

vi: 27 June 2023

Research Article

Symbolic art of the highest Artist: natural purposes in Kant's third Critique

Peer-approved: 27 June 2023

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Qeios, Vol. 5 (2023)
ISSN: 2632-3834

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An interpretation of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is presented as a coherent whole rather than a collection of disconnected parts. I argue that Kant interprets natural beauty and the purposiveness of living things as symbols of the prowess and goodness of a supreme artist. These symbols support us in our pursuit of moral ends but are not the justification of that pursuit. All cognition of the inexplicable creative intelligence of the supreme artist is symbolic. We are subjectively certain that our moral vocation is the final purpose of nature. My reading proceeds in reverse order from the theological considerations of the *Methodology of the teleological judgment* which derives a rational theology that is supported by (but not dependent on) physicotheology, via the *Critique of teleological judgement* which analyzes the inexplicable artistry of living things as illustrations of the technique of the highest artist, via the *Critique of aesthetic judgment* which sets up analogies between human and divine art, to the two introductions. The antinomy of teleological judgment is a cognitive illusion of the peculiar constitution (*intellectus ectypus*) of our cognitive faculties that explains wholes from parts: we must both conceive of living things as possible in accordance with efficient causes but we cannot conceive of them as possible except through final causes. In particular, it is the internal purposiveness of living things that is beyond our comprehension. If we had an *intellectus archetypus*, that explains parts from wholes, then we would not be subject to this cognitive illusion. The power of judgment adjudicates between reason, which is exalted by the sublime, and the understanding, which is humbled by the purposiveness of living things.

Immanuel Kant's *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* was published anonymously in 1755. In a brief aside, its author remarks the very different success of mechanical explanation in physics and biology.

The heavenly bodies are round masses, and therefore have the simplest formation which a body whose origin is sought can possibly have. Their movements are likewise uncomplicated; they are nothing but a free continuation

of an impulse once impressed, which, by being combined with the attraction of the body at its centre, becomes circular. ... It seems to me that we can here say with intelligent certainty and without audacity: 'Give me matter, and I will construct a world out of it!' ... But can we boast of the same progress even regarding the lowest plant or an insect? Are we in a position to say, 'Give me matter, and I will show you how a caterpillar can be produced'? Are we not

arrested here at the first step, from ignorance of the real inner conditions of the object and the complication of the manifold constituents existing in it? It should not therefore cause astonishment if I presume to say that the formation of all the heavenly bodies, the cause of their movements, and, in short, the origin of the whole present constitution of the universe, will become intelligible before the production of a single herb or a caterpillar by mechanical causes will be distinctly and completely understood.

This passage identifies two key differences between physics and biology. The complexity of a caterpillar far surpasses the physical simplicity of the solar system and there are manifold living manifolds. Each *species* of insect, each *species* of plant, seems to obey *specific* laws as well as universal laws. A third difference lurks amid the foliage. The motions of the planets obey invariant physical laws but caterpillars seem to act contingently for non-physical reasons. Their actions seem purposeful and unpredictable in ways that the motions of the planets do not. Yet the planets—Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn—had once been deified because their wandering ways amid the perfect motion of the fixed stars suggested they had minds of their own. Their idiosyncratic behavior had been rendered regular and necessary by the Copernican revolution and the fixed orbits of Newtonian physics. The contingent paths of the planets had been revealed as no more than an anthropic illusion. Could some latter-day Newton make similar sense of the production of a single herb, even of a blade of grass? The prospects seemed dim.

Kant took up the purposiveness of living things in his *Critique of the power of judgment (CPJ)*. This is a complex work written in Kant's characteristically convoluted prose. It starts with beauty and art, turns to biology, then ends with theology. Many readers turn to the parts they find interesting—either art or biology, rarely theology—and skip the rest. Thus *CPJ* is commonly interpreted as an aggregate of disconnected parts even though *CPJ* itself finds purposiveness in the mutual dependence of parts of a harmonious whole. My approach has been to follow a few threads of the fabric in an attempt to understand how the parts work together as an organic whole. For this purpose, I will quote extended passages, with ellipsis to combat Kant's prolific parenthesis, to clarify how I interpret the flow of his argument. I will

quote from the English translation of Guyer and Matthews (Kant 2000). They translate *Zweck* as 'end' and *letzter Zweck* as 'ultimate end' but I modify their translations by using 'purpose' for *Zweck* to maintain the etymological link with purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) and 'last purpose' for *letzter Zweck*. The use of emphasis in quotations will be mine. I have also extensively consulted the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in German to understand choices made in translation (and to appreciate Kant's occasional humor).

Orientation within *CPJ*'s tangled skein will be aided by some brief comments on Kant's vocabulary of *Zweck* [purpose]. *Zweckmäßigkeit* [purposiveness] is a principle of the power of judgment. Subjective purposiveness is experienced in beautiful forms that exhibit *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck* [purposiveness without purpose]. Objective purposiveness is observed in organized beings conceptualized as *Naturzwecke* [natural purposes]. *Endzwecke* [final purposes] are principles of reason, not of the power of judgment. A *letzter Zweck* [last purpose] exists in systems of external purposes. When something is used as a means to an end which is used as a means to another end, then the end for which other ends are means but is not a means to another end, is the last purpose. *Unzweckmäßigkeit*, *Zweckwidrigkeit*, *unzweckmäßig*, *zweckwidrig* indicate absence of purpose, especially in discussions of the sublime. *Endursache* [final causes] are natural purposes considered as causes and effects of themselves. *Teleologie* [teleology] is the study of *Zwecke*.

What does Kant mean by *Zweck* and *Zweckmäßigkeit*? In §10, Kant defines *Zweck* as the object of a concept insofar as the concept is regarded as the cause of the object. What does this mean? Consider 'heart' as the object and 'pumping blood' as the concept. The need for pumping blood is a reason (or cause) for there being a heart. The heart exists for the sake of pumping blood. That is its purpose. §10 further defines a will as acting in accordance with a representation of a purpose, and then follows this definition with:

An object ... is called purposive merely because its possibility can only be explained and conceived by us *insofar as we assume as its ground* a causality in accordance with purposes, i.e., *a will that has arranged it* so in accordance with the representation of a certain rule. Purposiveness can thus exist without a purpose, *insofar as we do not place the causes of this form in a will*, but can still make the explanation of its possibility

conceivable to ourselves only by deriving it from a will.

We understand the *actuality* of the object as produced by mechanism but conceive of its *possibility* as caused by a will. A work of human art is an *actual* product of a human mechanism made *possible* by a human will. When we recognize artistry in the beautiful forms and intricate contrivances of nature, we cannot understand the physical mechanism but conceive of a willing cause. In section VIII of the first introduction, and again in §76, Kant defines *Zweckmäßigkeit* as *Gesetzlichkeit des Zufälligen* [lawfulness of the contingent]. Mechanisms act necessarily rather than contingently. Lawfulness that cannot be understood as necessitated by natural mechanisms can only be comprehended as arising from contingent choices of an intentional cause.

In overview, I interpret *CPJ* as an extended argument that theology cannot be grounded in the empirical study of nature but that the beauty and purposiveness of nature suggest and confirm the existence of an intelligent world-cause. The *Critique of aesthetic judgment* sets up analogies between human and divine art, and between an artistic genius and a highest artist; the *Critique of teleological judgment* analyzes the inexplicable artistry of living things as illustrations of the technique of this highest artist; then the *Methodology of teleological judgment* derives a rational theology supported by, but not dependent on, physicotheology.

Much of the obscurity of *CPJ* devolves on the question, what is the *significance* of natural beauty and the purposiveness of natural purposes? My central contention is that Kant interprets them as symbols of the prowess and goodness of a supreme artist that confirm and support us in our pursuit of moral ends. All our cognition of this inexplicable creative intelligence comes from a symbolic world. There is a venerable tradition of symbolic interpretations of divine pronouncements, from Delphic oracles to Christian scripture, but this was not what I had expected to find in *CPJ*. The Kant of this reading may appear more medieval than modern, but I do not wish to imply that he has nothing interesting to say about contemporary concerns in art and biology.

How does one explicate such a complex work? *CPJ* argues that the purposiveness of organized beings is evident in the interdependency of their parts, in a unity of purpose in which each part supports and sustains the whole. A corollary view is that there is no natural order in which to present the parts in

propounding the whole. My analysis has the overall form of a reverse reading that retraces Kant's footsteps from *CPJ*'s end to its beginnings and thus follows the trail of the fox back to his den. Because I wish to prevent the spoor being lost by excessive trampling, I defer most consideration of the secondary literature until the final discussion. Great works can be interpreted in many ways. I hope that my interpretation is interesting and not without textual support.

Physicotheology and the argument from design

The final sections of *CPJ* comprise the *Methodology of the teleological judgment* (§79–§91; called an Appendix in the second edition). The *Methodology* contains Kant's rejection of a physicotheology based in the understanding, in favor of an ethicotheology based in reason, and contains Kant's moral proof of the existence of God. The principal subject of the *Methodology* is the relationship between teleology and theology: what does the purposiveness of nature reveal, or fail to reveal, about God and the purpose of our existence? §79 addresses whether teleology is part of natural science or theology. Kant concludes that teleology is not a theoretical science. It is neither natural science nor theology, but furnishes a method by which nature *must be judged* according to the principle of final causes.

The major import of §80 is that a purely mechanical explanation of natural purposiveness is unattainable. The mechanical principle must be subordinated to the teleological principle. Kant does not deny the possibility of a mechanical explanation of natural purposes but believes its attainment to be beyond our human capacities. The *analogy of forms* revealed by comparative anatomy in which animals of different genera conform to a common *schema* suggests the possibility that all had been generated from one primal-mother. Perhaps there had been a progression from raw matter to mosses to polyps to humans by a process akin to crystallization—or, one might add, analogous to the condensation of the solar system from a nebulous chaos—but even so, we would still have to ascribe to the universal mother an organization already purposively aimed at all her descendants. Kant was not prepared to concede an exemption from the teleological principle even to those heritable alterations of form that are taken up into the generative power (we would call them mutations) because to grant such an exemption would

open the possibility that other characters also have accidental origins and this would render unreliable the principle of teleology that nothing that is preserved by reproduction is non-purposive.

Hume had argued that the facile ascription of the purposiveness of nature to a divine mind explained nothing because one could then ask from whence came the purposiveness and attributes of this mind. Kant concludes that “this objection amounts to nothing” because the existence of purposiveness can only be understood as arising from a unity of ground in a simple substance, present at the origin, not from a multiplicity of grounds in an aggregate of substances. This simple substance, deduced from a transcendental argument, must be intelligent. Those doctrines that posited a simple substance without ascribing to it understanding (pantheism, Spinozism) invoked a unity of ground but could not explain the unity of purpose that we must ascribe to an intelligent substance on account of the contingency that we find in everything that we can think of only as purposive.

Section §81 considers competing theories of the production of natural purposes in a material world. Kant rejects occasionalism in which God separately creates each being from materials newly brought together in favor of preestablishment in which living things produce others of their kind after the initial act of creation. He also rejects *evolution* (then a name for the theory of *preformation*) because evolution differed from occasionalism only in that the acts of individual creation occurred all at once, encapsulated within the first individual, rather than occurring on many different occasions. The proponents of evolution saw in malformed births (*Mißgeburten*) a marvelous purposiveness (*berunderungswürdige Zweckmäßigkeit*) prepared for the astonishment of anatomists by its purposeless purposiveness (*zwecklosen Zweckmäßigkeit*). I suspect a Kantian jest. The only tenable theory appeared to be the production of natural purposes by *epigenesis* in which products are generated by mechanical processes giving form to unformed materials. Kant praises Blumenbach as the most sophisticated exponent of epigenesis, but his description of the latter’s theory as positing “an inscrutable principle” of an original organization that directs and guides a formative drive cannot be considered a whole-hearted endorsement.

Sections §82–§84 argue that human beings are both the last purpose [*letzte Zweck*] and final purpose [*Endzweck*] of creation. §82 considers nature as a system of purposes in which some natural purposes use other natural purposes for their own purposes; a

blade of grass may be eaten by a cow that is eaten by a lion. The last purpose would be at the end of such a chain. Kant concludes that human beings are the last purpose of creation because they are the only beings who can form a concept of purpose and by the means of their reason make a system of purposes out of the aggregate of purposively formed things.

Section §83 considers possible last purposes of human existence, rejecting happiness in favor of culture. But culture can serve *arbitrary* and disparate purposes: toward what end does culture proceed as a last purpose in the system of cultural purposes? Kant describes a progression from a despotic state to a civil society to a cosmopolitan system of states to a “sovereignty where reason alone shall have power”. Even though war is an unintentional experiment [*unabsichtlicher Versuch*] of humans (aroused by unbridled passions) it may instantiate a deeply hidden, perhaps intentional [*tief verborgener, vielleicht absichtlicher*] design of supreme wisdom to bring about this last purpose. The addition of *vielleicht* (perhaps) to *absichtlicher* in the second edition of 1793 is consistent with Duncan’s (2012) suggestion that Kant’s attitude to theodicy shifted substantially after 1790.

Section §84 considers that human beings considered as noumena are the final purpose [*Endzweck*] of creation.

Only in the human being, although in him *only as a subject of morality* is unconditional legislation with regard to purposes to be found, which therefore makes him alone capable of being a final purpose, to which *the whole of nature* is teleologically subordinated.

Section §85 distinguishes physicotheology—“the attempt of reason to infer from the purposes of nature ... to the supreme cause of nature and its properties”— from ethicotheology—“the attempt to infer from the moral purposes of rational beings in nature ... to that cause and its properties”. Physicotheology must fail because the empirical cannot determine things that exist outside of nature.

[Physicotheology can] certainly justify the concept of an intelligent world-cause, as a *subjectively appropriate concept for the constitution of our cognitive faculty* of the possibility of the things that we make intelligible to ourselves in accordance with purposes;

but it cannot determine this concept any further in either a theoretical or a practical respect.

The investigation of nature *justifies* the concept of an intelligent world-cause but cannot *determine* its attributes. The empirical study of nature cognizes purposiveness without cognizing a final purpose.

How the things in the world are useful to one another; how the manifold in a thing is good for this thing itself; how one even has reason for assuming that *nothing in the world is in vain*, but that *everything in nature is good for something* ... the teleological view of the world answers all of this magnificently and extremely admirably. But since the data and hence the principles for determining that concept of an intelligent world-cause (*as the highest artist*) are merely empirical, they do not allow us to infer any properties beyond what experience reveals to us in its effects.

The above passage is notable for its theodicy: everything in nature is good for something. This theodicy reappears in the ensuing discussion of how the ancients believed in many gods because they could not allow themselves to assume wise and beneficent purposes lying hidden beneath the mixture of good and evil that was apparent in the world. For this reason, the ancients introduced the idealism of final causes in which the purposive unity of the parts *inhered* in individual things rather than *depended* on one substance, and from hence by divergent paths came pantheism and Spinozism.

But what good does the purposiveness of nature serve if it reveals nothing of final purposes?

What help is it, one may rightly complain, to ground all these arrangements on a great and for us an immeasurable intelligence, and have it arrange this world according to its intentions, *if nature does not nor ever can tell us anything about the final aim*, without which we can find no common reference point for all these natural purposes ... I would, to be sure, have an *artistic intelligence* for various purposes, but *no wisdom for a final purpose*, which, must really contain the determining ground of the former.

The defects in physicotheology are corrected by the *a priori* idea of a higher being who possesses such wisdom.

Kant's moral theology (ethico-theology) is expounded in section §86. The existence of moral beings necessitates a final purpose of the world in which such beings exist:

If it thinks over the existence of the things in the world and existence of the world itself, even the most common understanding cannot reject the judgment that all the many creatures, no matter how great the artistry of their arrangement ... would exist for nothing if there were not among them human beings ... it is the value that he alone can give to himself, and which consists in what he does, in how and in accordance with which principles he acts, not as a link in nature but in the freedom of his faculty of desire, i.e., a good will is that alone by means of which his existence can have an absolute value and relation to which the existence of the world can have a final purpose.

Then, by a transcendental deduction from the constitution of human reason, Kant derives the entire world as the purposive creation of an intelligent world-cause.

Now since we recognize the human being as the purpose of creation only as a moral being, we have in the first place a ground ... for regarding *the world as a whole ... as a system of final causes*, but above all a ground for a principle for conceiving, for the relation of natural purposes to an intelligent world-cause *that is necessary given the constitution of our reason*.

This original being must possess the standard divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, justice, eternity, and omnipresence. By pure practical reason, Kant has demonstrated, at least to his own satisfaction, that human beings of good will (acting in conformity with moral laws) are the final purpose of a legislative sovereign. I do not wish to debate the strengths and weaknesses of this argument here but will draw your attention to the following:

But the principle of the relation of the world to a supreme cause, as a deity, on account of the moral vocation of certain beings in it, does not do this by merely supplementing the physical-theological basis for proof, and necessarily making this its ground; rather it is adequate for that by itself, and *urges attention* to the purposes of nature and research into the *inconceivably great art* that lies *hidden behind its forms* in order to provide *incidental confirmation from natural purposes* for the ideas created by pure practical reason.

Empirical knowledge of the natural world cannot ground our belief in a supreme cause of nature—the argument from the moral vocation of human beings to a deity is adequate for that in itself—but the study of the superhuman art revealed in living things confirms *incidentally* the dictates of pure practical reason.

For *given the subjective constitution of our reason* and even how we must always think of the reason of other beings, *it can count as certain for us a priori* that this final purpose can be nothing other than the human being under moral laws, while *by contrast the purposes of nature in the physical order cannot be cognized a priori at all*, nor can it be understood in any way that a nature could not exist with such an purpose.

We are *subjectively certain* that our moral vocation is the final purpose of nature. This has been given to us *a priori*. By contrast, natural purposiveness in the physical world is inexplicable *a priori*. Physicotheology, the argument from design, cannot provide proof but only an *a posteriori* confirmation of our moral certainty.

The *Remark* appended to §86 considers occasions when the mind is disposed to moral sensation. At these moments, a person *feels a need* to be thankful to someone, or to have obeyed a command of an overlord, or to have heard the voice of a judge. Such a mind *voluntarily* conceives of a morally legislative being outside of the world. In our striving toward the universal highest purpose, we have a pure moral ground for assuming such a cause “even if for nothing more than avoiding the danger of seeing that effort as entirely futile in its effects and thereby flagging in it”. This constitutes a prologue to §87 where Kant provides his moral proof of the existence of God. The

concept of the *practical necessity* of our final purpose does not harmonize with the theoretical concept of the *physical possibility* of its performance by causes solely in nature.

We must assume a moral cause of the world (an author of the world) in order to set before ourselves a final purpose, in accordance with the moral law; and insofar as the latter is necessary, to that extent ... is it also necessary to assume the former, namely, that there is a God.

In a footnote, Kant clarifies that this is not intended as an objectively valid proof but as one that is subjectively necessary and sufficient for moral beings.

Kant then considers a righteous man who conforms to the moral law but denies God (Spinoza is his example). The beliefs of such a well-intentioned person are self-contradictory. He must either succumb to despair that the end is impossible or, from a practical point of view, must assume the existence of a moral author of the world (a belief that has the advantage that it is not self-contradictory).

Section §88 argues that the properties of this highest being are thinkable only by analogy and to think of these properties as presented objectively in the world would conceal an anthropomorphism.

Now in order to avoid a misunderstanding that can easily arise, it is most necessary to mention here, first, that we can think these properties of the highest being *only by means of analogy*. For how would we investigate its nature, nothing similar to which can be shown to us by experience? Second, that by means of this analogy *we only think this being*, and thereby *do not thereby cognize it* and attribute anything to it theoretically. (§88)

The assumption of a moral author of the world is *subjectively necessary* for the reflecting power of judgment but *not objectively valid* for the determining power of judgment. The *Remark* to §88 disowns any claim that the moral proof is newly invented by Kant; rather it lay latent in our faculty of reason from which it has progressively developed by the cultural cultivation of human reason.

Section §89 addresses the utility of the moral argument in restricting the pretensions of reason. The limitation of the use of reason to the practical (moral)

domain prevents reason from aspiring to a *theosophy* or from sinking to an anthropomorphic *demonology*. It protects against *theurgy*, *idolatry*, and *materialism*. If theoretical cognition of God had come before the moral proof, then morals would need to conform to a theology corrupted by the defects of our understanding. Religion would thereby be made immoral and perverted. The moral proof also justifies our confidence in immortality of the soul based on “the assumption of our continuance as a necessary condition for the final purpose that is absolutely imposed upon us by reason.”

Teleological proofs of the existence of God (arguments from design) are addressed in §90. A contrast is made between persuasion [*Überredung*] and convincement [*Überzeugung*]. Kant finds the argument from design to be highly persuasive, even a healthy illusion. Indeed, there is nothing to be said against the argument as long as one is concerned with popular usefulness but the argument does not convince and it is the duty of the philosopher to unmask even such a healthy illusion. Proofs that aim at convincement could determine the object in itself [*an sich*] or for us [*für uns*]. A proof of the former kind is unattainable because of the separation between the supersensible object and any sensible intuition demonstrated in the first *Critique*. However, one can *think* of two dissimilar things by means of an *analogy* even with respect to their points of dissimilarity.

We can very well conceive of the causality of the original being with regard to the things in the world, in analogy with an intelligence as the ground of the forms of certain products that we call art works ... but from the fact that among beings in the world the cause of ***an effect that is judged as artistic has to be attributed to intelligence*** we can by no means infer an analogy that the very same causality that we perceive in humans must also pertain to the being who is entirely distinct from nature.

Although natural purposes can be considered analogous to human art, we cannot thereby infer that the supreme artist’s intelligence resembles our intelligence. A physical proof of the existence of the original being as a divinity or of the soul as an immortal spirit “is absolutely impossible from a theoretical point of view.”

A footnote compares the works of humans and beavers.

From the fact that the human being uses reason in order to build, I cannot infer that the beaver must have the same sort of thing and call this inference by means of the analogy ... Likewise, in ***the comparison of the purposive products of the causality of the supreme world-cause in the world with the artworks of human beings***, I *conceive* of the former in an analogy to an understanding, but I cannot *infer* to this property in the world-cause by means of the analogy.

A second footnote says that, although this analogy misses nothing in the relation of the original being to the world as far as practical or theoretical consequences are concerned, to wish to investigate what the being is in itself would be without purpose, a futile impertinence.

The final section of *CPJ* (§91) discusses practical faith. Faith assumes “as true that which it is necessary to presuppose as a condition for the possibility of the highest moral final purpose.” God, freedom, and immortality of the soul are matters of faith rather than facts. Of these:

Freedom is the only concept of the supersensible that proves its objective reality (by means of the causality that is thought in it) in nature, through its effect which is possible in the latter, and thereby makes possible the connection of the other two ideas to nature, as well as the connection of all three to each other in a religion, and that we thus have in ourselves a principle that is capable of determining the idea of the supersensible outside us into one cognition, although one that is possible only in a practical respect, of which merely speculative philosophy (which can also provide a merely negative concept of freedom) had to despair: hence the concept of freedom (as the foundational concept of all unconditionally practical laws) can extend reason beyond those boundaries within which every (theoretical) concept of nature had to remain restricted without hope.

Freedom is objectively present in the world in choices of action that are undetermined by mechanical necessity. The idea of freedom acting in nature allows

the union of the ideas of God, immortality and freedom in one cognition that extends practical reason into nature and saves us from despair.

The long *General remark on teleology* that concludes *CPJ* reaffirms that the physicotheological proof is deserving of honor but does not convince. Natural purposiveness is not objectively necessary:

We can conceive of rational beings who see themselves surrounded by a nature that gives no clear trace of organization but reveals only effects of pure mechanism of raw matter, and who on that account ... seem to have *no ground to infer an intelligent author*, in which case there would also be *no suggestion of a physical teleology*; nevertheless, reason, which in this case gets no guidance from concepts of nature, would still find in the concept of freedom and the moral ideas that are grounded upon that a practically sufficient ground for postulating the concept of an original being in accordance with these ... But now the fact that the rational beings in the actual world *find ample material for physical teleology* there (although this was not necessary) serves as the *desired confirmation* of the moral argument, *insofar as nature is capable of displaying something analogous* to the (moral) ideas of reason. For the concept of a supreme cause that has understanding ... thereby acquires *reality sufficient for the reflecting power of judgment*.

A world without purpose is conceivable and that world would also justify a moral theology, but the contingent existence of purposiveness in our actual world suggests and confirms the moral argument and is *sufficiently real* to satisfy the reflecting power of judgment. As part of the final sentence of *CPJ*, Kant writes:

A physical (properly physico-teleological) theology can at least serve as a propaedeutic to theology proper, since by means of the consideration of natural ends, for which it provides us with rich material, it suggests to us the idea of a final purpose.

Physicotheology proceeds from *Zweckmäßigkeit* to *Endzweck*, from the purposiveness of natural purposes

to a creative mind with a purpose. This argument fails because empirical purposiveness determines nothing about supersensible purposes. Nevertheless, the purposiveness of living things *suggests* the idea of a final purpose and *confirms* the moral conclusions of reason by an analogy between human art and superhuman art. Kant's vision in the *Methodology* is of a providential world in which everything occurs for some purpose. What then is the purpose of natural purposes? Kant, I propose, saw them as symbols that reassure and support us in pursuit of our moral vocation.

Critique of the teleological power of judgment

The *Critique of the teleological power of judgment* opens with a general consideration of objective purposiveness in nature (§61). In our subjective appreciation of nature, the variety and unity of beautiful forms strengthens and entertains the mental powers "as if they had actually been designed for our power of judgment." However, in the objective investigation of nature

We have no basis at all for presuming a *priori* that purposes that are not our own, and which also cannot pertain to nature (which we cannot assume as an intelligent being), nevertheless can or should constitute a special kind of causality, or at least an entirely unique lawlikeness thereof. (§61)

We cannot assume that nature is an intelligent being with purposes therefore we have no *a priori* grounds for assuming purposiveness in nature. The objective purposiveness of nature is a regulative principle but not a constitutive principle of the teleological power of judgment. Kant poses the problem this way: when one is confronted with the integration of form and function in the physical body of a bird

One says that given the mere *nexus effectivus* in nature, without the help of a special kind of causality, namely that of purposes (*nexus finalis*), this is all in the highest degree contingent: i.e., that nature, considered as mere mechanism, could have formed itself in a thousand different ways without hitting precisely upon the unity in accordance with such a rule, and it is therefore outside the concept of nature, not within it, that one

could have even the least ground *a priori* for hoping to find such a principle. (§61)

Nature could have been put together in many different ways without producing anything with the least resemblance to a bird. The unity of avian form and function is *contingent* to the very highest degree. We can only make sense of this orderliness by positing a special kind of causality, of final causes, that is completely foreign to the efficient causes of nature. We are forced to employ an “*analogy with causality according to purposes, without presuming thereby to explain it.*”

The inexplicability of natural purposes

Kant offers a provisional definition of a natural purpose in §64:

I would say provisionally that a thing exists as a natural purpose *if it is cause and effect of itself* ... for in this there lies a causality the likes of which cannot be connected with the mere concept of nature without ascribing a purpose to it, but in that case also *can be conceived without contradiction but cannot be comprehended.*

Natural purposes can be thought without contradiction by reason as purposive but purposiveness in nature cannot be comprehended by the understanding. (In the published order of sections, §64 comes shortly after §59 in which symbols are said to present concepts of reason for which sensible intuitions are inadequate.)

Three senses in which a thing is both *cause and effect of itself* lie at the heart of why organized beings are inexplicable to our understanding. A tree (1) produces offspring like itself, and thus can be considered to generate itself *generically*, (2) exhibits an organized development from acorn to oak and thus can be considered to develop itself *individually*, and (3) its parts work together as a whole in their generation such that all the parts are reciprocally dependent on each other.

Section §65 elaborates on how natural purposes, considered as organized beings, can be related to themselves reciprocally as both cause and effect. Kant considers a descending series of efficient causes (*nexus effectivus*) as conceived by the understanding and an ascending series of final causes (*nexus finalis*) as conceived in accordance with a concept of reason (of purposes). The descending series can be

considered real causes and the ascending series ideal causes. A thing that is considered the effect of a cause in the descending series may be considered an effect of this cause in the ascending series. If a natural product is to contain within itself a relation to purposes then its parts must be conceived as possible only through their relation to the whole, an effect through final causes, and the whole must be conceived as formed by the parts, an effect through efficient causes.

In such a product of nature each part is conceived *as if it exists only through all the others, thus as if existing for the sake of the others and on account of the whole* ... it must be thought of as an organ that produces the other parts ... only then and on that account can such a product, as an organized and self-organizing being, be called a natural purpose. (§65)

Such an organized and self-organizing being has a *formative* power unlike a mere machine:

In a watch one part is the instrument for the motion of another, but one wheel is not the efficient cause for the production of the other ... one wheel in the watch does not produce the other, and even less does one watch produce another ... (§65)

Natural purposes organize and repair themselves. Their outer form may resemble human art in subjective judgments of taste but the analogy fails when confronted by their internal organization and formative powers. If this is art, then it is an art whose production is beyond human comprehension.

Beauty in nature, since it is ascribed to objects only in relation to *reflection on their outer intuition* ... can rightly be called *an analogue of art*. But inner natural perfection, as is possessed by those things that are possible only as natural purposes and hence as organized beings is *not thinkable and explicable* in accordance with any analogy to any physical, i.e., natural capacity that is known to us. (§65)

Organized beings thus provide objective reality for the concept of a purpose of nature, a concept that had hitherto been restricted to practical purposes. Natural science thus acquires a basis for judging its objects by

application of a teleological principle that is defined in §66 as

An organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well. *Nothing in it is in vain*, purposeless, or to be ascribed to a blind mechanism of nature.

This is not an *a priori* principle but one that is derived from experience, yet it can be considered a maxim of the *a priori* principle of the subjective purposiveness of living things.

The recognition of objective purposiveness in organized beings raises the further question, addressed in §67, whether nature in its entirety can be considered as organized as a *system of purposes* in which each organized being forms part of a greater whole for the sake of some final purpose of nature. Section §67 could be read as a satire in the manner of *Candide*— “the vermin that plague humans in their clothes, hair, or bedding are, in accordance with a wise dispensation of nature, an incentive for cleanliness” — but it seems to me that Kant targets the excesses of physicotheology not teleology itself: nature may indeed form a system in which nothing occurs in vain but that does not mean we can understand the purpose of each and every part of the system.

The following passage I read as sincere, rather than satiric:

We may consider it as a *favor* that nature has done for us that in addition to usefulness it has so richly distributed beauty and charms, and we can love it on that account, *just as we regard it with respect because of its immeasurability*, and *we can feel ourselves to be ennobled in this contemplation*—just as if nature had erected and decorated its magnificent stage precisely with this intention.

We are ennobled by contemplation of the immeasurability of nature—this reprises Kant’s analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of the aesthetic power of judgment*—and charmed by its beauty. Kant adds a footnote at the word ‘favor’ [*Gunst*]: in aesthetic judgment we look on beautiful nature *with favor* but in teleologic judgment “we can regard it as a *favor of nature* that by means of the exhibition of so many beautiful shapes it would promote culture”. Section §67 concludes:

Once we have discovered in nature a capacity for bringing forth products that can only be conceived by us in accordance with the concept of final causes... *the unity of the supersensible principle must be considered as valid* in the same way not merely for certain species of natural beings but *for the whole of nature as a system*.

The final section of the *Analytic of teleological judgment* (§68) defines the separate domains of natural science and theology (considered as a science). The concept of God may be necessary to explain the purposiveness of nature but then it would be circular to use this purposiveness to prove there is a God.

If one brings the concept of God into natural science and its context in order to make purposiveness in nature explicable, and subsequently use this purposiveness in turn to prove that there is a God, then there is nothing of substance in either of the sciences, and a deceptive fallacy casts each into uncertainty by letting them cross each other’s borders.

The domains and methods of theology and natural science should be kept separate:

Why, then, does teleology usually not constitute a proper part of theoretical natural science, but is instead drawn into theology as a propaedeutic or transition? This is done in order to keep the mechanism of nature restricted to what we can subject to our observation or experiments, so that we could produce it ourselves ... for *we understand completely only that which we ourselves can make* and bring about in accordance with concepts. *Organization*, however, as an internal purpose of nature, *infinitely surpasses all capacity for a similar presentation by art*.

If organized beings are works of art, then they have been produced by a technique unknown to our art. The antinomy of teleological judgment, to which Kant turns in the *Dialectic*, pits the mechanical principle of natural science against the teleological principle that lies outside of natural science.

The antinomy of teleological judgment

Kant considers the antinomy of teleological judgment to be an unavoidable cognitive illusion of the peculiar constitution of our cognitive faculties (§69). The antinomy is presented in §70 as a conflict between the first and second maxims of the power of judgment: the *thesis* “All generation of material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws” and the *antithesis* “Some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws (judging them requires an entirely different law of causality, namely that of final causes.)” The first is a maxim of the determining power of judgment applying the universal laws of material nature given by the understanding. But these universal laws are general and must be supplemented by particular laws provided by experience. The reflecting power of judgment is confronted with the extraordinary diversity and dissimilarity of these empirical laws and must spy out a principle to bring them under a unified and interconnected experiential cognition. This principle, of the objective purposiveness of nature, brings reason into play and is expressed in the second maxim (§70).

An antinomy was originally a conflict between laws as, for example, between canon law and civil law. The antinomy of teleological judgment arises as a conflict between the separate jurisdictions of the reflecting and determining powers of judgment.

[It is a] fundamental principle for the reflecting power of judgment that for the *evident connection* of things in accordance with final causes we must conceive of a causality different from mechanism, *namely that of an intelligent world-cause acting in accordance with purposes*, no matter how rash and indemonstrable that would be for the determining power of judgment. (§71)

Kant resolves the antinomy by showing that we do not need to choose (§78). We should accept both the thesis:

It is of infinite importance to reason that it not allow the mechanism of nature in its productions to drop out of sight and be bypassed in its explanations; for without this no insight into the nature of things can be attained.

and the antithesis:

It is an equally necessary maxim of reason not to bypass the principle of purposes in the products of nature, because ... to exclude the teleological principle entirely ... even where purposiveness ... undeniably manifests itself ... must make reason fantastic and send it wandering about among figments of natural capacities that cannot even be conceived.

Kant explores a number of issues between the presentation (§69–§71) and resolution (§78) of the antinomy to which I will turn under two heads: §72–§75 compare Kant’s critical theology with earlier dogmatic systems of theology; §76–§77 consider our cognitive faculties as organized systems exhibiting lawfulness in their contingency. But before that I will digress on a blade of grass as representative of the inexplicability of natural purposes.

A blade of grass

In 1755, Kant had expressed skepticism that the “production of a single herb or a caterpillar by mechanical causes will be distinctly and completely understood.” Thirty-five years later in the *Critique of teleological judgment* mentions a blade of grass in three passages (not counting those that discuss animals eating grass):

To judge a thing to be purposive on account of its internal form ... we need not only the concept of a possible purpose, but also cognition of the final purpose (*scopus*) of nature, which requires the relation of nature to something supersensible, which far exceeds all our teleological cognition of nature, for the purpose of the existence of nature itself must be sought beyond nature. The internal form of a mere blade of grass can demonstrate its merely possible origin in accordance with the rule of purposes in a way that is sufficient for our human faculty of judging. (§67)

The possibility of the formation of a blade of grass, in its internal purposiveness, can be comprehended only by a rule of purposes whose ground must be sought in the supersensible.

For it is quite certain that we can never adequately come to know the organized beings and their internal possibility in accordance with merely mechanical principles of nature, let alone explain them; and indeed this is so certain that we can boldly say that it would be absurd for humans even to make such an attempt or to hope that there yet may arise a Newton who could make comprehensible even the generation of a blade of grass according to natural laws that no intention has ordered; rather, we must absolutely deny this insight to human beings. (§75)

The explanation of organized beings by merely mechanical principles must remain incomprehensible.

Absolutely no human reason (or even any finite reason that is similar to ours in quality, no matter how much it exceeds it in degree) can ever hope to understand the generation of even a little blade of grass from merely mechanical causes ... it is absolutely impossible to draw from nature itself any explanatory ground for purposive connections, and in accordance with the constitution of the human cognitive faculty it is necessary to seek the highest ground of such connections in an original understanding as cause of the world. (§77)

Kant's position had hardened since 1755. He now believed that a purely mechanical explanation of living things would *forever* be incomprehensible to the particular understanding that had been given to us as human beings. Because of the peculiar constitution of our understanding, we see purposiveness in the natural production of a blade of grass and cannot comprehend a mechanism. We must seek a highest ground in an original intelligence as cause of the world. The forever inexplicable blade of grass humbles the human understanding and symbolizes the superhuman artistry of an equally inexplicable God.

Toward a non-dogmatic theology

No one had seriously doubted the correctness of the fundamental principle that organized beings must be judged in accordance with the concept of final causes, but this raised the question whether this principle is

merely subjectively valid or an objective principle of nature (§72). If our only concern were mere cognition of nature, we would not need to ask the question.

It must therefore be a certain presentiment of our reason, or a hint [*Wink*] as it were given to us by means of nature, that we could by means of such a concept of final causes step beyond nature. (§72)

Nature gives a wink that we are on the right track in seeking something beyond nature.

After this nod from the almighty, Kant turns to previous dogmatic systems. The technique that is displayed in organized products of nature had been viewed as either unintentional (*technica naturalis*) or intentional (*technica intentionalis*). The former corresponded to a belief in the idealism of natural purposes, the latter to belief in their realism from which could arise the further hypothesis that all products of nature are intentional. Epicurus and Democritus propounded the unintentional *casuality* of natural purposes (obviously absurd) whereas Spinoza propounded the unintentional fatality of natural purposes (not so easy to refute because his concept of an original being is unintelligible). Belief in the realism of natural purposes was either physical, with a material world-soul, or hyperphysical with the world-whole the product of an intentionally productive, intelligent being. A footnote to §72 characterizes these dogmatic positions as beliefs in *lifeless matter* (Epicurus), *lifeless God* (Spinoza), *living matter* (hylozoism) or *living God* (theism).

Kant addresses the failures of these dogmatic systems in §73. The systems of Epicurus and Spinoza are opposed to the realism of teleological judgments. Epicurus's explanation in terms of a mechanism of blind chance [*blinde Zufall*] explains nothing not even the illusion of purposiveness. On the other hand, Spinoza sees natural things not as products of an original being but as accidents inhering in that being. He thus achieves a unity of ground in natural necessity but removes all contingency and intentionality from nature. His absolute necessity of all things leaves no room for even an unintended purposiveness.

Hylozoism and theism, on the other hand, are committed to the realism of teleological judgments. Advocates of these systems believe themselves *able to understand* the idea of intentionally acting causes in nature. Hylozoism (living matter) can immediately be rejected because lifelessness (*inertia*) constitutes the

essential characteristic of matter. Theism has the advantage of the other systems because its ascription of an understanding to the original being “can best rid the purposiveness of nature of idealism and introduce an intentional causality for its generation” but our determining power of judgment is *unable to prove* that natural purposes *could not be explained* by mere mechanism.

Section §74 begins by contrasting dogmatic and critical treatments of a principle. A dogmatic treatment sees the principle as contained and determined under another concept. By contrast, a critical treatment considers the principle solely in relation to our cognitive faculties and the subjective conditions necessary for thinking it. All dogmatic systems of theology must fail because they depend on the determining power of judgment which is incapable of subsuming the purposiveness of nature under any objective concept:

Not merely can it not be determined whether or not things of nature, considered as natural purposes, require for their generation a causality of an entirely different kind (that in accordance with intentions), but *this question cannot even be raised*, because the objective reality of the concept of a natural purpose *is not demonstrable by means of reason* at all (i.e., it is *not constitutive for the determining*, but is *merely regulative for the reflecting* power of judgment). (§74)

Section §75 turns to the concept of an objective purposiveness of nature as a critical principle of reason for the reflecting power of judgment.

To say that the generation of certain things in nature or even of nature as a whole is possible only through a cause that is determined to act in accordance with intentions is quite different from saying that *because of the peculiar constitution of my cognitive faculties* I cannot judge about the possibility of those things and their generation *except by thinking of a cause for these acts in accordance with intentions*.

The former would be a dogmatic statement of an objective principle of the determining power of judgment whereas the second is a critical statement of a subjective principle of the reflecting power of

judgment. Kant bases his critical teleology (and theology) in the peculiar constitution of our cognitive faculties:

We cannot conceive of the purposiveness which *must be made the basis* even of our cognition of the internal possibility of many things in nature and make it comprehensible except by representing them *and the world in general* as a product of *an intelligent cause* (a God).

Because of our peculiar constitution, we *must* represent the world *as a whole* as the product of an intentionally acting being whose agency is beyond our comprehension.

Only this much is certain, namely that if we are to judge at least in accordance with *what is granted to us to understand through our nature* ... we absolutely cannot base the possibility of those natural purposes on anything but *an intelligent being*—which is what alone is in accord with the maxims of our reflecting power of judgment and is thus a ground which is subjective but *ineradicably attached to the human race*.

Kant hints that human nature makes *necessary* the inference from the purposiveness of nature to an intelligent world-cause.

Our cognitive faculties as a purposive system

The claim that the peculiar constitution of our cognitive faculties is ineradicably attached to the human race is followed by a *Note* (§76) intended for elucidation (rather than proof) that describes these faculties in highly purposive language. Reason reaches toward the unconditioned and is aware of its moral command. The understanding is at reason’s service. Reason would be unrestrained in its ideas without concepts given in objective reality. The understanding restrains exuberant reason by restricting the validity of its regulative principles to the subject (albeit *universally for all members of the species*), and so on.

Much of §76 revolves around distinctions between the possible and the actual with the power of judgment stuck in the middle between the demands of reason and the understanding. It is absolutely necessary for the understanding to distinguish between *actual* and *possible* things but actuality and possibility are

indistinguishable for reason in their original ground. Therefore, the power of judgment must adjudicate a metaphysical dispute between reason and the understanding:

The concept of an absolutely necessary being is an *indispensible idea of reason* but an *unattainable problematic concept for the human understanding*. ... we should conceive all objects in accordance with the subjective conditions *necessarily pertaining to our (human) nature*; and if the judgments made in this way cannot be constitutive principles ... *there can still be regulative principles*, immanent and secure in their use and *appropriate for the human point of view*. (§76)

The jurisdictions of reason's practical laws of reason and the understanding's theoretical laws must be kept separate:

If reason without sensibility ... were considered as a cause in an intelligible world ... there would be no distinction between what should be done and what is done, between a practical law concerning *what is possible through us* and the theoretical law concerning *what is actual through us*.

We would be unable to distinguish between mechanisms and techniques of nature if our understanding were not of the sort that goes from the universal to the particular.

But now since the particular ... contains something contingent with regard to the universal, but reason nevertheless requires unity, hence lawfulness ... which *lawfulness of the contingent is called purposiveness* ... the concept of the purposiveness of nature ... is *necessary for the power of judgment* in regard to nature ... thus *a subjective principle of reason* ... is *just as necessarily valid* for our human power of judgment *as if it were an objective principle*.

Thus, our cognitive faculties are described as a purposive system in which the parts work together for the sake of the whole. All purposive organization is contingent not necessary. The contingency of our actual understanding and the possibility of a different understanding are addressed in §77.

Another (higher) understanding than the human one might be able to find the ground of the possibility of such products of nature even in the mechanisms of nature, i.e., *in a causal connection for which an understanding does not have to be exclusively considered as a cause*. What is at issue here is thus the relation of our understanding to the power of judgment, the fact, namely, that we have to seek *a certain contingency* in the constitution of our understanding in order to notice this as *a special character of our understanding in distinction from other possible ones*.

This higher understanding would ground the possibility of natural products in mechanisms without recourse to the intentions of an original understanding. Kant here entertains the idea that belief in God might be a *contingent* product of the discursive nature of the human understanding that moves logically from one part to another, seeing the whole as dependent on the parts. When this understanding encounters parts that depend on wholes it must—to lawfully comprehend that contingency—have the *a priori* principle of the purposiveness of nature grounded in an original understanding. However, we can think of an intuitive (*archetypical*) understanding that sees the parts as dependent on the whole.

It follows that it is merely a consequence of *the particular constitution of our understanding* that we represent products of nature *as possible* only in accordance with another kind of causality than natural laws of matter, namely only in accordance with that of purposes and final causes.

The generation of natural purposes by mechanism would be explicable for an archetypical understanding. Such an *intellectus archetypus* is thinkable without contradiction. However, because of our peculiar *intellectus ectypus*, we find it necessary to explain the production of natural purposes as possible only by final causes and as inexplicable by efficient causes.

Aesthetic judgment

The *Critique of the aesthetic power of judgment* (§1–§60) is commonly read for what it says about human

art but its principal subject is natural beauty for which human art serves as an analogy. My analysis will begin with five key-passages (I–V below).

(I) *On the division of the beautiful arts* (§51) discusses how art expresses ideas in *sensible intuition*. *Plastik* (sculpture and architecture) is the art of sensible truth. *Malerei* [painting] is the art of sensible illusion. Both present ideas as shapes in space, the former in three-dimensional corporeal extension, *as the object itself exists*, knowable by sight and by feeling, the latter in two-dimensional extension knowable only by sight. The aesthetic idea, the *archetype* [*Archetypon, Urbild*], is grounded in the imagination but its expression, the *ectype* [*Ectypon, Nachbild*], is given in space. Of the plastic arts, architecture is intended for human use whereas sculpture's primary aim is the expression of aesthetic ideas. Kant does not explicitly state, but implies, that the sensible truths of nature, presented as corporeal extensions in space, are closest to sculpture. Natural beauties are ectypic expressions of archetypic ideas.

An archetype is a model from which copies are made, the mold from which a sculpture is cast. An ectype is an *impression* or copy of an archetype, a statue cast from the mold. Archetypic ideas give form to sensible ectypes as a paw leaves its trace as a pawprint. An archetypic intellect moves from the idea to the object, from formal cause to matter in motion. An ectypic intellect seeks the idea in the object. In ancient Greece, symbols were the uniquely-fitting parts of a broken token that represented a contract (Ladner 1957).

(II) *On beauty as a symbol of morality* (§59) begins with two forms of presentation [*Darstellung*]:

All hypotyposis (presentation, *subjectio sub adspectum*), as making something sensible, is one of two kinds: either schematic, when to a concept grasped by the understanding the corresponding intuition is given *a priori*; or symbolic *where to a concept which only reason can think*, and which no sensible intuition can be adequate, *an intuition is attributed* with which the power of judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to that which it observes in schematization, i.e., it is merely the rule of this procedure, not of the intuition itself, and thus merely the form of the reflection, not the content, which corresponds to the concept.

An intuition is *attributed* to a concept for which no sensible intuition is adequate. The power of judgment presents intuitions according to schemata or symbols. Schemata are objective *a priori* intuitions of concepts of the *understanding*. Symbols are subjective intuitions of concepts of *reason* for which sensible intuitions are inadequate. Symbols present the ineffable in sensible form.

All intuitions that are ascribed to concepts *a priori* are thus either schemata or symbols, the first of which contain direct, the second indirect presentations of the concept. *The first do this demonstratively, the second by means of an analogy ...* in which the power of judgment performs a double task, first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then, second, applying the mere rule of the reflection on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the first is only the symbol.

A symbol substitutes one object for another. The object of a sensible intuition substitutes for an incomprehensible object. And here is the crux:

All of our cognition of God is merely symbolic, and anyone who takes it ... as schematic, *lapses into anthropomorphism*, just as if he leaves out everything intuitive, he *lapses into deism*, by which nothing at all, not even from a practical point of view, is cognized.

All *presentation* of God in the sensible world is symbolic. To interpret the sensible world as a schematic presentation of God's intentions is to ascribe human characteristics to the deity, but to deny all intuitive presentation is to lapse into a deism in which nothing of God is revealed in the world.

Now I say that *the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good ...* in regard to the objects of such a pure satisfaction [the power of judgment] gives the law to itself ... and it sees itself ... as related to *something in the subject itself and outside of it*, which is *neither nature nor freedom*, but which is connected with the ground of the latter, namely the supersensible, *in which the theoretical faculty is*

combined with the practical, in a mutual and unknown way, *to form a unity*.

The reflective power of judgment bridges the chasm between the sensible and the supersensible, between phenomenon and noumenon, between theoretical understanding and practical reason. It thereby unites the legislation of the understanding with respect to the sensible world with the legislation of reason for supersensible freedom. This unification of the cognitive faculties is achieved via subjective feelings of pleasure and displeasure.

Kant then compares the beautiful and morally good: *first*, the beautiful pleases immediately in the intuition whereas the morally good pleases in the concept; *second*, the beautiful pleases apart from any interest but the morally good is bound up with the interest of what we should do; *third*, the beautiful is harmonious with laws of the understanding whereas the morally good is harmonious with universal laws of reason; *fourth*, judgments of beauty and moral goodness are both universally valid.

The analogy between beauty and the morally good, the symbolism of one for the other, is restated in the concluding paragraph of the *Critique of the aesthetic power of judgment*:

But since taste is at bottom a faculty for the judging of *the sensible rendering of moral ideas (by means of a certain analogy of the reflection on both)*, from which, as well as from the greater receptivity for the feeling resulting from the latter (which is called the moral feeling) that is to be grounded upon it, is derived that *pleasure which taste declares to be valid for mankind in general*. (§60)

The highest artist illustrates moral ideas in objects of symbolic art. Subjective judgments of the beautiful and morally good are binding for all humankind.

(III) Symbolic presentations of the inexpressible had earlier been considered in *On the faculties of the mind that constitute genius* (§49). This section addresses the nature of human genius but I interpret it as also developing the analogy between natural beauty and the work of a highest artist. It is this latter complementary interpretation that will be my focus here.

Spirit is the principle of the mind that enlivens the soul and purposively sets the mental powers aswing [*in Schwung versetzt*] in such play as maintains and strengthens the powers. This animating principle is

nothing other than the faculty for the presentation of *aesthetic ideas*. One effortlessly sees that an aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination that no language can make intelligible and the *counterpart of a rational idea* for which no intuition is adequate.—The relation between the idea of reason and the aesthetic idea, between part [*Stück*] and counterpart [*Gegenstück*] or complement [*Pendant*], reprises that between archetype and ectype.—An aesthetic idea resembles both objective reality and an inner intuition. A creative aesthetic idea can stimulate so much thought and so much activity of reason that it can never be grasped in a determinate concept.

Those forms which do not constitute the presentation of a given concept itself, but, as supplementary representations of the imagination, express only the implications connected with it and its affinity with others, are called (aesthetic) attributes of an object whose concept, as an idea of reason, cannot be adequately presented. Thus Jupiter's eagle with the lightning in its claws, is an attribute of the powerful king of heaven, as is the peacock of the splendid queen of heaven.

An aesthetic attribute expresses the implications of an idea of reason that cannot be adequately presented.

They do not, like logical attributes, represent what lies in our concepts of the sublimity and majesty of creation, but something else, which gives the imagination cause to spread itself over a multitude of related concepts, *let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words*; and they yield an aesthetic idea, which serves that idea of reason instead of logical presentation.

Aesthetic ideas are expressed in works of artistic genius and, even more, in the superhuman art of natural beauty. The beauties of nature are aesthetic attributes (unlike the logical attributes of the sublime). They let one think concepts that cannot be expressed in words.

(IV) The *Transition from the faculty for judging the beautiful to that which judges the sublime* (§23) compares the beautiful and sublime. Both please for themselves. Both can be connected with concepts through the faculty of presentation, otherwise known

as the imagination. Judgments of both are *singular* but claim *universal validity*. The most important and intrinsic difference between the sublime and the beautiful, however, is this:

Natural beauty (the self-sufficient kind) *carries with it a purposiveness in its form*, through which the object seems to be predetermined for our power of judgment, and thus constitutes *an object of satisfaction in itself*, whereas, that which, without any rationalizing, merely in apprehension, excites in us the feeling of the sublime, *may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment*, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination, *but is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that*.

The different presentations of the sublime and natural beauty in sensible form are then discussed.

What is properly sublime *cannot be contained in any sensible form*, but concerns only ideas of reason, which though no presentation adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind precisely by this inadequacy, *which does allow of sensible presentation*. Thus the wide ocean, enraged by storms, cannot be called sublime ... one must already have filled the mind with all sorts of ideas if by means of such an intuition it is to be put in the mood for a feeling which is itself sublime, in that *the mind is incited to abandon sensibility* and to occupy itself with *ideas that contain a higher purposiveness*.

The ideas of reason cannot be adequately presented but the sensible presentation of a mighty storm incites the properly predisposed mind to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas of a higher purposiveness. The mighty storm symbolizes ideas of reason. The above passage is immediately followed by a discussion of natural beauty:

The self-sufficient beauty of nature reveals to us *a technique of nature*, which makes it possible to represent it as a system in accordance with laws the principle of which we do not encounter

anywhere *in our entire faculty of understanding*, namely that of a purposiveness with respect to the use of the power of judgment *in regard to appearances*, so that this must be judged as belonging not merely to nature in its *purposeless mechanism* but rather also to the *analogy with art*. Thus it actually expands not our concept of natural objects, but our concept of nature, namely as a mere mechanism, into the concept of *nature as art* (§23, p. 129f)

The sublime passionately presents ideas of reason. Natural beauty calmly presents nature *as art*. The passage concludes:

From this we see that the concept of the sublime in nature is far from being as important and rich in consequences as that of its beauty, and that in general it indicates *nothing purposive in nature itself*, but only in the possible use of its intuitions to *make palpable in ourselves a purposiveness* that is entirely independent of nature. For the beautiful in nature we must seek *a ground outside ourselves*, but for the sublime *merely one in ourselves*.

Natural beauty is richer in consequences than the sublime. The sublime symbolizes ideas of reason within ourselves. Natural beauty symbolizes something outside ourselves. The sublime exalts reason. Beauty perplexes the human understanding. We are exalted by a mighty storm but humbled by a blade of grass.

(V) *On the intellectual interest in the beautiful* (§42) concedes that an interest in beautiful art can be combined with vanity, obstinacy, and corrupting passions, but asserts that an immediate interest in natural beauty is always the mark of a good soul.

This preeminence of the beauty of nature over the beauty of art ... is in agreement with the refined and well-founded thinking of *all human beings who have cultivated their moral feeling*. ... Now what is the distinction between such different assessments of two sorts of objects, which in the mere judgment of taste would scarcely compete for preeminence over each other?

The pleasure or displeasure in merely aesthetic judgments is called taste but the pleasure or displeasure in intellectual judgments on the basis of maxims which we make into law for everyone is called moral feeling. These two kinds of judgment resemble each other in their disinterestedness and claims for universality.

But since *it also interests reason that the ideas* (for which it produces an immediate interest in the moral feeling) also *have objective reality*, i.e., that nature should at least *show some trace or give a sign* that it contains in itself some sort of ground for assuming *a lawful correspondence of its products with our satisfaction* that is independent of all interest (which we recognize *a priori* as a law valid for everyone, without being able to ground this on proofs), reason must take an interest in every manifestation in nature *of a correspondence similar to this*.

Reason seeks some sign, a nod or a *Wink*, from objective reality that its moral ideas are on the right track.¹

It will be said that this explanation of aesthetic judgments in terms of their affinity with moral feeling looks much too studied to be taken as the true interpretation of *the cipher by which nature figuratively speaks to us* in its beautiful forms ... the analogy between the pure judgment of taste, which, without depending on any sort of interest, allows a pleasure to be felt and at the same time to be represented *a priori* as proper for mankind in general, and the moral judgment, which does the same thing on the basis of concepts, leads to an equally immediate interest in the object in the former as in that of the latter—only the former is a free interest, the latter one grounded on objective laws. To that is further added the admiration of *nature which in its beautiful products shows itself as art*, not merely by chance, but *as it were intentionally*, in accordance with a lawful arrangement and as purposiveness without a purpose, which latter, since we never encounter it externally, we

naturally seek within ourselves, and indeed in *that which constitutes the last purpose of our existences*, namely the moral vocation.

Beautiful forms are a ciphered writing [*Chifferschrift*] by which nature speaks to us about moral feelings. Our satisfaction in aesthetic and moral judgment is experienced as universally-binding. Our admiration of natural beauty, both as *objective lawful arrangement* and *subjective purposiveness* without purpose, helps us identify our moral vocation as the last purpose of our existence.

The sublime

A celebrated passage from the second *Critique* is engraved on Kant's tombstone:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

The third *Critique* connects the starry heavens to the moral law via the aesthetic judgment of the sublime.

Now in the aesthetic judging of such an immeasurable whole [the heavens], the sublime does not lie as much in the magnitude of the number as in the fact that as we progress we always arrive at ever greater units; the representing to us all that is great in nature as in its turn small, but actually *representing our imagination in all its boundlessness*, and with it nature, as *paling into insignificance beside the ideas of reason* if it is supposed to provide a presentation adequate to them. [§26]

Contemplation of the sublime elevates the supersensible above the sensible, the moral law above natural laws. Our phenomenal insignificance signifies our noumenal significance. My interpretation is opposite to that of Neiman (2001) who sees the contrapurposiveness of the sublime as forcing reason to acknowledge its own impotence. Kant returns to the *presentation* of the sublime in §27:

The feeling of the sublime is thus a feeling of displeasure from the inadequacy of the imagination ... and a pleasure that is thereby aroused at the

same time from the correspondence of this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest sensible faculty in comparison with the ideas of reason ... the inner perception of the inadequacy of any sensible standard for the estimation of magnitude ... is a *displeasure that arouses the feeling of our supersensible vocation* in us, in accordance with which it is purposive and thus a *pleasure to find every standard of sensibility inadequate* for the ideas of the understanding.

An immediate feeling of displeasure in confrontation with the sublime arouses a feeling of pleasure in our supersensible vocation. Moreover

The effort to take up in a single intuition a measure for magnitudes, which requires an appreciable time of its apprehension, is a kind of apprehension which, *subjectively considered is contrapurposive*, but which objectively, for the measurement of magnitude, is necessary, hence purposive; in this way, however, the very same violence that is inflicted on the subject by the imagination is judged as *purposive for the whole vocation of the mind*.

The vast and tempestuous is experienced as contrapurposive (*zweckwidrig*) in immediate intuition but as purposive (*zweckmäßig*) in reasoned contemplation.

Similar themes recur in the General Remark after §29. Ideas cannot be directly *presented*, but the mental striving and feeling of the unreachability of the idea by means of the imagination

... is itself a *presentation* of the subjective purposiveness of our mind in the use of the imagination for our supersensible vocation, and compels us to think nature itself in its totality, as the *presentation* of something supersensible, subjectively, without being able to produce this *presentation* objectively.

Kant here invokes two indirect presentations of ideas in the contemplation of the sublime, both of which I interpret as symbolic rather than schematic. The first is a presentation of the *subjective purposiveness of our mind* and the second is a presentation of *nature in its*

totality as a symbol of the supersensible. We quickly realize that the sensible presentation of nature in its vastness falls completely short of absolute magnitude in space and time:

We are reminded that we have only to do with *nature as an appearance*, and that this itself *must be regarded as the mere presentation of a nature in itself* (which reason has in the idea). This idea of the supersensible ... *is awakened in us by means of an object* the aesthetic judging of *which stretches the imagination to its limit* ... in that it is grounded in the [moral] feeling of a vocation of the mind ... in regard to which the representation of the object is judged as subjectively purposive.

The power of judgment links the starry heavens above to the moral law within, both are experienced as sublime, rather than beautiful, associated with feelings of respect rather than love and intimate affection.

Natural beauty and artistic genius

Kant presents the aesthetic idea that the phenomenal world is the artistic creation of an intelligent world-cause by developing an explicit analogy between artistic and natural beauty and an implicit analogy between an artistic genius and a highest artist. Art entails choices grounded in reason. Bees have no choice in producing a honeycomb which is a work of their creator. Genius is a talent for making inspired choices. Art is distinguished from science as technique is distinguished from theory. It requires know-how as well as know-what. Technique employs mechanism “without which the spirit ... which alone animates the work, would have no body at all” (§43). Kant nods toward the artistic technique revealed in the bodies of living things. Great art is revealed not just in the beauty of its forms but in its masterful use of materials.

Genius is a natural gift or inborn predisposition of the mind (§46). Artistic geniuses are favorites of nature (§47, §49) who receive their gift as an unearned favor. Their works are both original and exemplary but genius “cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being” (§46). Although genius provides rich *material* for the production of art, it requires *training* to give form to its products (§47).

Although mechanical and beautiful art ... are very different from each other, still *there is no beautiful art in which something mechanical*, which can be grasped and followed according to rule ... *does not constitute the essential condition of art*. For something in it must be thought of as a purpose, otherwise one cannot ascribe its product to any art at all. (§47)

In these passages, Kant prefigures the inexplicability of the production of natural purposes by mechanism.

Judging an object as beautiful requires taste. Its production requires genius (§48). We can all develop our taste but few among us are gifted with genius.

In the judging especially of living objects in nature ... objective purposiveness is also commonly taken into account for judging its beauty; but in that case the judgment is no longer purely aesthetic, i.e., a mere judgment of taste. *Nature is no longer judged as it appears as art, but to the extent that it really is art* (albeit superhuman); and the teleological judgment serves as the foundation for the aesthetic and as a condition of which the latter must take account (§48)

Natural beauty is subjectively judged as *if it were art* and objectively cognized as *superhuman art*. Natural purposes are pleasing in their subjective purposiveness without purpose, but their objective purposiveness reveals superhuman technique. The aesthetic and teleological powers of judgment support each other in Kant's teleological project.

The mental powers whose union constitutes genius are the imagination and the understanding (§49).

Genius really consists in the happy relation ... of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, *through which the subjective disposition of the mind* that is thereby produced ... *can be communicated to others*. The latter talent is really that which is called spirit, for *to express what is unnameable ... and to make it universally communicable* ... requires a faculty for apprehending the rapidly passing play of the imagination and unifying it into a concept ... which can be

communicated *without the constraint of rules*. (§49)

Communicability of the ineffable is central to aesthetic judgments of taste. The power of judgment 'clips the wings' of the imagination to make its products suitable to the lawfulness of the understanding.

Taste, like the power of judgment in general, is the discipline (or corrective) of genius ... by introducing clarity and order into the abundance of thoughts it makes the ideas tenable, capable of an enduring and universal approval, of enjoying a posterity among others and in an ever progressing culture. (§50)

I diagnose a struggle within Kant between his mature *intellectus ectypus*, proceeding from parts to wholes, and his embryonic *intellectus archetypus*, intuiting the mind as an interconnected and mutually supportive system in which aesthetic ideas are counterparts of ideas of reason. The ectypic Kant builds an objective bridge across the gulf that *separates* the understanding from reason, but the archetypic Kant enjoys the interplay of the faculties in subjective experience as a harmonious and purposive whole. The power of judgment, with its sense of proportion and impeccable taste, prevents the free play of the faculties of the mind from becoming disorderly and enables us to express feelings that can be readily understood by others and that collectively contribute to the advancement of culture.

The antinomy of the aesthetic power of judgment

The antinomy of the aesthetic power of judgment can be expressed, somewhat flippantly, as: there is no sense in arguing about judgments of taste, yet we continue to argue about them. We *know* our judgments differ but *feel* others *should* concur in our judgment. Kant, of course, does not express it this way. The antinomy's thesis is that a judgment of taste is not based on concepts because otherwise it would be decidable by proofs whereas its antithesis is that judgments of taste are based on concepts because otherwise we would be unable to argue about them (§56).

Kant resolves the antinomy in §57 as a natural but unavoidable illusion that arises from 'concept' not being taken in the same sense in thesis and antithesis. When a judgment of taste pertains to an object of the

senses, it is simply what I feel about the object. I am not making any claim about it; not determining a concept. Everyone has their own taste. However, when I make a universal claim that others should concur in my judgment, my claim pertains to a “pure rational concept of the supersensible which grounds the object (*and also the judging subject*), as an object of sense, consequently as an appearance”. This transcendental concept, which grounds object and subject in their supersensible relation, is in itself indeterminate and unthinkable, yet gains validity “because its determining ground may lie in the concept of that which can be regarded as *the supersensible substratum of humanity*.”

Kant’s resolution of this antinomy was at first sight, indeed at fifth reading, obscure: “The solution of the antinomy amounts merely to the proposition that two apparently conflicting propositions do not in fact contradict each other ... but there is nothing by which it can be made more comprehensible”. What I think Kant is saying is that we cannot argue about the individual judgment of taste because I am simply stating my feeling toward an object and this does not determine anything about the object (it is purely subjective). However, we cannot but feel that our singular judgments with respect to some objects are universally valid (and so we argue). This is a *necessary* accompaniment of what it is to be human in the world of appearances. To be flippant: you can’t change human nature. To be less flippant: we make universal claims for some of our singular judgments and expect that others should agree with us because our ability to communicate is based on the assumption of a shared supersensible substratum of our humanity.

We possess subjective certainty in our judgments of taste because they are *our* judgments, but Kant does not allow us to agree to disagree on matters of taste. Why should he make this strange commitment? At the end of §57, Kant remarks that the antinomies of the three *Critiques* are all resolved in a similar way: “one is compelled, against one’s will to look beyond the sensible and to seek the unifying point of all our faculties *a priori* in the supersensible: because no other way remains to make reason self-consistent.” Kant wants subjective certainty when he demands others should assent to his moral judgments. This may get to the heart of the problem. Kant is about to declare that beauty is a symbol of the morally good (§59). If what we *should do* is determinate, then what we *should feel* should be similarly determinate. Kant needs universality of the supersensible. He fears a

moral relativism in which what we *should do* is an indeterminate judgment of individual taste.

The universal communicability versus particularity of judgments of taste

Kant fills many pages of the *Analytic of the aesthetic power of judgment* grappling with problems of the communicability of subjective certainty and the universality of individual judgments. Judgment involves evaluation. According to *CPJ*, an aesthetic judgment is subjective and entirely disinterested. It is a pure appreciation: a feeling of pleasure or displeasure with respect to a thing but without any personal intentions toward the thing. Because our judgments of beauty are without personal interest, we experience them as valuations that *should* be shared by everyone independent of their interests (§6) from which we *demand* that others assent to our judgments (§7).

Our minds share structure and content *a priori* as part of what it is to be human. The purposive organization of the human mind is contingent—we could have been *given* different minds by the *giver* of minds—but *given* the minds that we have, their nature is *subjectively necessary for us*. An empirical justification for the assumption of shared structure and content of our minds is that we are able to communicate with each other and often agree about what satisfies or dissatisfies us in certain objects (the problem, of course, is that we do not agree about all objects).

The universal communicability of the sensation (of satisfaction or dissatisfaction) ... the unanimity, so far as possible, of all times and peoples about this feeling in the representation of certain objects: although weak and hardly sufficient for conjecture, this is the empirical criterion of the derivation of taste, confirmed by examples, *from the common ground, deeply buried in all human beings*, of unanimity in the judging of forms under which objects are given to them. (§17)

This common ground includes unanimity in our feelings with respect to certain objects. Our demand for universal agreement in judgments of taste “is a subjective necessity, which is represented as objective under the presupposition of a common sense” (§22).

The common sense ... is a merely *ideal norm under the presupposition of which*

one could rightfully make a judgment that agrees with it and the satisfaction in an object that is expressed in it *into a rule for everyone*: since the principle, though only subjective, is nevertheless *assumed to be subjectively universal* (an idea necessary for everyone) ... [which] *could demand universal assent* just like an objective one. (§22)

The *sensus communis* is *ideal*, therefore indeterminate, not something *real* that can be determined by concepts. Section §58 returns to consideration of whether the purposiveness of nature and art is *ideal* (in the mind, based on *a priori* principles) or *real* (in nature, based empirically on the senses). He finds reasons why one might consider purposiveness in nature as real (intentional):

The beautiful formations in the realm of organized nature speak strongly in behalf of the realism of the aesthetic purposiveness of nature, since one may assume that the production of the beautiful is based on an idea of that in the producing cause, namely a purpose in favor of our imagination. [translation modified for *ein Zweck zu Gunsten unserer Einbildungskraft*].

Flowers, pheasants, crustaceans, and insects are beautiful in their outward form but other beautiful things, such as crystals, are formed by purely physical processes. Natural beauty does not settle the question, but what downright proves the ideality of our judgments of beauty is the fact that we legislate taste for ourselves rather than learn it from nature.

The idea of a common sense contains at least two *peculiarities* (§31–§37): we feel that some of our judgments have a claim to universal assent, as if they were *objective* (§32); but we recognize that our judgments of taste are not determinable by proofs, as if they were merely *subjective* (§33). These are indeed logically peculiar but not outside my human experience. Kant believes that all claims of *a priori* necessity require a deduction:

Now since the power of judgment in regard to the formal rules of judging ... can be directed only to ... that subjective element *that one can presuppose in all human beings* ... the correspondence of a representation with these conditions of the power of judgment must be able to

be assumed to be valid for everyone *a priori*. (§38)

If that is not clear, Kant appends a *Remark* to explain why the deduction is easy.

It asserts only that *we are justified in presupposing universally in every human being* the same subjective conditions of the power of judgment *that we find in ourselves* ... [it] only comes down to this: the correctness of the principle for validly judging for everyone on subjective grounds.

We assume common ground when we communicate about our feelings of pleasure and displeasure and therefore assume that we have the same feelings. We understand each other under the presupposition of a *sensus communis*. Sensory sensations can only be communicated under the assumption “that everyone has a sense that is the same as our own” (§39). Kant accepts that the senses provide us with pleasures of enjoyment that are not the same for everyone, but our satisfaction in moral activity and our pleasure in the sublime in nature are not pleasures of this kind and claim universal participation in our feeling. Our pleasure in the beautiful, in the harmony of the imagination and the understanding, also claims universal assent.

This pleasure must necessarily rest on the same conditions in everyone, since they are *subjective conditions of a cognition in general* and the proportion of these cognitive faculties that is required for taste is also requisite for *the common and healthy understanding that one may presuppose in everyone*. (§39)

Section §40 defines tastes as “the faculty for judging *that which makes our feeling* in a given representation *universally communicable* without the mediation of a concept”.

Kant compares the empirical interest in the beautiful (§41) with the intellectual interest in the beautiful (§42). §42 has been discussed at length above. Here I will merely note that the intellectual interest in the beautiful is present in “Someone who alone (and without any intention of wanting to communicate his observations to others) considers the beautiful shape of a wildflower”. By contrast, the empirical interest in the beautiful is a characteristic inclination of human nature that is only expressed in society. It is an aspect

of human sociability that we desire to communicate our feelings and taste to others.

A human being abandoned on a desert island would not adorn either his hut or himself ... rather, only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a human being but also, in his own way, a refined human being ... for this is how we judge someone who is inclined to communicate his pleasure to others and is skilled at it, and who is not content with an object if he cannot feel his satisfaction in it in community with others. ... sensations have value only to the extent that they may be universally communicated ... the idea of its universal communicability almost infinitely increases its value.

This reprises a similar passage in §2 in which a castaway would have no interest in living in a palace. A simple hut would be sufficient for his solitary needs.

Back to the beginnings

First beginning

Kant wrote two introductions for the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*: a longer ‘first introduction’ and a shorter ‘second introduction’ that was the introduction included in the published book. I will limit my comments on the former to a few passages. In section IV, Kant presents a possible world in which the multiplicity and diversity of empirical laws, and the natural forms corresponding to them, could be infinitely great and “present to us a raw chaotic aggregate and not the least trace of a system”. Kant continues

For *unity of nature* in space and time and *unity of the experience possible for us are identical*, since the former is a totality of mere appearances (kinds of representations) which can have its objective reality only in experience, which, as itself *a system in accordance with empirical laws*, must be possible if one is to think of the former as a system (*as must indeed be done*). Thus it is a *subjectively necessary* transcendental presupposition that such a *disturbingly unbounded diversity of empirical laws* and

heterogeneity of natural forms *does not pertain to nature*. [p. 13]

The unity of nature and of experience are identical. It is subjectively *necessary* that the world of experience should form a cohesive *system* and not be a disturbingly unbounded *aggregate* of empirical laws. Subjective necessity is not something we can choose. It is the nature of our subjectivity.

Section VIII discusses the purposiveness of natural forms and includes a definition of purposiveness:

I understand by an absolute purposiveness of natural forms such an *external shape as well as inner structure* that their possibility must be grounded *in an idea of them* in our power of judgment. For *purposiveness is a lawfulness of the contingent* as such. *With regard to its products as aggregates, nature proceeds mechanically*, as mere nature; but *with regard to its products as systems ... it proceeds technically*, i.e., as at the same time an art. [p. 20]

When we conceive natural products as an *aggregate* of parts we envision nature acting mechanically but when we consider natural products as an organized *system* we envision them produced technically, as art.

Section XI lays out the structure of the third *Critique* schematically. A domain of *a priori* cognition, such as the power of judgment, should be considered as a whole prior to the determination of its parts; in other words, as a system. The determining power of judgment acts *schematically* under laws of the understanding but the reflective power of judgment acts *technically* in accordance with its own laws grounded on the principle of the purposiveness of nature which one must presuppose in it *a priori*. This principle is only subjective “yet brings along with it the concept of a *possible* objective purposiveness, i.e., of the lawfulness of the things of nature as natural purposes”.

Subjective purposiveness is an aesthetic judgment whereas the possibility of objective purposiveness is a logical or teleological judgment. This is the basis of the division of the *Critique* into separate critiques of aesthetic and teleological judgment. An orthogonal division of purposiveness is between internal purposiveness for the thing itself and relative purposiveness for the use of something else. With respect to subjective purposiveness, internal purposive is experienced as *beauty*. This involves a

critique of *taste*. By contrast, the *sublime* has an external purposiveness. This involves a critique of the *feeling of spirit*. The representation of the sublime is not purposive in itself but used with “view to another feeling, namely that of the inner purposiveness in the disposition of the powers of the mind.” With respect to the objective purposiveness of nature, the teleological judgment of internal purposiveness concerns the inner *perfection* of a things whereas the judgment of relative purposiveness concerns its *usefulness* for other purposes. Kant says that the *Critique of teleological judgment* will contain two books, the first of which will bring under principles the judging of natural purposes with regard to their *internal possibility* and the second with regard to their *relative purposiveness*. I take these two ‘books’ to correspond to §61–§78 and §79–§91 (the Methodology/Appendix).

In an interesting paragraph, human art is said to be grounded in the determining power of judgment (presumably because human art, the mechanical arts as well as fine arts, is produced according to concepts). Moreover, “The judging of artistic beauty will have to be considered as a mere consequence of the same principles which ground the judgment of natural beauty.” This primacy of natural beauty over artistic beauty conforms to my reading of the third *Critique* as a whole. However, I would qualify Kant’s subordination of artistic to natural beauty with the observation that Kant sees artistic genius as a gift of nature and the work of genius as inexplicable like natural beauty.

Second beginning

In the final paragraph of the second Introduction, we read:

The power of judgment’s concept of a purposiveness of nature still belongs among the concepts of nature, but only as a regulative element of the faculty of cognition ... The *spontaneity in the play* of the faculties of cognition, the agreement of which contains the *grounds of this pleasure*, makes that concept suitable for mediating the connection of the domain of the concept of nature with the concept of freedom in its consequences, in that the latter at the same time *promotes the receptivity* of the mind for moral feeling. [p. 82]

The beauty of nature is not without purpose. As a regulative principle, it connects nature with freedom and promotes moral feeling. The separate legislations of understanding in nature and reason in freedom had been earlier described in these terms:

The understanding legislates *a priori* for nature, as object of the senses, for a theoretical cognition of it in a possible experience. Reason legislates *a priori* for freedom and its own causality, as the supersensible in the subject, for an unconditioned practical cognition. The domain of the concept of nature under the one legislation and the concept of freedom under the other are *entirely barred from any mutual influence* that they could have on each other by themselves ... *by the great chasm that separates the supersensible from the appearances*. [p. 80]

Each of these austere legislations is objectively binding in its own domain, but critical philosophy had created a jurisdictional gap between them. In order to bridge the gap between the sensible and the supersensible, the reflecting power of judgment subjectively seeks unity in the manifold of particulars.

There is such a manifold of forms in nature ... that there must nevertheless also be laws for them which, as empirical, may seem to be contingent in accordance with the insight of our understanding, but which if they are to be called laws ... must be regarded as necessary on a principle of the unity of the manifold. [p. 67, translation modified at *for them*]

These laws *seem to be contingent* for the determining power of judgment but *must be regarded as necessary* for the reflecting power. By analogy, the empirical laws supplied by the reflective power of judgment “must be considered in terms of that sort of unity they would have if an understanding (*even if not ours*) had likewise *given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition*, in order to make possible a system of experience in accordance with particular laws of nature” [p. 67]. If the reflective power of judgment is to make sense of the world, it has no other option than to view nature *as if it had been purposefully arranged* for our comprehension by an understanding that is not our understanding.

Now since the concept of an object insofar as it at the same time contains the grounds of the reality of this object is called a purpose, and the correspondence of a thing with that constitution of things that is possible only in accordance with purposes is called the purposiveness of its form, thus the principle of the power of judgment in regard to the form of things in nature under empirical laws in general is *the purposiveness of nature in its multiplicity*. [p. 68]

The purposiveness of nature is not only an *a priori* principle of the reflecting power of judgment but also a transcendental principle. We judge nature as purposive, not because of what is objectively revealed in the world, but because this is an *a priori* feature of our subjective judgment.

We must think of there being in nature, with regard to its merely empirical laws, a possibility of infinitely manifold empirical laws, which *as far as our insight goes are nevertheless contingent* ... [but since a unity of experience must] necessarily be presupposed and assumed, *for otherwise no thoroughgoing interconnection of empirical cognitions into a whole of experience would take place* ... the power of judgment must thus assume it as an *a priori* principle for its *own use* that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity, *not fathomable by us, but still thinkable*, in the combination of its manifold into one experience possible in itself. [page 70]

An *a priori* principle is *assumed* without justification and is *necessary* for us. That is what it means to be a *priori*. By an *a priori* judgment “one either knows something as entirely certain or knows nothing at all” [§90; similar statement in §91].

The aesthetic power of judgment is essential, since this alone contains a principle that the power of judgment lays at the basis of its reflection entirely *a priori*, namely that of a formal purposiveness of nature in accordance with its particular (empirical) laws for

our faculty of cognition, without which the understanding could not find itself in it. [page 79]

The understanding *finds itself* in the formal purposiveness of natural beauty.

Section VIII lays out the grand scheme. Subjective representation [*Vorstellung*] of an object, prior to any concept, is distinct from objective presentation [*Darstellung*] associated with a concept. [English representation comes after presentation but German *Vor-stellung* is ‘placed before’.] The representation of the first sort of purposiveness rests on the immediate pleasure in the form of the object on reflection. The presentation of the second kind of purposiveness is associated with understanding rather than feelings of pleasure. In presentation of art, the object (say a painting) is associated with “an antecedently conceived concept of an object that is a purpose for us”. It reminds us of a purposive object. In presentation of a living thing, the object (say a sparrow) is associated with the concept of a natural purpose. *Natural beauty* is the presentation of the concept of formal (subjective) purposiveness and *natural purposes* are the presentation of a real (objective) purposiveness.

Section II describes the immense chasm between the concepts of nature and freedom.

Yet the latter should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the purpose that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the purposes that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom. Thus, there must still be a ground of the unity of the supersensible that grounds nature with that which the concept of freedom contains practically.

If freedom is to achieve its moral ends, it must be able to act in nature using means provided by nature. The possibility of the actualization of these ends presupposes an *agreement* between the laws of nature and freedom. This agreement—a unity of the supersensible symbolized in a unity of the sensible manifold—is lawfulness of the contingent or the purposiveness of nature in its multiplicity. As I have hoped to demonstrate in my reverse reading of *CPJ*,

the power of judgment mediates between the understanding of nature (in its necessity) and reason (in its freedom). For practical freedom, the power of judgment provides techniques (arts of living) that enable reason to act in nature for moral ends. For theoretical understanding, the power of judgment indicates the hand of a highest artist in the technique of nature and thereby affirms our moral ends.

Approaching the end

The whole determines the parts in systems of purposes. *CPJ* is commonly interpreted as an aggregate of weakly connected parts (“a dog’s dinner” Gardner 2016) but I have attempted to interpret it as a strongly integrated whole. The most controversial aspect of my interpretation will be my claim that Kant advocates an intentional God who is represented in the sensible world by aesthetic attributes (symbols) that sustain our moral vocation. The part that first presented this sense of a whole to my understanding was §59 and its three emphatic statements; all presentation is either schematic or symbolic; all knowledge of God is symbolic; beauty is the symbol of the morally good. Kant never mentions symbols outside of §59 and rarely mentions schemata. A critic could therefore argue that I have let a minor part dominate my interpretation of the whole. I would defend my interpretation on two grounds. First, Kant’s comments in §59 are particularly emphatic. Second, Kant has reasons for presenting his major arguments implicitly rather than explicitly.

Symbols present concepts that cannot be expressed directly. I believe Kant intended many passages of *CPJ* to be interpreted symbolically especially those pertaining to the original intelligence (one of many terms he uses for what I will call God): a pawprint is not merely a depression in the ground but also an impression from above, a hint of that which we seek in nature. §59 also states that one who interprets God’s presence in the world schematically falls into anthropomorphism. One cannot explicate the inexplicable. Some of Kant’s heavily-hedged allusions to God are easy to interpret as agnosticism but I interpret them instead as attempts to avoid anthropomorphism. Put another way, Kant scrupulously maintains agnosticism with respect to the properties of an inexplicable God. These are, to use a cliché, beyond human understanding. Kant would have judged himself guilty of anthropomorphism if he had presented God’s attributes schematically. We cannot know God’s purposes. No work of complexity reflects a unitary authorial intention although the

author may aspire to such unity. Kant’s location on the agnosticism–theism spectrum probably shifted many times during the writing and revising of *CPJ*.

If God were completely inexplicable then any theological interpretation would be as good or bad as any other. Kant is not that kind of a skeptic. He recognizes good and bad theological arguments. I will first consider his position with respect to physicotheology and the argument from design. Clark (1999) provides a useful overview of the complex disputes over teleology in Prussia preceding *CPJ*. I will focus on the theology of Christian Wolff who had been expelled from Halle 1823–1840 because his metaphysics was seen as a mechanization of the world and a reduction of humans to automata akin to Spinozism (Clark 1999). During his exile in Marburg, Wolff (1728, §85) coined *teleologia* as the name for a science that studied the ends of things (*finis rerum explicat*). His physicotheology argued from the purposiveness of mechanistic nature to a God with a purpose. David Hume had attacked the argument from design in his *Dialogues concerning natural religion* that appeared posthumously in 1779. Kant read the *Dialogues* in private translation in 1780 and acquired a copy of the published translation in 1781 (Winegar 2015). Neiman (2001) considers the argument from design to have been an obsession of Kant’s that is often ignored as embarrassing to modern sensibilities.

Kant rejects the arguments of both Wolff and Hume in *CPJ*. Against Wolff he argues that objective teleology can prove nothing about the attributes of God. Against Hume he argues that purposiveness is only thinkable under the presupposition of unity in an original intelligent being that is capable of design. In other words, Kant rejects a Wolffian teleology in which the study of ends provides evidence of God’s intentions (van den Berg 2013) but does not dispute that God has intentions. In the first *Critique*, Kant (1781/1998) rejected all existing proofs for the existence of God but singled out the physicotheological proof as deserving of respect, as the oldest, clearest and most appropriate proof *for common human reason*. *CPJ* substitutes a moral proof of the existence of God but continues to view physicotheology as *suited* to our understanding and as providing *incidental* support to the moral proof. Kant rejects the argument *from design to God* as invalid, but does not reject design. Our understanding cannot prove or reject the absence of design but our reflective power of judgment recognizes design as an *a priori* principle that is not subject to proof or disproof.

Zammito (1992) has made a persuasive case that Herder is the “unnamed antagonist” of most of the *Critique of teleological judgment* (p. 10). That is, when Kant criticizes hylozoism and pantheism (which he equates with a belief in ‘living matter’) it is principally Herder he criticizes. Beyond a bitter personal animosity, what is at stake for Kant is Herder’s advocacy of a teleological nature, of which humans form part, that is one with divinity. This denies distinctions that are important to Kant’s critical philosophy.

My essay interprets *CPJ* as a stand-alone text. A broader analysis would situate *CPJ* in the context of Kant’s evolving attitudes toward religion and morality. It is notable that those sections of *CPJ* that most directly address theology (§79–§91) are labelled an Appendix in the second edition of 1793. There is some evidence that Kant’s understanding of the moral import of evil shifted in the period immediately after the publication of *CPJ* in 1790, culminating in his rejection of all theodicy the following year (Duncan 2012). Gressis (2018) argues that this shift was motivated by a desire to absolve God of blame for evil and to maintain human responsibility. Gressis sees this shift as accompanied by a burgeoning respect for feelings and inclinations. In the second *Critique* (1788) a rational being should wish to be without inclinations but inclinations play a positive role in *Religion within the bounds of bare reason* (1793). This shift is already noticeable in *CPJ* of 1790 in which feelings of pleasure and displeasure play a positive role (Guyer 1990).

The level of design that Kant entertains in *CPJ* can be all encompassing. The world *in its entirety* may be an intended system of purposes, with the uplifting of reason a purpose of that which we experience as sublime and the humbling of the understanding a purpose of that which we experience as beautiful. God’s intentions are objectified in the superhuman art of living things that we judge subjectively as presentations of his goodness and his favor for us. The beautiful and sublime are intended to sustain our moral vocation, but we are not privy to God’s intentions. If nothing in nature occurs in vain, then that must include things we experience as evil. Kant occasionally entertains the possibility that what appears to us as evil may have some hidden purpose. My main text has already alluded to his comments on mutation in §80 and on war in §83. In §85, Kant juxtaposes good and evil (*Gute und Böse*) and the purposive and contraproposive (*Zweckmäßige und Zweckwidrige*) as intimately intermixed in the world and faults the ancients for their polytheism because

“they could not allow themselves to assume for the sake of the arbitrary idea of a most perfect author that there are nevertheless wise and beneficent purposes lying hidden beneath this”. A world without the possibility of evil would not be a moral world. The distinction between possibility and actuality enables our freedom to pursue a world without the actuality of evil. Kant may have believed we exist in the most moral of possible worlds.

Because Kant views the faculties of the mind as an organized whole, the parts of the mind should be mutually self-supporting and exist for the sake of the purposiveness of the whole. Therefore, the *a priori* principle of the reflective power of judgment must support the moral ideas of practical reason. The purposiveness of nature is subjectively certain. Guyer (2009, 2020) has emphasized the teleological nature of Kant’s conception of philosophical method and of the organization of our minds, and that this teleological principle is something that Kant simply assumes (2020, p. 121). In Kant’s critical teleology, according to Guyer (2009, p. 60):

The purpose that we must suppose to underlie all of nature including our own human nature is not an unknowable divine purpose, but the purpose of our own realization of the primary and secondary objects of morality itself. (2009, p. 60)

At this point, Guyer’s and my interpretations deviate. I do not see this as a choice of one or the other but as an antinomy in which Kant wishes us to accept both the thesis (an unknowable divine purpose) and the antithesis (a knowable purpose in the realization of our morality). As Kant argues in §80, against Hume, the existence of purposiveness can only be understood as arising from a unity of ground in a simple substance present at the origin. Kant never wavers in his ascription of intelligence and intentions to an original understanding that is ultimately responsible for purposiveness in the world including the purposiveness of our cognitive faculties. Kant summarily dismisses Epicureanism as absurd and rejects Spinozism because the latter’s doctrine of absolute necessity eliminates all contingency from the world. For Kant, contingency is either blind chance (Epicureanism) or the contingency of choice which necessitates an intentional agent.

One of Kant’s abiding concerns is the relation between necessity and contingency. With respect to our cognitive faculties, Kant contrasts the *objective*

contingency of possible minds to the *subjective necessity* of our actual mind. We could have been given an *intellectus archetypus* rather than an *intellectus ectypus* and if we had possessed such a mind we would *necessarily* have seen the world differently. An obvious extension of the idea of different possible minds would have been to consider different actual minds as coexisting in the world. Such an approach would have greatly simplified the resolution of the antinomy of aesthetic judgment: our differences in personal taste could simply reflect differences in our minds. Different *a priori* principles would correspond to a giver of minds who gave each of us a different mind. Each mind would be *subjectively necessary* for itself but *objectively contingent* for other minds. However, this would be a world without unity of purpose and unity was a desideratum of great importance to Kant. Moreover, such a hypothesis would have opened a path to aesthetic and moral relativism in which what is good or beautiful for me need not be good or beautiful for you. Finally, such a hypothesis would have called into question the premises of a transcendental philosophy that derived the conditions

Declarations

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

for the possibility of knowledge from the *a priori* contents of a singular human cognition.

CPJ affirms the nature of the subject. The objective world is presented in subjective experience and understood by the subject. A subjective principle can be as certain as if it were an objective principle. Our subjectivity is necessary *for us* and enables us to think objectively of other subjects.

Acknowledgments

The manuscript has benefited from comments of Helmut Muller-Sievers, Paul Guyer, Richard Bondi, Lucas Mix and Jeff Lipshaw.

Footnotes

¹ The word translated as trace [*Spur*] is cognate with spoor, the tracks of an animal being hunted. The only other use of *Wink* in *CPJ* occurs in §72 where nature hints that the grounds of its purposiveness lie outside of nature.