a causality in it, namely to keep us in the state of having the presentation itself, and to keep the cognitive powers engaged in their occupation without any further aim. We *linger* in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself.”³⁸¹ But while the identification of this contemplative lingering gives us a depiction of, on the one hand, the empirical and psychological condition of the beholder of a beautiful appearance, on the other hand it also identifies the primary basis for distinguishing this experience from cognition in terms of the transcendental activity that supports it. For while cognitive syntheses have their aim in arriving at rule-governed and decisive determinations of the object under consideration, aesthetic judgments contribute nothing whatsoever to our cognition of the object. In other words, they arrive at no determinate conclusion; they are the point of departure for contemplative reflection, as well as its medium and its purpose. The purposivity without purpose of aesthetic judgments describes not only a quality of the appearance being judged, but of the subject judging, and provides a glimpse into the possibility of a form of thought in which experience becomes an end in itself.

In order to understand the gravity and the scope of this restriction of the claims of reflective judgment, we must attend to the strictness with which Kant asserts the non-

³⁸¹ CJ 222; Gadamer speaks of a similar quality of aesthetic experience, attributing it to the “autonomous temporality” of the artwork as a temporally transcendent possibility for the subject experiencing it: “When we dwell upon the work there is no tedium involved, for the longer way allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us. The essence of our temporal experience of art is in learning how to tarry in this way. And perhaps it is the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity.” Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. N. Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 45.

cognitive status of its representations. The point is not merely that reflective judgments do not interfere in the kind of determinations that belong properly to the categories, but that they determine nothing about objects whatsoever, including any account of the cause or the nature of their beauty, or any rules which would allow us to determine in advance what sort of appearances should be judged beautiful. In fact, trying to introduce guidelines for the appreciation of beauty frustrates and hinders our enjoyment, rather than promoting it. “If we judge merely in terms of concepts then we lose all presentation of beauty. This is why there can be no rule by which someone could be compelled to acknowledge that something is beautiful.”³⁸² The total absence of a conceptually determinative basis in aesthetic judgments may well seem to undermine any claim they might make to *a priori* validity, insofar as universality and necessity are properties belonging to the concepts of understanding, but entirely absent from the presentations of the faculties of sensible intuition. This is not to say that sensation is unqualifiedly and irredeemably subjective; the principle aim of the figurative synthesis is to draw out of the sensible manifold whatever is capable of transcending the private conditions under which it was intuited. In synthetic cognition, only what can be subsumed under the categories is capable of providing the material for objective determination of an object of knowledge. How, then, can any judgment performed without the contribution of concepts lay claim to *a priori* universality?

Clearly the universal validity of aesthetic judgments is not simply derived from a different origin from that of cognitive judgments, rather it claims a validity of a wholly different kind, which Kant calls an aesthetic, rather than logical, universality. The

³⁸² CJ 215

discovery of aesthetic judgment and the principle underlying it forces Kant to expand his understanding of what constitutes the universal validity of our representations, and the critical task of the third *Critique*—if this may be distinguished from its systematic task as announced in the introduction—is to seek the transcendental source of this claim to necessity which always accompanies our pure aesthetic judgments. This problem is analogous to the *quaestio juris* posed in relation to the categories in the first *Critique*. Just as there it was necessary to demonstrate by what right the categories could play a determinative role in the apprehension of objects which they themselves are not causally responsible for, here the deductive task consists in explaining the peculiar demand that is immediately and necessarily connected in the mind of the subject with every pure aesthetic judgment he makes, namely the expectation that all others should take the same pleasure in apprehending it, and thus agree with our merely subjective judgment. But because this judgment is performed without the objectivizing influence of the concept, its universality falls short of direct communicability, giving it a special kind of subjective universality. Again, it is important to note that the judgment is *experienced* according to this peculiar demand for agreement:

A judgment of taste requires everyone to assent; and whoever declares something to be beautiful holds that everyone *ought* to give his approval to the object at hand and that he too should declare it to be beautiful. Hence the *ought* (*das Sollen*) in an aesthetic judgment, even once we have all the data needed for judging, is still uttered only conditionally. We solicit everyone else's assent because we have a basis for it that is common to all.³⁸³

The universality of our aesthetic judgments is thus anticipated rather than experienced; and if we seek empirical verification of the agreement of others with our own aesthetic judgments, then this is not because the agreement is empirically grounded, but only

³⁸³ CJ 237

because we know that certain contingent events might well interfere with the capacity for this common basis to surface in the form of aesthetic pleasure.

In the first place, we should notice that such a subjective basis for agreement is non-demonstrable, non-discursive and incommunicable. It can neither be explained through appeal to concepts nor justified by demonstration of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, it presupposes what Kant calls a *sensus communis*, that is, a sense distinct from outer sensation by which we judge certain sensations of pleasure in ourselves to be valid for all others, whether or not their judgment agrees with our own. This last qualification is significant, since it suggests that as aesthetic agreement cannot be formed by empirical consensus, neither can it be undermined by the lack thereof. Even in the face of widespread dissent, pure aesthetic judgments continue to maintain the possibility of universal agreement, or indeed the expectation of it, as an integral part of their claim. In this respect, aesthetic claims resemble the practical judgments originating from the moral will, insofar as they concern what *ought* to be the case, rather than what is. And yet, here they also differ from the judgments of the will, in that they judge with respect not to a purely abstract principle of reason, but in relation to a concrete appearance, a phenomenal object. This is the first direct evidence that the account of reflective judgment provides concerning the possibility of connecting the spheres of our theoretical and practical ideas. When I judge an object to be beautiful, I freely remove it from its attachment to the chain of natural mechanism and transport it into the realm of moral freedom. But this transcendence that aesthetic experience effects does not obliterate or ignore the natural status of the object it so liberates from its causally determinative basis; rather, it preserves this phenomenal object as what it is, subject to the laws of nature, and yet supplants an

entirely independent causal principle upon it, namely human freedom. This judgment thus transforms what is given as an object of deterministic mechanism and creates from it the foundation, as it were, from which a teleological purpose can arise.

Indeed, the formal properties of aesthetic judgments seem to combine aspects of both practical and theoretical judgments, but just as we have already seen that the relation of such judgments to the objects of cognition is further a substantive relation, so too is there a deeper connection to the exercise of the moral will. That is to say that judgments of the beautiful do not merely resemble moral judgments in their relation to the practical sphere, but also insofar as they are in themselves an exercise of freedom. The ambiguity of this formulation is not meant to conceal an emptiness in its meaning, but rather to accommodate the multiple senses in which freedom is an essential and constitutive element of aesthetic enjoyment. In the first place, whoever judges aesthetically does so only insofar as he is, however temporarily and conditionally, disburdened of the need to judge the object before him cognitively. The aesthetic attitude is above all one of leisure, and depends on a kind of mental luxury to renounce the pressing demands of objectivity. Just as we cannot be compelled by force or by argument to take aesthetic pleasure in this or that particular appearance, so can we not but by our own mental attunement be made to actively take the pleasure that we may judge to be connected with an appearance. Aesthetic judgments are not only radically singular, but fragilely so as well, and their preservation can only be encouraged rather than enforced. Beauty is an appearance that is recognized only where a highly conditional receptivity is fostered, and the attitude of receptivity to pleasure is perfectly antithetical to that of being compelled.

Of course this merely dispositional or psychological description of the enjoyment of beauty is intended to indicate the transcendental structures underlying it, and thus the empirical freedom of the judging subject has its correlate in the faculties that make this judgment possible. The absence of a determinate concept from the logical act of judgment means that the imagination is free to judge the appearance according to a standard which it invents, as it were, on the spot. “How are judgments of taste possible? [This] problem concerns the a priori principles that the power of judgment uses...where it does not...merely have to subsume under objective concepts of the understanding, so that it is subject to a law, but where it is, subjectively, object itself as well as law to itself.”³⁸⁴ It is crucial to recognize that the freedom from the restraint of the categories does not abandon the imagination to judge capriciously or arbitrarily, but rather urges it forward in its search for a standard by which to judge, though it finds none immediately available. The imagination’s freedom in this instance, a freedom to determine the principle of its own operation, is therefore equally its burden and responsibility, since without such a principle it is powerless to judge with a priori validity. In this freedom to submit to the law of its own choosing—or to say the same thing, to become both law and legislator unto itself—the imagination turns not to any principle of reason among others, but to the highest and most inclusive principle belonging to the *Gemüt* and encompassing all others.

The mentioned standard can be supplied only by means of that by reference to which we are to make all of our cognitive powers harmonize, doing which is the ultimate purpose given us by the intelligible element in our nature. It is in this way alone, too, that this purposiveness, for which we cannot prescribe an objective principle, can be based a priori on a principle that is subjective and yet universally valid.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ CJ 288

³⁸⁵ CJ 344

This is of course not the first occasion within the critical project upon which reason has been compelled to seek a standard for reconciling the various and disparate elements comprised by its cognitive power as a whole. This was essentially the same problem dealt with in the schematism, which is precisely why both objective determination of phenomena and aesthetic apprehension of appearances are simply different species of a common function, judgment. But whereas the schematism speaks of “the *subsumption* of intuitions under pure concepts” or “the *application* of a category to appearances,” it is difficult not to notice the dramatic shift in tone that is suggested by the present reference to “a reciprocal subjective harmony between the cognitive powers.”³⁸⁶ The categories assume the role of ordering and determining intuitions in order to give rise to cognition, because there the understanding is legislative, providing not just the principle of its own operation, but as well the rule by which its own principle is to be coordinated with those of the other faculties contributing to objective determination. But since the task of reflective judgment is not to determine a representation, but rather to establish a relation between the various principles for determining representations, in order to facilitate their unity without demanding the sacrifice of their autonomy, it must, as it were, rule without a rule, or act purposively in the absence of a purpose of its own. This fragile relation of the faculties is referred to as their “free harmony,” the condition under which alone they may be combined.

So reflective judgments manifest a subjective freedom, not only in the psychological or empirical disposition of the subject in whom they are made, but furthermore in the arrangement of the transcendental faculties underlying this mood and

³⁸⁶ CJ 218

making it possible as an a priori valid judgment. What makes an aesthetic judgment universally binding, then, is not, as in the case of a determinative judgment, its conformity to an a priori rule, but paradoxically, the total absence of such a rule from its basis. This is why the suspension of private interest is so crucial to the possibility of making pure aesthetic judgments that rise above the particularity of the individual subject who makes them. For a judgment performed without any interest compelling its approval is a judgment that is independent of any determination other than that provided by the (universal) faculty of judgment, that is to say, a free judgment. And any judgment that is made freely is, despite its merely subjective basis, deserving of the agreement of any other freely judging subject. “If someone likes something and is conscious that he does so without any interest, then he cannot help judging that it must contain a basis for being liked that holds for everyone.”³⁸⁷ Aesthetic judgments thus lay claim to a special, merely subjective form of universality, based not on a common object, but on the commonality between subjects presumed to hold within themselves the same powers of reflection.³⁸⁸ The free harmony of the faculties in an aesthetic judgment thus functions as a kind of purification, stripping away whatever hindrances might obstruct the activation of this “common sense” by which we demand that others share our subjective but disinterested pleasure in a mere appearance.

³⁸⁷ CJ 211

³⁸⁸ Such an inference is justified by the fact that the same conditions—that is, the same transcendental faculties—that support aesthetic judgment also enable determinative judgments of cognition: “This pleasure must of necessity rest on the same conditions in everyone, because they are subjective conditions for the possibility of cognition as such, and because the proportion between these cognitive powers that is required for taste is also required for the sound and common understanding that we may presuppose in everyone.” (CJ 292-3) In other words, the possibility of universalizing taste presupposes nothing more about the subject than the fact that it possesses ordinary knowledge of the world and that it is unconstrained by interest or by any other hindrance in its judgment.

But unless this freedom exhibited by the faculties in their harmonious interrelation is given a more thorough determination, it will remain a merely negative principle, unsuitable to serve as the basis for a judgment capable of demonstrating the possible unity and coherence of experience. For a harmony of the faculties, though it does not suggest a legislative relation in which any faculty dominates, nonetheless does require their careful and purposive arrangement, such that not simply any ruleless activity will suffice to rise to the level of this common sense. While no particular faculty is capable of providing a rule for the others to be subordinated to, the imagination nonetheless stands apart in its capacity to operate *for the sake of* ordered regularity, even in the absence of such a principle to follow. When Kant attempts to determine the specific harmony constituting the two varieties of aesthetic judgment, the beautiful and the sublime, the common element he finds in each is that “for this liking to occur the *imagination on its own* must sustain the mind in a free activity.”³⁸⁹ When the imagination surrenders this freedom either in the direction of determination by sensation or by the concept, it indeed judges, but by compulsion rather than through freedom. And yet insofar as the imagination holds such determination at bay, it does so not for the sake of forestalling lawfulness as such, but rather the particular determinate laws that foreclose the possibility of reflection. Indeed, through aesthetic judgment the imagination manifests what Kant refers to as a “free lawfulness,” by which it seeks to discover a rule for judgment instead of merely applying one. “Aesthetic purposiveness is the lawfulness of the power of judgment in its freedom...[if] the judgment is determined by anything else,

³⁸⁹ CJ 270 (emphasis added)

whether a sensation proper or a concept of the understanding, then the judgment is indeed lawful, but it is not one made by a free power of judgment.”³⁹⁰

At the conclusion of the initial analysis of the beautiful, in the first “General Comment,” Kant attempts to draw together the four moments of the beautiful in order to discover by what cognitive power such a form of judgment is possible. During the course of this analysis, by means of an investigation of the distinctive traits of aesthetic experience, Kant had arrived at the conclusion that “a pure judgment of taste is one...whose determining basis is therefore merely the purposiveness of the form.”³⁹¹ The pleasure produced by reflectively apprehending its appearance concerns only its formal arrangement as an object for thought, and not insofar as it is directly pleasant to the faculty of sensation itself. Pure purposiveness is thus the basis of the distinction between a priori taste and mere enjoyment. Now, in his summary remark, however, Kant maintains that what has been demonstrated is something slightly different: “we find that everything comes down to the concept of taste, namely, that taste is an ability to judge an object in reference to the *free lawfulness* of the imagination.”³⁹² An apparent substitution or shift thus takes place, as the basis for judgments of taste seems to move from the purposiveness of the object’s form to the “lawfulness of the imagination in its freedom.” So how are we to resolve this apparent confusion concerning the ultimate foundation on which the capacity for judgment rests?

Since this remark is situated within a summary comment on the section of the text in which purposiveness without purpose is explicitly introduced, it seems unlikely that Kant regards these two statements as conflicting with each other in any way. In fact, Kant

³⁹⁰ CJ 270

³⁹¹ CJ 223

³⁹² CJ 240

refers to purposiveness again later in this same comment, though it seems neither to be the case that he means to suggest that taste depends on *both* the purposiveness of form and the free lawfulness of imagination. Rather the point of this remark seems to be to connect these two concepts, not simply for the sake of permitting a re-description of taste, but in order to deepen the transcendental meaning of the analytic of the beautiful by discovering the cognitive power (or powers) that operate according to this peculiar subjective principle. Thus Kant writes: “Only a lawfulness without a law, and a subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony...is compatible with the free lawfulness of the understanding (which has also been called purposiveness without a purpose) and with the peculiarity of a judgment of taste.”³⁹³ Purposiveness and lawfulness are thus parallel concepts, both suggesting an activity that is teleologically directed in such a way that this conformity to an end manifests itself in the emergence of characteristics of order and regularity, yet without these being the products of mechanical necessity. And yet, no special faculty is required either where purposiveness is directed toward a determinate purpose, or where the impulse to lawfulness is guided by the legislation of an objective and determinative rule. The question posed by reflective judgment concerns the sort of faculty that is capable of acting in conformity with the idea of purposiveness in the absence of a purpose, and the answer, Kant concludes, is that such a faculty must be one governed by a free lawfulness, through which it strives to attain a principle for its own activity, or to become law and legislator to itself. Such a power belongs only to the productive imagination, which thus is identified as the ultimate transcendental source of judgment.

VI. The Antinomy of Pure Imagination

³⁹³ CJ 241

Even in the schematism and the figurative synthesis of the first *Critique*, productive imagination—that is, the power of presentation in its capacity to generate a priori forms of synthetically organized appearances—was demonstrated to be an indispensable catalyst in the generation of objectively valid representations of natural objects. Imagination was shown to be capable, independently of any material borrowed from experience, to gather together the manifold of intuition according to laws provided to it by the categories of the understanding and the transcendental unity of apperception, and thus to actively generate phenomena as such, producing them not merely from other representations, but from the in itself unintelligible manifold provided by sensibility. Therefore it is not the imagination in its transcendental productivity that reflective judgment reveals to the critical philosophy for the first time, but rather this same power in its autonomy with respect to the rules of the understanding. Leaving aside for the moment the question of the specific relation between determinative and reflective judgments, as well as the corresponding forms of presentation, symbolic and schematic, that correspond to them, it is important to note just how slight the difference between them is in terms of the arrangement of cognitive powers that make them possible. The most subtle shift in the legislative priority that abides between imagination and understanding leads to a near reversal of the aims of the power of cognition in general, from the objective specification of scientific knowledge to the subjective reflection of aesthetic contemplation. Given the subtlety of this difference, we may rightly ask what purpose it serves to locate the source of reflective judgment in the autonomy of the imagination rather than in the rule-governed operation of the understanding. In other words, what does it ultimately tell us about the status of these judgments and their role in

constituting the underlying unity of experience that they are made possible by an imagination liberated from the demands of objective presentation and thus free to linger in contemplation before the not-yet cognized appearance?

We might reasonably expect, given the announced aims of the third *Critique* and Kant's tendency toward reinforcing the separation of the activities of the various faculties, that such a question would be given more explicit consideration than it in fact receives in those passages where Kant discusses the imagination in its free lawfulness. But by the time Kant introduces the notion of the imagination's striving towards lawfulness, an idea that he draws largely out of his presentation of the sublime, he has already presented the groundwork for answering this question, albeit without directing it specifically towards this end. In fact it is quite early in the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, just after having introduced the analysis of beauty as a disinterested pleasure, that Kant considers the significance of the leading role taking by imagination in aesthetic judgment. Up to this point in the text, Kant has introduced two crucial claims about the experience of the beautiful, the one being the aforementioned pleasure in the absence of a determinate interest, and the other, that beauty is the product of an act of judgment. That is to say, that although it is nothing more than a sensation (i. e., not a cognition), the feeling associated with a beautiful appearance is nonetheless not merely passively received, but actively formed as the product of a specific and identifiable cognitive operation. The phenomenon of beauty is therefore credited to two apparently distinct sources, both of them internal to the subject of this experience. Kant addresses this issue in a section entitled "Investigation of the Question Whether in a Judgment of Taste the

Feeling of Pleasure Precedes the Judging of the Object or the Judging Precedes the Pleasure.”³⁹⁴

Ultimately, this question concerning the relative priority of the sensation of pleasure as compared to the act of judging in aesthetic taste is an attempt to get at the fundamental causal basis of reflective judgment. In other words, either the judgment is first produced independently of the sensation of pleasure, to which it then gives rise; or, the judgment proceeds by taking the pleasure produced by the appearance as one of its premises, and then connecting it with the concept of purposiveness, thereby transforming it into a synthetic claim worthy of universal assent. The question, however, leads only to an impasse at this early stage in the analysis of taste, since essentially it is nothing more than an advance presentation of the same problem that Kant will introduce as the antinomy of taste in the *Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment*.

Insofar as an antinomy is not any mere disagreement, but one produced by the conflict of opposing a priori, universal concepts, Kant insists that there is no antinomy in the claims of taste—since these refer only to the subjective experience of the individual—but only of the transcendental principles underlying the capacity for aesthetic feeling. In other words, the self-conflicting dimension of taste is not expressed in disputes between various subjects concerning the objects of their aesthetic judgments, but rather in the tension felt by the individual who himself cannot easily reconcile the disparate aspects of the experience he undergoes. “Even a conflict between different people’s judgments of taste does not constitute a dialectic insofar as each person merely appeals to his own taste, since to that extent no one seeks to make his judgment a universal rule.”³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ CJ §9, pp. 217-9

³⁹⁵ CJ 337

The position elaborated here represents a significant departure from the presentation of determinative judgments in the first *Critique*, insofar as in the experience of the latter (as opposed to what can be understood from the perspective of the critique) there was no room to distinguish between the transcendental basis of the judgment and its product as an experience of nature. The universal validity of the one was the same as that of the other, a fact which guarantees the universal communicability of knowledge according to objective concepts. The fact that the universality of the principles of aesthetic judgment does not by itself directly secure the empirical universality of the claims of taste is nothing more than another expression of the antinomy of taste, and the reason for its incommunicability.

The combination of the seemingly incompatible characteristics of universality and incommunicability accounts for the peculiar tension that inhabits every aesthetic claim. To reach an antinomy in the principles of determinative judgment, it was necessary to press the categories beyond the limits of their applicability to sensible presentations, in the search for supersensible principles of nature. Hence, in the first *Critique* “dialectic” is understood as a “logic of illusion” that “consists in the mere imitation of the form of reason...[and] arises entirely from lack of attention to the logical rule.”³⁹⁶ No such inattention to the lawfulness of the cognitive faculties, however, is required to produce an apparent contradiction in the claims of taste. “For when we consider the basis that makes judgments of taste as such possible, we find that concerning this basis conflicting concepts arise naturally and inevitably.”³⁹⁷ Taste is thus dialectical in quite a different sense than that which applies to the illegitimate application of the categories to questions

³⁹⁶ CPR A296/B353

³⁹⁷ CJ 337

that outstrip the limits of their legitimate employment. The dialectical illusions produced by the power of objective cognition call into question only the matter engaged by their supersensible transgressions, while leaving the principles of cognition themselves intact, and even reinforcing and purifying them by their negative lesson. The dialectic of taste, however, strikes at the heart of aesthetic experience, challenging not just the legitimate reach of its claims, but “whether this power is lawful and hence also whether such a power is intrinsically possible.”³⁹⁸ Even in their legitimate employment, the principles of taste contain such an apparent contradiction that a pure aesthetic judgment itself appears to undermine its own claim to universal agreement.

But this antinomy arises only insofar as taste is held to a standard of lawfulness that is in fact foreign to the criteria regulating its claims. To be sure, aesthetic judgment invites this reference to the lawfulness of the concepts of the understanding insofar as its validity is based on the “indeterminate concept” of the supersensible, namely the idea of the subjective purposiveness of nature for our power of judgment. As we have already seen, however, this purposiveness in the absence of any identifiable purpose is a quality that can only be manifested in the mere appearance of an object, quite apart from its objective determination. For once an appearance is cognized and transformed into an object (*Gegenstand*) in the strict sense, the purposiveness in its form is immediately connected to a specific purpose, dissolving the basis for aesthetic judgment. The fact that imagination, rather than the understanding, takes the lead in judgments of taste thus means that they are lawful by their conformity to the idea of lawfulness as such, rather than to a specific law, and that therefore their lawfulness makes them universally valid without this validity thereby becoming communicable through the concept. To return to

³⁹⁸ CJ 337

the question about whether the feeling precedes the judgment or the reverse, it is now apparent that the question itself is based on a misapprehension of the issue. The question itself suggests an effort to transport the structure of determinative judgment directly into the sphere of reflective judgment, as if they were distinguished merely by their content, rather than by the form of their respective synthetic activities. For the feeling of pleasure and the judgment are not separated as cause and effect, but rather are two simultaneous aspects of the same cognitive operation considered from alternate perspectives. Regarded from the side of sensation, the aesthetic experience is a disinterested pleasure, while viewed in terms of its conceptual basis it is understood as an act of synthetic judgment.

This simultaneity of feeling and judgment helps to explain why neither alternative produces a satisfactory answer to the question. For if we assume that the feeling of pleasure occurs first, and provides the basis on which the judgment is formed, then any claim to the assent of others is sacrificed, and the difference between the disinterested pleasure of taste and the mere agreeableness of a sensation undermined. And yet, on the assumption that the feeling of pleasure is merely an effect of the judgment, we deprive the activity of judging itself of any foundation other than the concept, and thus reduce the pleasure to the teleologically determined aim of the judgment, conflating it with the morally good. In order to maintain its independence as a form of experience with a unique principle borrowed neither from cognitive nor from practical concepts, aesthetic judgment must combine elements of each according to its own subjective rule. It must, without sacrificing its unrestricted purposiveness (i.e., its freedom), nonetheless acquire the kind of communicability that entitles it to the expectation of universal agreement. “Hence this subjective universal communicability can be nothing but that of the mental

state in which we are when imagination and understanding are in free play.”³⁹⁹ Thus even when Kant declares that the pleasure as such follows from the act of subjective judgment, it is nevertheless clear that both depend even more deeply upon the possibility of a subjective harmony of the cognitive powers (imagination and understanding) outside of the rules governing objective cognition. Judgment indeed precedes the disinterested liking of the beautiful, but it does not, and cannot, supply its determining basis. That can be supplied only by “the mentioned universality of the *subjective conditions* for judging objects.”⁴⁰⁰

In other words, neither the feeling of pleasure nor the consciousness of the act of judgment, as empirical acts, can furnish the a priori source of aesthetic experience. Instead it rests on the possibility of the free play of the faculties, or their capacity to act purposively prior to being organized under the dictates of any determinate purpose. The mere existence of this free, harmonious relation of the faculties, in which their interaction is governed only by the rule of their possible unity, is an extremely significant discovery for Kant. For on the one hand, its possibility can be known insofar as the coordination of the faculties under a rule depends on the more basic possibility of their harmonious interaction. This is why we are justified in assuming that the ground of our own subjective aesthetic judgments also obtains in every other judging subject insofar as it is capable of rule-bound, objective cognition. But on the other hand, this also suggests that insofar as the complete conditions for the possibility of aesthetic experience are also necessary (though not sufficient) conditions for the cognition of nature, that the development of the former capacity may play some role in the development of the

³⁹⁹ CJ 217

⁴⁰⁰ CJ 217 (emphasis added)

latter—or to put it differently, that the talent for making pure aesthetic judgments, unhindered by any peculiarities of standpoint or prejudices of interest, may in some way promote or further our cognitive interest in nature, even though these judgments can in no way contribute directly to cognition of nature as such. In other words, the necessary existence of such a mental state, presupposed by all our cognitive activities and yet most directly awakened through aesthetic reflection, indicates the manner in which this a priori form of liking might underlie both our theoretical and practical principles, and thereby provide a basis for uniting them as demanded by the need for an explanation of the overall coherence of experience.

As Kant had noted in the introduction to the third *Critique*, the fact that our noumenal moral vocation demands a fulfillment that can only be found in the phenomenal world of nature means that “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.”⁴⁰¹ Aesthetic judgment does not produce such a state—rather it depends on it as the most fundamental condition of its possibility—but it does play a critical role in developing its place in the systematic unfolding of Kantian philosophy, in two ways. First, it exposes this free harmony of the cognitive powers to the critical reflection capable of explaining its constitutive role at the origins of ordinary experience of the world. That is to say, the fact of our capacity to take such a disinterested pleasure in mere appearances signals the activity of our cognitive powers in a relation that defies their ordinary positions of domination and subordination, though still obeys the form of lawfulness. And second, it furnishes a form of experience, the

⁴⁰¹ CJ 176

pursuit of which actively transforms and unifies our overall experience by maintaining the space in which the supersensible unity of its principles may be enacted. Aesthetic judgment is therefore not only a signal of this possibility, but in its performance, and in the preservation of its necessary conditions, it is a way of maintaining and actualizing it. Judgment has nothing to do with merely abstract intellectual exercises, and reflection has nothing to do with detached observation. As objective cognition actively forms the realm of nature and the moral will commands to us a purpose, so reflective judgment wrests these isolated representations from their opposition and recasts them in a common image. This is what Kant calls the beautiful.

We began by noting the peculiar and tortuous fate of reason and, taking it as our point of departure, set out to chart the course of its ineluctable conflict with itself. However, the peculiar fate of the critical philosophy whose task is to examine this fact of reason, is that it discovers at the foundation of experience a form of thought that it can only identify, but is nonetheless deeply inadequate for describing. This is not a failure peculiar to the transcendental method, but proper to the discourse of philosophy itself, insofar as it discovers that the unity and coherence of experience are grounded in an incommunicable yet universal form of contemplation, that is, reflection on the beautiful. Thus if Kant was late to discover the supersensible principle underlying reflective judgment, then this might have as much to do with the peculiar tensions inhabiting the form of experience it engenders as it does with the seemingly inverted direction in which the project of criticism was unfolded. For although the conviction that steels our aesthetic impressions provides us with no useful means of communicating them with others, these impressions themselves are nonetheless so received by us as to spontaneously give rise to

the sense that we are not alone in these judgments, quite apart from any evidence to support such an expectation. The conjunction of these features in the object of our lingering contemplation gives rise to a feeling of restlessness, and a resolute determination to wrestle with this peculiar fate, and to concretely achieve the intersubjective agreement that the free harmony of the faculties in aesthetic reflection promises. In fact, the incommunicability of this experience does not stifle, but rather incites in us a desire to communicate it to others, insofar as “the ability to communicate one’s mental state, even if this is only the state of one’s cognitive powers, carries a pleasure with it.” This explains why it was so important to clarify that the pleasure is not a mere product of aesthetic judgment, not a momentary sensation, but a temporally extended attunement that carries the subject from the liking that first draws the attention of the reflective faculties, forward in the direction of the expectation of the possibility of sharing this subjective attunement with others. The pleasure we take in the beautiful is both beginning and end of the judgment, both the impetus behind our sustained attention to the appearance and the promised result of our desire to see it confirmed. The incommunicability of the beautiful thus becomes a demand for the discovery of some other means for its presentation.

If objects of determinate cognition find their communicability through the concept, then, aesthetic objects should find whatever manner of presentation is available to them through that reference to the free harmony of the faculties that secures their judgment in reflection. Even though the “aesthetic idea”—as Kant comes to designate that quality of the appearance that is the basis for an aesthetic judgment—is by definition and by comparison to the concepts underlying objective knowledge an “unexpoundable

presentation of the imagination,” it must be capable of reproducing the mental state to which it gives rise. Aesthetic judgments thus have their communicability guaranteed by the fact that “they are produced according to certain principles of the cognitive powers to which they belong,” but this simultaneously determines the limits of the manner in which they can be exhibited. Because they follow an a priori principle of the imagination in giving rise to reflective judgments, a principle that by definition lacks the characteristics of discursive articulation, aesthetic ideas merely indicate the mental state corresponding to them indirectly. “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.”⁴⁰² The manner of *Darstellung* that governs aesthetic experience is thus one of indirection. As a form of reflection, it does not determine its object but merely secures the space in which such determination according to universal rules become possible; and as a unexpoundable idea, it does not render the object intelligible, marking it only as an appearance pointing beyond itself to the possibility of the merger of intelligibility with our supersensible moral vocation.

What all of this means is that the priority of the imagination over the understanding—or at least its release from subservience to the categories—in reflective judgments has enormous consequences for the way in which the principles of aesthetic thought give rise to concrete experience. Although the principles of objective cognition are, by definition, rules for producing objectively valid knowledge of nature according to universal laws, they are nonetheless also capable of generating representations that, while not giving rise to any dialectical illusion, nonetheless can be thought prior to any experience of objects. In fact, the strictly objective element of cognitive experience, though it depends on the synthesis with an intuition for its validity, is an exclusively

⁴⁰² CJ 341

intellectual matter: “An objective relation can only be thought.” But the reverse is true in the case of the subjective relation, the supersensible principle of the unity of the cognitive powers, that grounds reflective judgment. It cannot be thought, but only intuited, or felt. “Hence that unity in the relation between the cognitive powers in the subject can reveal itself *only through sensation*.”⁴⁰³ Accordingly, the awareness of this supersensible principle of the grounding harmony of the *Gemüt*, though it is itself the highest transcendental principle available to us, can only be known through experience. The beautiful is needed not just as an object for aesthetic judgment, but as an occasion for awakening the mental attunement that makes the coordination of all our transcendental ideas not just possible, but the highest aim of all our mental activity.

Thus, if the critical philosophy, taken as a whole, seems to reinforce the divisions within reason rather than showing the way past them, this is not a failure of the system, but a sign of its adequacy to the problem. It is a characteristic advantage of art, as Kant recognized, following an insight from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, that it can produce a beautiful presentation of what nature can present only as ugly or unpleasant.⁴⁰⁴ Philosophy, however, knows no such advantage, and must recreate the conflict proper to reason within itself; it must accept for itself a fate just as tormented as the fate of human reason.

⁴⁰³ CJ 219

⁴⁰⁴ Aristotle regards this capacity of artistic representation as both tied to human nature, and therefore as one of the original causes of the impulse to poetry: “It is...natural for all to delight in works of imitation. The truth of this...point is shown by experience: though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies. The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it.” (Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. R. McKeon (New York: Modern, 2001), 1448b9-15) Observing the same phenomenon but giving a very different explanation of it, Kant writes: “Fine art shows its superiority precisely in this, that it describes things beautifully that in nature we would dislike or find ugly. The Furies, diseases, devastations of war, and so on are all harmful; and yet they can be described, or even presented in a painting, very beautifully.” (CJ 312) For Kant it is not that curiosity overpowers disgust, but that the capacity to freely remove ourselves from our own interest elevates the experience above the displeasure that it would otherwise produce.

But for just the same reason, the artwork will come to play a pivotal role in the development of the critical philosophy, symbolically figuring its peculiar fate precisely by reflecting the aspirations of the speculative reason, while also emphasizing the immeasurable distance by which it falls short. The artist, as creator of the beautiful appearance, serves as the limit point of philosophy, the regulative idea toward which the system of reason aspires in its effort to align freedom with the phenomenal realm of appearances. It is not the thing-in-itself that plays this role as limit point—the noumenal *as such* is a verifiable dimension of experience within the system of reason—but the artistic accomplishment of an image capable of merging the noumenal and the phenomenal, that is to say, the work of the genius.

It is little coincidence, then, that as the focus of the transcendental philosophy shifts toward the unifying experience of the beautiful, the system itself should begin to resemble this experience, moving slowly towards emphasizing the synthetic ground of experience over its fragmented presentation through the lens of the division between theoretical and practical cognition. Kant's claims of the systematic perfection of the critical philosophy must therefore be read in light of the insistence on the peculiar fate of reason. What is wanting is the standpoint from which to arbitrate questions regarding the competing claims that arise from the various images of the world⁴⁰⁵ that are generated by the principles of transcendental philosophy. Philosophical thought fails to ascend to the level of systematicity⁴⁰⁶ insofar as it fails to achieve a "moral image of the world" that is capable, first, of standing on its own, but second and more importantly, of being brought

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Henrich, Dieter. "The Moral Image of the World." In *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 3-5.

⁴⁰⁶ In this sense, perhaps Kant is wrong to regard his own thought as having systematic aspirations, insofar as his commitment to preserving some of the fundamental distinctions of transcendental philosophy seems to be at least as great a priority in his thought.

into a coherent relationship with the conception of nature organized by the concepts of the understanding.

The great insight of the Kantian philosophy, and its most significant accomplishment as a system, is to account for the possibility that human reason might, without contradiction, be said to recognize the illusory quality of certain of its concepts, and yet still to find these concepts not only indispensable, but in fact entirely valid and applicable to the most elemental modes of its own operation. Not all illusory images evaporate straightaway, simply by virtue of their being exposed as such. This insight is crucial to the notion of a systematicity that is perfectly capable of containing inconsistent and even competing principles; accepting it not only has the merit of allowing us to maintain the interpretive charity of assuming that Kant meant what he said, but is furthermore supported both by the analysis of reflective judgment, as well as by Kant's external remarks concerning the relation between the third *Critique* and the system that precedes it. It is a commonplace of interpretation that Kant himself did not fully understand, or refused to honestly face up to, the most important implications of his own philosophical discoveries.⁴⁰⁷ This fact is so much taken for granted that Fichte, for example, will find no difficulty in proclaiming his own philosophical system to be identical to Kant's in its founding principles,⁴⁰⁸ even while it reaches conclusions that are expressly prohibited by Kant's understanding of the meaning of critique. The effective history of Kant's work, therefore, demands of everyone who would approach it an

⁴⁰⁷ "On a modest acquaintance with the philosophical literature since the appearance of the Kantian Critiques I soon came to the conclusion that the enterprise of this great man, the radical revision of our current conceptions of philosophy, and hence of all science, has been a complete failure; since not a single one of his numerous followers perceives what is really being said." Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁴⁰⁸ "I have long asserted, and repeat once more, that my system is nothing other than the Kantian; this means that it contains the same view of things, but it is in method quite independent of the Kantian presentation." Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, p. 4.

implicit decision about how to distinguish form from content, spirit from letter, genuine philosophical insight from errors of prejudice or dogmatism. Rather than seeking to exempt itself from such considerations, the present project has instead attempted to clarify the essential and indispensable elements of the system *taken as a whole*, and to develop its interpretive strategies out of an interest in preserving all of Kant's commitments, even where the appearance of conflict between such principles strains our capacity to think them together.

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