

# Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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## Abstract

**R**ecent scholarship examines the primary achievement of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in terms of empirical cognition, identifying a primitive claim in aesthetic judgment that entitles us to consider our responses to objects as having a normative relation to them. This reading locates an important insight in the third *Critique* for post-Fregean epistemology. Yet it does so by bracketing Kant's account of aesthetic experience from the practical context of the critical project. In this paper I situate Kant's account of aesthetic normativity in his response to the speculative questions arising from reason's practical interest. This reading shows that aesthetic judgment does not simply ascribe normativity to nature in ourselves but also to nature as a whole. I conclude that questions of cognitive normativity cannot be bracketed from a holistic account of humans as ends-creating, interested creatures.

## Introduction

**K**ant's analysis of aesthetic experience in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* opens his critical project to a hitherto unobserved *a priori* that does not ground a body of knowledge, as do the *a priori* principles of the first and second *Critiques*, but a special capacity for contemplation that is not governed by the interests of cognition. While Kant (1967, 128) acknowledges that this capacity is "least rich in *a priori* grounds of determination," he nevertheless insists that it completes the critical project by providing a way to harmonize the theoretical and practical bodies of knowledge. What is remarkable about Kant's

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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investigation is that the task of completing the critical project is examined as a matter of our capacity to appreciate beauty and understand organic life. This capacity is based on the sense of “quickenning” or “enlivenment” (*Belebung*) we feel as we are opened to a living world in harmony with our cognitive faculties. Kant suggests that there is something about our aesthetic capacity to judge without interest – and to feel ourselves as living beings – that promotes the distinct functions of the two interested uses of reason.

That Kant’s third *Critique* actually completes the critical project is a matter of contention. Some interpreters have considered Kant’s systematic ambition to be disingenuous, suggesting that the third *Critique* does not present a unified system of knowledge but two distinct regions of empirical experience (see Beck 1969 and Guyer 1979). In the past two decades, however, an increasing number of scholars have defended Kant’s systematic achievement. This is in part due to Hannah Ginsborg’s extensive work on Kant’s critique of taste. Ginsborg argues that while the *a priori* principle of aesthetic judgment cannot be known by cognition, it grounds a primitive claim that entitles us to consider our responses to objects that affect our senses as having a normative relation to them. She aims to provide an account of normativity in Kant that does not depend on moral normativity but rather self-referentially grounds itself in relation to aesthetic experience.

Ginsborg’s account of normativity has made significant inroads into our understanding of Kant’s project as a self-grounding system. Yet by focusing entirely on the cognitive implications of Kant’s discovery, it succeeds at the expense of bracketing out the role of reason’s practical interest in Kant’s investigation. My aim in this paper is to situate Kant’s account of the self-referential nature of aesthetic claims within his broader attempt to meet reason’s speculative need for a unified system that arises from its practical interest. This is not to reject Ginsborg’s contemporary application of Kant’s work but rather to show that his account of normativity has *more* to bear on contemporary

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philosophy than Ginsborg claims. Not only does it identify self-referential normativity independent of practical interest but it also problematizes the primacy granted to epistemology in post-Fregean philosophy, demonstrating that the exclusive focus on empirical cognition brackets out the very possibility of accounting for normativity in the first place. While practical philosophy cannot answer theoretical questions about nature, neither can it be reduced to theoretical philosophy.

I begin by considering Ginsborg's account of Kant's argument in the third *Critique* to clarify what I take to be her emphasis on the cognitive implications of Kant's discovery. To show that a broader reading of Kant's argument better captures his account of aesthetic experience, I then turn to the first two *Critiques* to identify the motivation for Kant's third investigation. I suggest that the speculative need to harmonize theoretical and practical reason – the project of the third *Critique* – opens to us as matter of practical interest. In section three I show that the impossibility of meeting this interest within theoretical experience leads Kant to search for a ground outside the theoretical and practical spheres in the feeling of vitality that grounds judgments of beauty. In the final section I argue that this solution establishes the feeling of vitality as an ultimate end that prepares us for the exercise of freedom, that is, for ends-creating action. The primitive claim to normativity that grounds both aesthetic and cognitive judgments opens itself to us through a cultural project of freedom.

### The primitive claim

Ginsborg provides one of the most original and influential accounts of Kant's work that connects the two parts of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and situates its argument in the broader critical project. She suggests that Kant's driving concern in the third *Critique* is to unite aesthetic experience and our perception of life under a single account of empirical cognition. The transcendental

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analysis of our faculties of cognition in the first *Critique* does not give the thinker, in epistemic contexts, sufficient justification to move from “it looks this way” to the judgment that “it *is* this way”; from merely *perceiving* something in a certain way to a *belief* that it is such a way (Ginsborg 2014, 4). Kant’s project is to discover how such justification might be found.

Ginsborg argues that this project is repeated in contemporary discussions of the conceptual content of sensibility in post-Fregean philosophy. Building from Kant, philosophers such as Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell, and Christopher Peacock reject the traditional subject-object view of thinking, which holds that a judgment “that things are thus and so” is correct on the basis that things *really are* thus and so. The traditional view fails, they claim, for while our experience is made up of perceptible facts, that “things are thus and so” cannot appear to us as such a fact. This critique is fundamentally Kantian. However, such scholars reject the “subjectivism” that leads Kant to insist on the non-natural status of practical reason, which owes nothing to our empirical natures and issues commands based on its own authority. Thus understood, Kant’s conception of nature is entirely disenchanted and conceptual content must be somehow projected onto it. Yet this account can give us no reason to expect that nature would answer to reason. Thus what Kant considered in terms of faculty philosophy is instead cast as the epistemological problem of grounding our belief that things are thus and so in thoroughgoing connection with nature. Sellars (1956, 298-9) makes a significant contribution to this end, introducing the notion of a “logical space of reasons” that, while distinct from nature, allows us to characterize “a state as that as *knowing*” based on being able to give reasons for what one is saying. McDowell (1994, 115-116) builds on Sellars’ space of reasons and aims to connect it to the first-order sphere of nature by appealing to the normative intentionality of sense-experience. He argues that it is our *nature* to orient ourselves in a world through reasoning and explaining our actions to

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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each other. The space of reasons is thus an extension of nature, a “second nature” in continuity with the first order.

While McDowell shows that a normative context is necessary for our being in touch with nature at all, it remains unclear what is meant by “nature” and how it is continuous with the space of reasons. As Robert Pippin (2002: 69) notes, McDowell relies on the teleological language of “actualizing” our nature to explain this connection. Such language is “idle,” according to Pippin, more an “exaggerated complaint than a substantive point.” For Ginsborg, McDowell’s rejection of subjectivism entails that the continuity between normativity and nature *cannot* be explained, for it excludes the possibility of accounting for how a claim of reason can become part of the fabric of nature. Ginsborg returns to Kant’s for a solution, claiming that Kant himself recognized the problem of normativity and thus altered his earlier account of nature. On her reading, the third *Critique* serves to justify our perceiving something *as being* thus and so by accounting for our awareness of our “own appropriateness to the object perceived” (Ginsborg 2014, 183). Kant’s goal is thus to explain the part of our way of perceiving things in which we take *ourselves* to be perceiving them as we *ought*. This “ought” is the normativity of cognitive claims: if cognition is to be possible, Ginsborg (2014, 4) states, “our natural perceptual and imaginative responses to the world must incorporate a primitive claim to their own normativity; a claim which, while legitimate, is not itself cognitive, and does not admit of cognitive justification.” While this primitive claim is not itself cognitive, it entitles us to rely on our cognition, to take that our responses to objects which affect our senses stand in normative relation to them. Ginsborg’s claim is that Kant’s account of reflective judgment succeeds without departing from what McDowell calls “subjectivism,” for it grounds “the possibility of taste ... on the same a priori principle which [Kant] takes to underlie empirical scientific enquiry” (Ginsborg 1990, 63). Thus Ginsborg (2014, 3) concludes that Kant contributes “to the understanding of judgement not

Andrew Cooper

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just in the special sense of discerning aesthetic value or suitability of a purpose, but in the sense relevant to the fundamental question of how cognition is possible.”

For reasons that will become important later, Ginsborg is not concerned with giving an account of the origin of this primitive claim but with showing us how it grounds the possibility of cognition. Her approach is to begin with the critique of taste, particularly with §9, and then to read Kant’s normative claim back into the account of cognition given in the first *Critique*. In the following sections I proceed inversely: I begin from the first *Critique* to show that while Kant provides several missing pieces to his earlier account of empirical cognition, this features as a part of a broader speculative question that springs from the interested character of cognition. Ginsborg isolates Kant’s account of *empirical* cognition from the systematic context of the critical project, presumably because she too takes issue with Kant’s non-natural account of practical reason. In what follows I argue that Kant’s attempt to account for how practical reason – our non-natural, interested commitment to an end or ideal – can become a part of the fabric of nature leads to his discovery of the primitive claim.

### The interest of reason

One of Kant’s great discoveries in the critical project is that humans are interested creatures. They are not merely subject to the laws of nature but possess the capacity to determine their own ends according to the interested principles of reason. What then is the relation between this self-governing capacity and the general governance ascribed to nature? In McDowell’s reading, Kant cannot provide a satisfactory answer. Because practical freedom is necessarily distinct from disenchanted nature, Kant reproduces the incapacity of traditional philosophy to account for the relation between conceptual content and objects. This critique leads McDowell to propose that human normativity is an extension of natural purposiveness.

Andrew Cooper

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In this section I examine Kant's account of human interest to claim that McDowell is only partly right. While the separation of normative agency and nature is indeed problematic, Kant recognises this problem and sets out to find a way of conceiving the *normativity of nature*, to use Ginsborg's words.

In *Critique of Pure Reason* (Bix-x) Kant outlines what I will call a "static" account of the cognitive faculties based on the fact that reason relates to its object in two ways.<sup>1</sup> What I mean by "static" will become clear in the next section; for now let me say that his method is *reflective*, involving a disinterested analysis of reason's interest. Theoretical reason relates to its object by "*determining* the object and its concept," and constitutes the faculty of cognition. Practical reason involves "*making* the object actual," and constitutes the faculty of desire. Each form of reason is governed by a distinct interest, "a principle that contains the condition under which alone the power's exercise is furthered" (*CPrR*, 5:119). These principles are, to use Ginsborg's term, *normative*; they guide how cognition *ought* to operate. They do not come from nature or any external power but are self-instituted by reason, which is the superior "power of principles."

In Kant's rational topography, the different modes in which cognition relates to its object must be thought about in distinct ways. From the vantage of theoretical reason we are required to consider the world as a law governed system, where every event has a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for its existence. From the vantage of practical reason we are required to presuppose a world of freedom in which it is possible for the subject to derive and follow their own laws. While these two ways of conceiving the world seem contradictory, Kant famously argues that we must keep them separate. Philosophy must be rethought not as the

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<sup>1</sup> Citations to *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the customary A/B page numbers from the first and second editions. Citations to *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of the Power of Judgment* are to Volumes 4 and 5 of *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe. Translations quoted are from the Cambridge University Press editions.

process of “discovering truth” but as “the determination of boundaries” (A796/B824). Once these boundaries have been established, the highest objects of philosophy – the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God – cannot be attained by speculation (A798/B826). And nor do we need them, for they are not necessary for the purposes of knowing. Yet the question that haunts critical philosophy is that if the highest objects are not necessary for knowing, why does reason endlessly strive toward them? Speculative reason is not content with the bifurcated settlement but continues to strive for “the completion of its circle in self-subsisting systematic whole” (A798/B862). To navigate this impasse Kant claims that because “these three cardinal propositions are not at all necessary for our knowing,” that is, for the theoretical use of reason, “their importance must really concern only the practical” (A799/B827).

By identifying the proper domain of the speculative questions of reason in terms of the practical, Kant establishes that while speculative philosophy is unable to satisfy the questions it raises for itself, another experiment lies open to us that might yield results. This experiment considers whether reason’s practical interest might be able to “guarantee that which in regard to its speculative interest it entirely refuses to us” (A804/B832). To undertake this experiment, Kant identifies that the entire interest of reason is united in the three questions, “What can I know?,” “What should I do?,” and “What may I hope?” (A805/B833). The first question is theoretical, and is answered by Kant’s analysis of cognition. The second is practical, and belongs to Kant’s analysis of reason. The third question, however, is “simultaneously practical and theoretical,” and thus lies at the heart of reason’s speculative concern. Because the practical and theoretical arise simultaneously in the question of hope, and because the practical gives us “pure” access to reason, Kant concludes that “the practical leads like a clue to a reply to the theoretical question, and, in its highest form, the speculative question.”

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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The question “What can I hope?” concerns our capacity to realise ideals and meanings in the natural order. Kant aims to provide an answer by stressing the priority of practical over theoretical reason. He first notes that we cannot answer the question by viewing the dictates of practical reason *as* theoretical reason. Theoretical reason operates on the principle that “something *is* ... *because something does happen*” (A805/B833). Thus if we view practical reason as constitutive in the same way that we must think of theoretical reason, then to think the moral principles of reason would be to produce them as laws of nature. This, for Kant, is impossible, for the constitutive power of reason is limited to God’s cognition. If, on the other hand, we understand the practical use of reason as regulative, and thus separate from the theoretical use of reason, we discover that it contains several principles of the possibility of experience that are unavailable to theoretical reason; in particular, “the inference that something *is* ... *because something ought to happen*.” This inference aims to draw the practical and theoretical together, for it entails that if practical reason shows us that something *ought* to happen, then it must be *able* to happen. Kant argues that while *ought* cannot imply what is, it can imply what *can*; this implication is a transcendental presupposition of practical reason. The normativity of practical reason makes possible a special kind of systematic unity – a *possible* unity – even if it does not satisfy the kind of proof that theoretical reason seeks.

Kant takes the notion of possible unity to answer the question of hope: if I behave in such a way as to be worthy of happiness, *how may I hope thereby to partake of it?* (A809/B837). Underpinning this question is the desire to *know* whether the principles of practical reason – in particular, the idea of the moral world – are necessarily connected with our hope for happiness; whether our practical efforts are guaranteed a happy reward. If we ground the connection between the hope of happiness and the sensible existence of the moral world, then the connection cannot be one of necessity. Such a system of self-rewarding morality, Kant

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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observes, “is only an idea, the realisation of which rests on the condition that everyone do what he should” (A810/B839). How, then, can we hope to be happy if we act morally in a world that is presented to us in such a way that is indifferent to the moral law? Kant’s answer is that we cannot think that the consequences of our just actions will result in happiness because of “the nature of things in the world.” In other words, the necessary connection between the hope of being happy and our moral effort “cannot be cognised through reason.” Rather, it may be hoped for only if we consider reason to be “grounded on a highest reason, which commands in accordance with moral laws, as at the same time the cause of nature.” Thus Kant concludes that “God and a future life are two presuppositions that are not to be separated from the obligation that pure reason imposes on us” (A811/B839).

Kant’s answer to reason’s speculative question is that theoretical reason must accept practical reason’s interest over its own. In *Critique of Practical Reason* he is more explicit in regards to the priority of practical reason’s interest. His goal is not simply to identify a possible passage between the two spheres of philosophy but to ground the interest of theoretical reason on the “primacy” of practical reason’s interest. Kant defines primacy as “the preeminence of the interest of one thing insofar as to this [interest] (which cannot be put second to any others) the interest of the others is subordinated” (5:119). Because theoretical reason is limited to the faculties of sensibility and understanding, it can tell us nothing of ultimate ends nor establish the unity of the theoretical and practical spheres. Practical reason, on the other hand, is separated from our “pathological conditions,” that is, our inclinations (5:120), and thus embodies reason’s pure interest.

Kant’s argument is that the purity of practical reason warrants its preeminence over theoretical reason. When theoretical reason acknowledges that “these same propositions [such as freedom, the existence of God, and the future] belong *inseparably to the practical interest* of pure

reason, it [theoretical reason] must assume them” (5:121). Note Kant’s use of the imperative mood. Despite the necessary boundary between the two spheres of reason, the theoretical use of reason *must* accept that the imperatives of practical reason are “sufficiently authenticated,” and “seek to compare and connect them with everything that it has in its power as speculative reason.” Here Kant goes beyond the claim that we can presuppose God and the afterlife that he made in *Critique of Pure Reason*, and calls a proposition borrowed from practical reason a “postulate.” A postulate is not merely a practical assumption but also “a *theoretical* proposition, though one not one provable as such, insofar as it attaches inseparably to a practical law that holds *a priori* [and] unconditionally” (5:122). The transfer of practical imperatives to the theoretical sphere turns them into authenticated propositions. Thus theoretical reason may accept the postulates of God, freedom, and immortality as “a foreign offering not grown on its own soil” (5:120) without violating the limits it sets for speculative reason.

Kant’s appeal to the primacy of practical reason has, since its initial reception, failed to convince. His earliest critic Karl Leonhard Reinhold argued that critical philosophy fails to live up to its own ideal of science, which requires that our “cognitions cannot at all constitute a rhapsody but must constitute a system, which alone can support and advance its essential ends” (A831/B860). Reinhold (2005, 42) insists that without a self-referential, “fundamental principle” (*Grundsatz*) that “imparts determination and internal coherence to all the metaphysical doctrinal principles,” Kant’s two-part “system” is no system at all. Contemporary readers are often less generous than Reinhold and judge Kant on naturalist grounds. From a naturalist point of view the requirement to subordinate theoretical to practical ideals does nothing to harmonize normativity and nature but simply reinforces the divide. It is no wonder that those who turn to Kant often bracket out the practical motivations of his project and focus instead on his account of empirical cognition.

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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In what follows I suggest that Kant's account of the normativity in aesthetic experience is intelligible only in the context of his broader systematic concerns. My aim is to show that Kant's turn to aesthetic experience demonstrates a shift in his understanding of the relation between the theoretical and the practical spheres. It is precisely Kant's search for an alternative to the subordination of the theoretical to the practical that opens his critical project to the self-referential normative claim in aesthetic experience.

### Aesthetic experience

Reinhold's critique gives a clue to Kant's project in the third *Critique*. In December 1787, a few weeks before the publication of *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant wrote to Reinhold in response to Reinhold's critique of his two-part system, stating his intention to write a third critique in order to remedy a shortcoming he had discovered in his earlier work. Kant (1967, 175-176) presents this new line of inquiry as a scientific discovery, informing Reinhold that the process of looking back over his critical project led him "to discover elucidations [he] had not expected." In the Second Introduction of the third *Critique*, Kant explains that his discovery provides a way to bridge the "incalculable gulf" that stands between "the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible" (5:175-176). Kant invites the reader to stand before the divide between theoretical and practical reason once more. Yet the "ought" of practical reason does not require the acceptance of theoretical reason but instead opens a new investigation. Because freedom *should* be realized in the sensible world, Kant reasons that there *must* be a way to conceive of nature "in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom" (5:176). Yet Kant's "ought implies can" connection – the requisite assumption of practical reason – does not *ground*

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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but rather *governs* the investigation into the faculty of judgment toward a search “the transition from the manner of thinking in accordance with the principles of the one to that in accordance with the principles of the other.” Kant proposes to find an intermediate principle between theoretical and practical reason that could govern their exchange. Yet how could such a principle be made present to us?

Kant’s investigation does not identify a principle in the way Reinhold anticipated, that is, a *philosophical* principle that could complete philosophy in human thought. Rather, it modifies the way we understand the operation of the two existing principles through a first-order experience, one that precedes philosophical reflection. While Kant makes it clear that his method is again transcendental rather than historical or cultural, he views the problem of the incalculable gulf as the result of the second-order, reflective starting point of critical philosophy. While the reflective starting point is very powerful in providing a topography of the mind’s faculties, it results in what I have called a “static” presentation. We are unable to say anything of their purpose, end, or normative relation to their environment. To bridge the gulf, Kant searches for an alternative way of thinking that would enable his analysis to inquire into the “purposive structure” (*zweckmäßiges Gebäude*) of cognition, that is, how the faculties together might be considered as having normative continuity with nature itself. For Ginsborg, this purposive structure is the heart of Kant’s systematic concern in the third *Critique*, for it identifies a self-referential source of normativity capable of completing the analysis of empirical cognition in the first *Critique*. Yet if my analysis is correct, the purposiveness of cognition, while having implications for empirical cognition, opens itself to us as practical, interested creatures; creatures for whom the speculative questions about nature do not go away. Even our expectation that there *ought* to be a normative relation is, for Kant, an outworking of the ends-directed structure of human cognition.

Andrew Cooper

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I will now give a sketch of Kant's explanation of how aesthetic experience yields an *a priori* principle. This argument is famously complex, and I do not hope to do justice to it here. Instead, I aim to draw out the importance of *interest* in Kant's examination of aesthetic judgment, and how the *lack of interest* that we experience in the feeling of vitality that undergirds judgments of beauty grounds his response to practical reason's demand. Through laying out the argument in the following way, my aim is to show that the claim to normativity that undergirds judgments of purpose is opened through practical knowledge of ourselves as purposive creatures, something we discover through acting. The constitutive parts of judgments of beauty can be laid out as follows:

1. Judgments of beauty are disinterested
2. We are aware of this disinterest because they ground an experience of the "feeling of life" (*Lebensgefühl*), which cannot appear to the interested uses of cognition
3. *Lebensgefühl* is a subjective feeling of pleasure that is universally communicable. Thus it makes available a new transcendental deduction
4. As a subjective feeling of pleasure, *Lebensgefühl* cannot be the ground of the judgment. It can only be the product. Thus it must be universal communicability that is the ground
5. This universality pertains to the free play of imagination and understanding. This free play precisely *is* the feeling of enlivenment
6. The free play of imagination and understanding results in their mutual agreement and enhancement, and is experienced as "purposiveness without a purpose"
7. Purposiveness without a purpose is an experience of ourselves as organic beings who are a part of nature

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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8. Recognising ourselves as a part of nature involves an analogy between seeing normativity in ourselves (practical reason) and seeing normativity in nature

Let us walk through each step in turn.

1. Kant begins his investigation into the purposive structure of cognition by stressing the difference between determinant judgments and a new kind of judgment he calls “aesthetic.” This difference must be understood through the notion of interest I outlined in the previous section. While determinant judgments are interested, aesthetic judgments are indifferent to their object; they are “disinterested” (§2). As we will see shortly, it is precisely because such judgments pertain to no interest of our own that we can move from our subjective feeling of pleasure to the expectation that *any* judger would experience the object in the same way (this does not, however, entail that disinterest is the ground of the judgment).

2. Instead of taking an interest in the existence of an object, aesthetic judgments are contemplative, meaning that the object is not determined but rather features as an occasion for a non-cognitive process in which “the representation is related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life [*Lebensgefühl*].” Aesthetic judgments thus turn on a different economy to judgments of determinants, for the representation is not related to an object but entirely to the subject. They contribute “nothing to cognition” but “only hold ... the given representation in the subject up to the entire faculty of representation, of which the mind becomes conscious in the feeling of its state” (5:204). By “feeling its state” in *Lebensgefühl*, the judger becomes aware of the particular structure of her faculty of representation; she becomes aware that the judgment is related “solely to the subject (its feeling)” and yet is extendable across the whole sphere of those who judge.

3. Thus judgments of beauty take the following form: they do not determine an object and yet claim universal status. We do not judge *Lebensgefühl* to be a merely

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subjective pleasure but a pleasure that is universally communicable; we do not direct our claim vertically to an object of cognition but horizontally to the community of judges. Because it is not immediately clear how a non-conceptual judgment can be in any sense universal, universality is thus the “curiosity” or “strangeness” (*Merkwürdigkeit*) of aesthetic judgment. The universal structure of such a judgment cannot come *from* experience, for experience cannot yield an *a priori*. For the transcendental philosopher, the universality of aesthetic judgment opens a new transcendental deduction: “the discovery of the origin [that is, the *a priori*] ... reveals a property of our faculty of cognition that without this analysis would have remained unknown” (5:213). This is because the *a priori* is only available to us through aesthetic experience and not through the reflective method of the first two *Critiques*.

4. To explain the non-cognitive universality of aesthetic judgment, Kant establishes that the pleasure we experience in aesthetic judgment – *Lebensgefühl* – is not the ground of the judgment (see §9). Paul Guyer (1979, 110-116) insists that Kant is not here referring to the act of judging the object to be beautiful, but rather to a prior exercise of the cognitive faculties which give rise to the feeling of pleasure. Thus our judgment of beauty is based on the pleasure itself. Guyer’s account is often referred to as the “two-act theory,” for it first involves the act of free play and second a reflection that the free play serves a subjective purpose. Yet as Béatrice Longuenesse (2009, 275) notes, if the pleasure of the given object came first, and if universal communicability were attributed to the judgment, then our claim would be contradictory. We would be making the claim that such a judgment depended on the representation of an object that is *given*, and yet the pleasure we find in a given object can only contain a merely private validity. Thus we could not claim that this judgment is universal; we would have no principle by which to extend from our subjective experience to a universal claim. Longuenesse stresses that the only way to conceive of the universal communicability of judgments



of beauty is to see the causality the other way around: the pleasure we experience in the object must be a *consequence* while the universal capacity for the communication of the state of mind must serve as the ground (5:217).

Longuenesse is right to stress Kant's precise elaboration of the causality of judgments of taste. However, as Ginsborg establishes, this is merely how we must *think* of aesthetic judgments as we reflect on the universality of our claim. While she also notes that the act of judgment precedes the feeling of pleasure – that “I feel pleasure in the object by virtue of making the judgment” – Ginsborg (1990, 74) notes that, phenomenologically, “the judgment does not precede the pleasure in time.” Thus there is only *one* act in judgments of beauty: to feel the pleasure in the object is just what it is to make the judgment. The pleasure is *consequent* on the universal validity of my mental state “in the sense that it is the consciousness or awareness of my mental state as universally valid” (ibid.).

5. The universality grounding aesthetic judgments lies in the communicability of the state of mind (*der Gemütszustand*) we experience in the relation of the powers of representation to each other “as they relate a given representation to cognition in general” (5:217). The powers of representation Kant refers to are the imagination and the understanding; the imagination composes the manifold of intuition in such a way that prepares it for the application of concepts while the understanding provides the conceptual structure that unifies the representations. Rather than the determinate economy we find in cognition, where understanding unifies the manifold of intuitions provided by the imagination under a concept, judgments of taste turn on an economy of “free play,” since “no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition.”

6. This step in Kant's argument has led to the most extensive debate amongst his critics. The first thing to stress is that free play is useless; it is without end or purpose. Because it is concepts that govern our application of ends, we can thus conclude that there is no concept involved in the

judgment of beauty (§10). However, because this free play *enlivens* our cognitive capacities, we discover that the object that occasioned the state of free play serves a *subjective* purpose. How could this enlivenment be in any sense purposive? Let us turn to Kant's account:

The powers of cognition that are set into play by this representation are hereby in a free play, since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition. Thus the state of mind in this representation must be that of a feeling of the free play of the powers of representation in a given representation for a cognition in general. (5:217)

While the disinterested pleasure does not involve a characteristic activity of either imagination or understanding, Kant states that it concerns "cognition in general." As we will see, the cognitive implications of Kant's claim can be taken in several ways. What is important to note is that the feeling we experience as the facilitated play of both powers of the mind "enlivens" (*belebten*) our cognition as a whole through their "mutual agreement" (5:219). This mutual agreement consists in a representation that is "singular and without comparison to others" (imagination), and nevertheless "is in agreement with the conditions of universality" (understanding). In other words, the imagination gives an object without a concept, and the understanding contributes the notion of universality. However, nothing is actually determined. Rather, the two faculties of cognition come into "the well-proportioned disposition that we require for all cognition" (*ibid.*). There is no external purpose involved, for there is no concept, and yet we discover the object to be *subjectively purposive*: we judge the object to be "purposive without a purpose."

In what sense is the object judged to be "purposive"? For Paul Guyer, the purpose becomes evident when we consider the free play of the faculties in terms of the first two stages of the threefold synthesis in the Transcendental Deduction in

Andrew Cooper

Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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*Critique of Pure Reason*: it involves the synthesis of apprehension in intuition and the synthesis of reproduction in imagination, but no synthesis of recognition in a concept. Because the two powers are enhanced and enlivened to their possibilities, we reflect that the experience contributes toward the goal of cognition in general: “the acquisition and possession of knowledge” (Guyer 1979, 85). Thus the harmony of the faculties alerts us to our power of our unification of our manifolds in intuition, and thus fulfils the goal of cognition, understood from a subjective point of view.

As both Ginsborg (1991) and Longuenesse (2009) have pointed out, Guyer’s account cannot be right for at least two reasons. Firstly, Guyer implies that it is ultimately for the purpose of improving cognition that the free play of the faculties constitutes a subjective purpose. This violates Kant’s entire claim that the free play of the faculties is merely “indeterminately purposive” (5:242) and thus remains “without any purpose” (5:221). Secondly, Guyer’s two-act account implies that the second reflective act is based on the pleasure of the free play. This contradicts Kant’s account of the pleasure, which stresses that the aesthetic judging of the object “precedes the pleasure in it, and is the ground of this pleasure in the harmony of the faculties of cognition; but on that universality of the subjective conditions of the judging of the objects alone is this universal subjective validity of satisfaction ... grounded” (5:218). Kant insists that the judgment precedes the pleasure, and that the universality is grounded on this judgment alone.

Against Guyer, Ginsborg builds her account on Kant’s notion of the universality of subjective conditions. She claims that the free play of the faculties is not dependant on Kant’s previous analysis of cognition, but rather shows us precisely how that account of cognition is possible at all. This claim stresses that Kant’s account of universality is self-referential: it is simply the pleasure we feel in the free play of the faculties that we take to be normative, which is

Andrew Cooper

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its own claim. The act of self-referentially taking one's mental state in an object to be universally valid with respect to that object "manifests an activity that is required for all cognition," namely the exemplary nature of our claims, but does not fulfil any predetermined end (Ginsborg 2014, 46). The structure of aesthetic claims anticipates the normative dimension underpinning Kant's analysis of judgments of experience, thereby providing a way of understanding the normativity of *any* claim. By separating the pleasure from cognition's goal, and stressing the cognitive significance of free play, Ginsborg's account does not explain the ground of the pleasure. Her point is precisely that to articulate a ground would be to psychologize aesthetic taste, pointing to a process that builds from an empirical experience to our supposedly universal claim. Instead, Ginsborg (2014, 50) stresses that the ground lies entirely in the fact that the experience of an object of pleasure carries with it both the "pleasure" and "the awareness that one's experience is universally valid."

I agree with Ginsborg that, because the harmonisation of the understanding and imagination cannot appear as cognition for the reason that there is no object to be represented, the subjective unity of the relation can only make itself known through sensation. This is what Kant describes as the "enlivening" of the faculties; the free play of imagination and understanding makes us feel fully alive, part of nature (5:219). Yet against Ginsborg I take this sense of enlivenment in the context of Kant's broader project in the third *Critique*. Enlivenment, I will suggest, does not constitute a primitive claim, that is, one that is entirely self-referential. Rather, it answers Kant's *speculative* question by grounding the normative connection between cognition and nature. This does not entail that the ground of aesthetic judgment is really, all along, practical reason. Kant's account is as radical as Ginsborg wants to make out, yet it does not bypass the practical. Rather, the disinterested state of mind that produces *Lebensgefühl* entails an experience of ourselves as organic beings who share an end with nature. It is

Andrew Cooper

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this feeling of being alive, *of participating in the goal of life*, that allows practical reason to harmonize with cognition and for us to discover normativity *in nature*. Our feeling of being alive entails a primitive claim that grounds the cognitive expectation that nature expresses itself in comprehensible form. This connection between ourselves and nature can be understood in the following two ways.

7. Ginsborg stresses one side of the connection, drawing our attention to how we experience nature, the domain that occasioned such an experience, as normative to the extent that it harmonizes with the ends of our cognitive faculties. The principle of aesthetic judgment entitles us to take that our responses to objects that affect our senses stand in normative relation to them.

8. However, this experience does not stand alone. Rather, it engages a prior experience of *ourselves* as purposive beings. Aesthetic judgments entail an experience of ourselves as harmonized, living beings, both cognitive and practical. Simply put, to recognize ourselves as a part of nature involves an analogy between seeing normativity in ourselves and seeing normativity in nature. We can cash out this analogy as follows:

- 8.1. What it is to see ourselves as normative beings is that we see ourselves as willing beings
- 8.2. We take a particular object to be beautiful on the grounds that it appears to us as normative; that is, as if it were the product of a will that intends to enliven our cognitive faculties
- 8.3. Thus the experience of *Lebensgefühl* grounds the experience of ourselves as willing beings and hence as moral beings

8.1. Kant makes it clear that there is “only a single sort of beings whose causality is teleological” (5:435), namely, the human being. This teleology is only available to us from the experience of ourselves as agents in possession of a will. On the basis of our inner constitution we can “cognize” a

supersensible faculty (freedom) and the object that consists the highest end: the highest good.

8.2. Aesthetic judgment, which takes the form of purposiveness *without* a purpose, is made possible through an analogy with the will. We judge the tendency of the representation of an object to enliven our cognitive faculties as the product of a will that has arranged it so (§10). Ginsborg underemphasizes this aspect of Kant's account, for she overemphasizes the self-referential nature of aesthetic claims to the extent that the object ceases to play a role in the judgment. She is correct to the extent that we do not determine nature as having a will, that no end is actually cognized. Yet because the understanding provides no concept of purposiveness, it is only possible to consider the purposiveness of an object in nature by deriving its causality through an analogy with a purposiveness we do know:

An object or a state of mind or even an action, however, even if its possibility does not necessarily presuppose the representation of an end, 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 ends, i.e., a will that has arranged it so in accordance with the representation of a certain rule. (5:220)

Kant concludes that purposiveness “can thus exist without an end, 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” (ibid.). Thus we do not judge the object to be beautiful on the grounds that it *is* the product of a will, but rather that it appears to us *as if* it were the product of a will that intends to enliven our cognitive faculties. This ground is confirmed by the fact that we “linger” (*weilen*) over the consideration of the beautiful (5:222); we seek to maintain this state of representation of the mind because this consideration “strengthens and reproduces itself.” This is precisely what pleasure

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Interested Creatures: Kant on normativity and nature

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is: the “consciousness of the causality of a representation with respect to the state of the subject, *for maintaining* it in that state” (5:220). To feel pleasure is to be impelled by our representation of an object to continue in that mental state. Thus it is pleasure that opens us to the means-end relation in the first place. Such a pleasure is life affirming and promotes the continuity of life.

8.3. The remarkable discovery of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is that pleasure opens us to an *a priori* through its very capacity to affirm and promote life. This is apparent to us in a way that provides no further ground in the *Lebensgefühl*. The *a priori* does not only ground our capacity for aesthetic judgment but also for grasping ourselves as practical and cognitive beings. Beauty opens us to ourselves as whole subjects who are part of nature, which we are then able to judge as a fitting home for our cognitive and practical endeavours. To be a part of nature is to see purposiveness in nature and in ourselves.

## The Methodology

**K**ant’s argument is that in aesthetic judgment the cognitive powers are exercised through creative play, allowing us to grasp them as structured in the form of a purposive whole. The transcendental topography we find in *Critique of Pure Reason* is experienced as dynamic and cohesive as theoretical and practical reason find their purpose in the subject’s feeling of vitality. In Ginsborg’s (2014, 6) account this is the summit of Kant’s achievement: Kant shows how we are entitled “to ascribe normativity to nature in ourselves, in the form of our own natural responses to perceptually given objects.” Ginsborg is right to highlight Kant’s attempt to show that we are entitled to ascribe to our natural capacity to judge a normative status. Yet because she brackets this insight from Kant’s speculative inquiry, she overlooks the fact that the normativity in aesthetic experience governs the transition from ascribing normativity to nature in ourselves to

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ascribing normativity to nature *as such*. While aesthetic normativity is indeed primitive, it harmonizes with the prior experience of ourselves as practical agents and warrants the transition to our conception of nature as a whole.

Kant examines the connection between aesthetic judgment and practical philosophy in the final section of the third *Critique* entitled Methodology of the Teleological Power of Judgment. His goal is to show how his account of reflective teleology opens a concept of nature that is not disinterested to our purposiveness but stands in genuine union with it. This section is often overlooked, largely because it includes a sustained reflection on the first cause and design arguments for God's existence and returns to the concept of the final end, which, if we were to approach the text for a naturalized account of empirical cognition, seem out of place. If we understand this section in terms of Kant's overarching speculative concern, however, it is not only the climactic moment of the third *Critique* but also the culmination of the critical enterprise. Kant rejects theologies that identify God as the link between nature and freedom and instead identifies an ultimate end that does not lie outside experience but in our capacity to appreciate beauty and understand organic life.

Before turning to the Methodology it is important to identify its context in Part II of the third *Critique*. In Part II Kant is concerned with organisms, which, like beautiful objects in nature, involve judgments of purposiveness. In the Analytic of the Teleological Power of Judgment he argues that organisms are different from inorganic material to the extent that they cannot be explained entirely according to the concepts of the understanding, which entail a principle of causality as a progressive nexus of efficient causes and their effects. In the Dialectic of the Teleological Power of Judgment he notes that because organisms are partially unexplainable in terms of such a principle, their existence poses a problem that can be examined as an antinomy between mechanical and teleological explanation. Kant's

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solution to the antinomy is a subject of much debate.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is within the bounds of consensus to say that his primary aim is to extend our purposive judgments of organisms to nature as a whole, for the antinomy leads us to consider “the unity of the supersensible principle ... as valid in the same way not merely for certain species of natural beings, but for the whole of nature as a system” (5:381).

In the Methodology Kant situates this solution in the broader critical project. His guiding concern is the speculative question of the unity of the critical project considered in the first and second *Critiques* through the question of hope. He notes that speculative philosophy, when left to its own devices, is led to “despair” over the impossibility of unifying nature and freedom (5:474). This is to restate the thesis that the ground of the practical and theoretical cannot be known by cognition (though in somewhat more *interested* language). Yet Kant does not again appeal to the pre-eminence of practical reason but considers a new way that has opened through the third *Critique*. First, he grapples with the overwhelming empirical evidence that the natural world *does not* accommodate moral action. As Jane Kneller (1990, 224) notes, one of Kant’s key points of departure in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is “the sight of moral virtue going unrewarded.” Yet for Kneller, the best that Kant’s account of aesthetic experience can offer “is a way of forgetting this fact for the time it takes us to judge an object in a wholly disinterested, ‘playful’ manner, since during the time in which we are contemplating the beauty of an object we are free from all interest.” Yet Kant is no proto-Schopenhauer, for his aim in the Methodology is to identify the implications of our capacity to judge aesthetically and teleologically for speculative reason. Kneller is right to note that nature’s overwhelming indifference to the human project as evidenced in storms and earthquakes leads him to conclude that nature cannot *produce* human freedom. Even if we bracket out natural evidence, the conflict and strife in human societies

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<sup>2</sup> For overviews of this debate see McFarland (1970) and McLaughlin (1990).

denies the empirical confirmation of freedom in humanity's inner constitution. However, Kant aims to show that aesthetic experience opens us to a way of considering nature as a sphere that *prepares* humanity for the exercise of freedom, that is, for action.

To make this argument, Kant distinguishes between two kinds of end: the final end (*der Endzweck*) and the ultimate end (*der letzte Zweck*). The final end, he informs us, lies outside of nature in the sphere of freedom (5:435). This freedom is “noumenal” because its sphere of normativity is pure, that is, non-cognitive. However, Kant observes that there is another kind of end, an ultimate end, that is manifest *within* nature: “In order ... to discover where in the human being we are at least to posit that ultimate end of nature, we must seek out that which nature is *capable of doing in order to prepare him for what he must himself do in order to be a final end*” (5:431, my emphasis). While nature cannot produce freedom, our aesthetic experience reveals that nature develops human beings for the effective realisation of freedom. This is what Kant terms culture: “The production of the aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general (thus those of his freedom) is culture [*Kultur*]. Thus only culture can be the ultimate end that one has cause to ascribe to nature in regard to the human species” (ibid.).<sup>3</sup> Kant insists that our judgment of culture as an ultimate end is only based the outer surface of nature, and thus arises as a mere analogy with our own intentional experience. Inner natural perfection, on the other hand, “is not thinkable and explicable in accordance with any analogy to any ... natural capacity that is known to us” (5:375). While we might be tempted to conclude that Kant thus denies any real normativity in nature, for natural normativity seems to be a mere reflection of our own practical reason, he then claims

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<sup>3</sup> Kant anticipates this argument in the *Analytic of the Sublime*, where he argues that we are “prepared by culture” to transform experiences that would, for the uncultured person, appear to be repellent into the development of moral ideas (§29). In this sense, culture enlarges the imagination to be suitable for our “proper domain (the practical),” so that we might see infinite freedom within that which arouses terror and fear.

that, “since we ourselves belong to nature in the widest sense, it [natural perfection] is not thinkable and explicable even through an exact analogy with human art” (5:375). Because we belong to nature – a fact revealed to us in aesthetic experience – our normativity demands that nature be reimagined not as an analogue of art but as “an analogue of life” (ibid.). While theoretical reason discloses nature as a nexus of efficient causation, leading us to despair if we remain in the theoretical position, aesthetic experience opens us to nature as a self-forming, living system that has no causal dependencies, that is free. Here we arrive at the end of the critical project: aesthetic experience grounds the transition from ascribing normativity to nature in ourselves to ascribing normativity to nature as a whole.

Kant’s goal in the Methodology is to show that the “disenchanted” nature produced by theoretical reason dissolves in aesthetic experience as we are opened to a sphere that precedes our interest and is hospitable to our cognitive and practical aims. While we have no guarantee that moral action will find moral ends, Kant anchors our ability to belong to nature in the enlivenment we feel in aesthetic experience. This does not entail that God and immortality have no role in his elucidation of moral hope; and yet it places these two pure ideas as dependent on freedom. In the final lines of the Methodology Kant notes that practical faith – our hope in the possibility of moral freedom – is only possible *through* freedom. Of the three pure ideas of reason, “freedom is the only concept ... that proves its objective reality ... in nature ... and thereby makes possible the connection of the other ideas to nature” (5:474). Thus “the concept of freedom ... can extend reason beyond those boundaries within which every (theoretical) concept of nature had to remain restricted without hope.”

Kant’s conclusion is remarkable in the context of the critical project. Freedom, as it is expressed through human action at the prompting of nature, must be considered as part of a broader cultural project that extends nature beyond the given to encompass our normative cognitive and practical

activity. This is what McDowell calls “second nature,” and yet McDowell’s static analysis of second nature as a space of reasons means that he cannot account for its relation to the first natural stratum. For Kant, second nature – what he calls “another nature” (5:314) – is certainly an extension of the first, and yet it appears to us through the expression of human self-directed action in the form of culture. Thus the ends of nature and the ends of human action are conjoined as a shared project. What we discover is that without experiencing ourselves as whole, natural creatures, the moral project remains an “ought” of practical reason, “a foreign offering” dislocated from the subject’s embodied life. The power of judgment as expressed aesthetically and teleologically opens us instead to a sense of nature in harmony with our practical and cognitive goals.

## Conclusion

**A**s Ginsborg has argued, Kant’s reflection on aesthetic experience has considerable bearing on contemporary problems in epistemology. While this certainly includes the primitive claim discovered in aesthetic judgments that grounds the normativity of “taking to be true” without an enchanted view of nature that somehow extends itself in reason, it also shows that cognitive normativity is part of a broader experience of humans as practical, self-referential creatures. This entails that our inquiry into knowledge cannot be disconnected from the experience of ourselves as living beings faced with the challenge of acting in a world that is often inhospitable to the practical ends we set for ourselves. Kant’s discovery of a primitive claim to normativity results from a sustained attempt to understand nature as both a domain that is amenable to our scientific endeavours *and* fitting for human flourishing. This inquiry begins and ends with the human vocation to be ends-creating creatures, irresistibly interested in their environment and yet able to withhold that interest so that a larger sense of nature can appear in harmony with human life.

Andrew Cooper

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